Cyberbullying and online harassment

Cyberbullying and online harassment can be extremely distressing. They can be classed as criminal offences but there is lots of help available to support you.

Tips to stay safe online

Think before you post - when posting or commenting on the internet, consider what you say and what effect this may have. Never post comments that are abusive or may cause offence to others.

Keep personal information personal - do not say anything or publish pictures that might later cause you or someone else embarrassment. Be aware of what friends post about you, or reply to your posts, particularly about your personal details and activities.

Make the most of privacy settings - keep your profiles closed, allowing access only to your chosen friends and family.

Report cyberbullying to internet service providers - lots of content on social media that is offensive or upsetting is not necessarily a criminal offence. However, cyberbullying often violates the terms and conditions established by social media sites and internet service providers. Report cyberbullying to the social media site so they can take action against users abusing the terms of service.
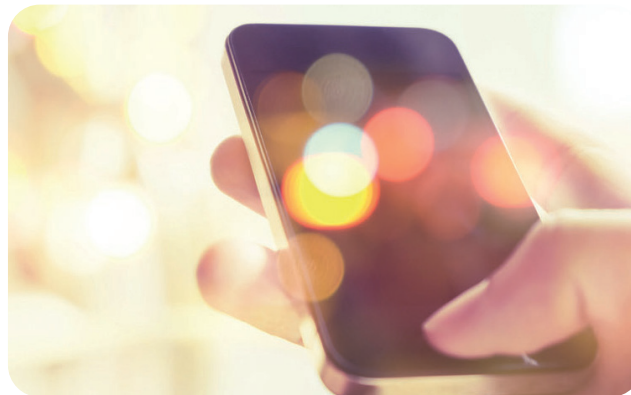
Social media help sections can show you how to block users and change settings to control who can contact you. You can get advice and support on using the following social media sites including the ability to report content to them.

Facebook - facebook.com
Twitter - twitter.com
Instagram - instagram.com
LinkedIn - linkedin.com
Google+ google.com
YouTube - youtube.com
Pinterest - pinterest.com
Tumblr - tumblr.com
Snapchat - snapchat.com

If you believe that you are the victim of an offence, always keep a record of the content, by taking a screenshot, for example. If you are worried that your child or a loved one might be the victim of cyberbullying here are some signs to look out for:

- Low self-esteem.
- Withdrawal from family and spending a lot of time alone.
- Reluctance to let parents or other family members anywhere near their mobiles, laptops etc.
- Finding excuses to stay away from school or work including school refusal.

For further signs and advice visit bullying.co.uk

Advice for parents and guardians

The internet can be a valuable resource for children, allowing them to connect with friends and learn new things. But there are also risks when going online, and children can be particularly vulnerable. Talking to your child is one of the best ways to keep them safe online.

By understanding the risks and keeping yourself up-to-date on the latest technology, websites and social networks you can help your child enjoy the internet safely and securely.

For further help and advice, please click on the links to our partners websites, where you will find additional help and support. We are proud to be working alongside a range of charities on this important subject.

NSPCC
nspcc.org.uk

Cyberbullying UK
bullying.co.uk

Mumsnet
mumsnet.com

Kooth
kooth.com

Internet Matters
internetmatters.org

Kidscape
kidscape.org

Help protect your children online

• Keep computers and games consoles in family rooms where you can monitor activity. Also make sure the games your child plays online are age appropriate.

• Install parental control software or activate parental controls through your internet to prevent access to inappropriate content.

• 'Friend' or 'follow' your child on social networking sites, so you can see how they are using them.

• Check they are old enough to join any websites or social networks with age restrictions.

• Advise your child not to post personal information or any images they wouldn't want everyone to see.

• Avoid using webcams unless talking to close friends or family. Consider covering your webcam when it's not in use.

• Monitor your children's internet usage, and be watchful for any secretive behaviour.

• Encourage your child to be open about what they do online and who they talk to.

Further advice is available for parents and carers of children at gov.uk

Advice for schools

Advice by the Department for Education:

Preventing and tackling bullying
Advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies can be viewed at gov.uk

Cyberbullying Advice for headteachers and school staff gov.uk

What can the police do?

If we consider a message or post to be potentially criminal, we will take appropriate action. This could involve arresting the person responsible or interviewing them under caution. Cases involving sustained abuse or where someone's life is threatened will be treated seriously.

We will look at all of the circumstances when considering the best response to a report of cyber bullying. We will assess how vulnerable the victim is and what resources are required to trace the offender via social networking sites, which often operate abroad and to different legislation. In certain cases it may be difficult to take action if the offender isn't in the UK.

We will work with the victim to bring about the most suitable and proportionate conclusion. This could include alternative options that include the officer in the case using their discretion and working with the offender to record an apology to the victim.