

ONLINE SAFETY NEWSLETTER

Providing online safety information for parents and carers

This special issue focusses on children and young people who bully



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SUPPORTING CHILDREN WHO BULLY OTHERS

Research from Anti-Bullying charity *Ditch the Label* found that over half of young people had been unpleasant to or bullied another young person at least once. Most guidance for parents and carers covers what to do to support a child who is the victim of bullying; in this issue of the newsletter we will look at how you can support a child who has been bullying others online.

What does online bullying look like?

Online bullying is bullying that happens via digital technology. As with other forms of bullying, there is an intention to hurt someone, it is repeated behaviour and there is usually an imbalance of power. It can consist of repeated nasty comments, threats and intimidation, harassment, defamation, isolation or exclusion, hacking into social media accounts, or

publically posting personal information about another person.

Where bullying happens online, there are some additional issues. Firstly, online bullying can happen 24/7, so giving young people a break from their devices, especially overnight can help both victims and those bullying to break the cycle. Secondly, the online space can make bullying easier because sharing or posting something unpleasant can happen extremely quickly with just one tap or click, and you are buffered from the emotional response of the victim; in addition, the internet can mask the identity of the perpetrator of the behaviour. Lastly, the reach of the internet can mean that as well as comments being shared quickly, they can be shared far more widely than was possible in the past.



Much online bullying happens alongside other forms of bullying such as face to face assaults or verbal abuse. Parents and carers need to be able to differentiate between the bullying described above and one-off or less serious issues.

Why might my child bully someone else?

Bullying behaviour can be a coping strategy for a stressful or traumatic situation, including being bullied by someone else, family splits or bereavement. Some people will seek to humiliate someone else to feel powerful because they lack that feeling of power and control over elements of their own lives. Those that have been bullied are twice as likely to bully others, and if the underlying issues are not resolved, a negative pattern of behaviour can follow.

Additionally, young people can learn to behave in a discriminatory way towards others who are different to them, for example those with a disability, different colour skin, gender, or nationality. If family or friends express discriminatory views, a young person can either believe this is the appropriate way to behave or may feel obliged to behave in this way to fit in. Without education and support to explore diversity and respect, these views may lead to bullying behaviour.

Young people may also be encouraged by others to abuse another young person when friends or acquaintances report that an individual has disrespected them, tried to humiliate them or even is being over friendly towards girlfriends or boyfriends. Sometimes this is other people trying to escalate issues or create issues where there are none.

Finally, it can be that a young person simply does not understand the impact that their behaviour is having on another person. In face to face interactions, we rely heavily on voice tone, facial expressions and body language to understand communication; online, much of this can be missing. According to Ditch the Label research, on average of 10 people that are bullied, 3 will go on to self-harm, 1 will go onto have a failed suicide attempt and 1 will develop an eating disorder.

It is important to be cautious about labelling any young person a bully. Your child might be nasty to someone or carry out bullying behaviour but labelling them a bully is unlikely to be helpful. Understanding the underlying reasons for the behaviour will help you to support your child to move forward, as well as stopping the behaviour towards the victim.

How can I help my child?

If you can, talk to your child and reassure them you are here to help. Help them understand their motivations and the impact of their actions. Encourage your child to think about how they would feel if they were the other person. This is particularly important if your child viewed the interactions as banter.

It may be useful to consider general stress-reduction strategies they can use, such as eating healthily, sleeping well and exercising, all of which can help people to cope better with difficult situations. Helping them engage in other activities they enjoy both inside and outside the home can also give them a better platform to be resilient.

Consider what other support might be helpful.

Emotional support from professionals at school, or a therapist or counsellor may be appropriate. If your child knows the person they have been bullying, then a facilitated restorative conversation with them can be a very powerful method for resolving issues for both parties (see below under What will school do?).

If your child only knows the person in the online environment, encourage them to apologise for the hurt they have caused. Where a young person is behaving in a discriminatory manner then reminding them about respecting others' views, opinions and feelings is likely to be appropriate; school may be able to assist with this.

It may be that some time away from using digital platforms may assist your child to reset their emotional balance and to get a sense of perspective. However, if access is removed for a lengthy period, the young person is likely to feel this is disproportionate and potentially try to get around any restrictions.

What will school do?

If a student reports to school that they are being bullied by another child, then school has a responsibility to both protect the students and to manage the behaviour of their students, even outside of school. The main aims of the school are usually to stop the behaviour and find a way forward for all involved.

It is likely that a member of the school staff will speak to your child so they have a chance to explain their side of the incident. They may ask to see your child's phone. If your child does not give permission then under the Education and Inspec-

tors Act 2006, the headteacher (or another member of staff that the headteacher delegates) can confiscate the phone and search for and delete material from it. School will conduct an investigation and take a view as to what they think happened and how each person is involved. In most cases, school will look to deal with the incident internally; this can involve providing additional education or support for all parties, putting sanctions in place for those identified as having behaved unacceptably or even reporting to the police.

School may offer your child emotional literacy or other education or support to try and help them understand why they have behaved poorly, what impact it has had on others and what other strategies they need to use. There may be circumstances where school offer family support or make a referral to another agency to provide family support. School may also offer a restorative conversation. This should not simply be a meeting where the 'perpetrator(s)' apologise. Restorative conversations allow all parties to explain how the incident has impacted on them, in a safe, facilitated environment, and to agree a way forward. Parents are not usually involved in these conversations; note school will not facilitate a conversation with the other parents.

The school's behaviour policy (which should be available on the school's website) will explain how each specific school will deal with bullying incidents and what the likely sanctions will be, including any escalation for repeated incidents.

internet
matters.org

The school will only usually report to police where they believe a criminal offence has taken place or where the young person carrying out the behaviour has been previously dealt with internally and they feel an escalation is required.

Even where school identify that the online behaviour does not constitute bullying, perhaps because it is a one-off incident, they may still feel that school action is warranted.

What should I do I am not happy with school's response?

If you are unhappy with how your child has been dealt with, then initially speak informally with the member of staff who has been dealing with the incident. If you cannot resolve your issues, then you will need to follow the school's complaints procedure (which again should be available on the school's website). This usually involves you putting your concerns in writing to a named person who will carry out an investigation of your complaint within a given timeframe. There is usually an escalation process to follow if you are still unhappy. Remember that school is balancing the needs of your child with the needs of others, and they will not be able to disclose details of conversations with other parents or actions they take in relation to other children.

For further information see [Internet Matters](#) and [Ditch the Label](#)

DITCH THE LABEL
YOUR WORLD, PREJUDICE FREE

Top tips for digital wellbeing



Our children live their lives online in a way that no other generation has ever done. While there are many benefits to the digital revolution, such as increased connectivity and creativity, and immediate access to information and entertainment, there is another side to this landscape that is less positive.

Young people need to be aware of the possible positive and negative impacts of being online on their mental health and wellbeing, and learn how to recognise activities that make them feel good and bad. There is evidence that those people who spend longer online are more likely to see upsetting content or experiencing upsetting interaction with others.

For parents it can be tricky to know how to support your child to manage their online life. Childnet have produced guides for parents of children of different ages (3-7, 7-11, 11-14, 14-17) to support digital wellbeing. See <https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/digital-wellbeing>