



ThinkUKnow e-Newsletter - Issue 6

This issue of the ThinkUKnow e-newsletter is the first issue in a two-part series on cyber-bullying. This issue will look at what you can do, as a parent, carer or teacher, if your child is being cyber-bullied. The second issue will look at what to do if your child is cyber-bullying others.

What is cyber-bullying?

Cyber-bullying refers to the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others (Bill Belsey, www.cyber-bullying.org). It may occur via mobile phones, email, instant messaging (IM), chat rooms, social networking or any other online application.

It may take the form of texting harassing or hurtful messages on mobile phones, posting derogatory comments on social networking profiles, creating websites to ruin a person's reputation or sending harassing emails. It differs from traditional schoolyard bullying in that it can occur 24/7 and there is no real place for young people to escape from this bullying. There is also the ability for the person cyber-bullying to remain somewhat anonymous to their victim.

Whilst it might be easy for adults to say that a child should just "not go on the internet" to avoid cyber-bullying, this can be a devastating idea for a young person to comprehend. The online environment is an important part of a young person's social community and to not be online may have serious social implications for them.

What can parents do?

Establishing the dialogue on cyber-bullying and your child's online activities will help you to identify when your child might be cyber-bullied and also to make your child feel more comfortable coming to you when things go wrong online. If you understand the technologies and applications they are using, you will be in a better position to understand how cyber-bullying might occur in that space and its impacts.

Time2Talk

This section provides some useful conversation starters for talking with young people about their use of technology.

Do you know what forms cyber-bullying might take?

What does your school have to say about cyber-bullying?

What would you do if a friend was being cyber-bullied?

Do you know how to block communications from people?

Who would you talk to if you were being cyber-bullied?

Support for young people

Cyber-bullying can have various effects on young people including poor performance at school, feelings of sadness, physical illness and lower self-esteem. Combined with other factors in the young person's life, cyber-bullying can sometimes lead to serious mental health issues such as anxiety disorders and depression, and may even lead to self-harm and suicide.

To assist young people in dealing with cyber-bullying, we suggest the following:

- Remind young people that it is not their fault that they are being cyber-bullied and that they can do something about it.
- Encourage them to talk about what is happening and how it is making them feel so that they can come up with ways to address the cyber-bullying.

There are certain signs you can look out for if you think your child might be being cyber-bullied. These might include:

- Changing patterns of how they use the internet or mobile phones;
- Receiving text messages more frequently and at odd hours of the day or night;
- Trouble sleeping or having nightmares;
- Becoming withdrawn and not socialising with their friends;
- Feeling unwell and not wanting to go to school.

If you can identify these as signs that something is going on with your child, you can try and get them to talk about their feelings, either to you or a counsellor. Recognising these signs will assist you in helping them to deal with the cyber-bullying and develop strategies to cope.

- Don't tell your child to simply "get over it". Acknowledge that what they are feeling is real and that it is having a negative impact on their life.

Young people may not always feel comfortable talking to their parents about these issues so you may wish to refer them to support services. These may be their school counsellor or GP, or other trained counsellors from:

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Kids Help Line: 1800 55 1800

Additional support may also be found on the following websites:

[Youth Beyond Blue](#)

[HeadSpace](#)

[Reach Out](#)