

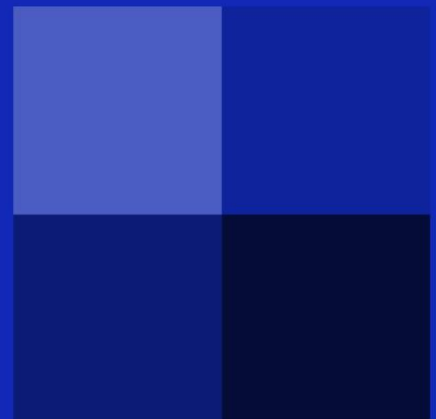


Cyberbullying

A survival guide

E-Sussex, E-Safe

Safeguarding all children in East Sussex all the time



What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is the use of connected technology to victimise another person or group of people. It uses a variety of technology, and sometimes multiple technology. Social media, instant messaging, images, texts are all vehicles that the cyberbully uses.

What is a cyberbully?

It is a person or group who victimise others. However, it is difficult to define the point at which someone becomes a cyberbully – they may genuinely have no idea that what they are doing IS cyberbullying – they may think its just harmless fun – sometimes, however, the cyberbully knows exactly what they are doing. Cyberbullies can be any age, any gender.

How will I know if my child has been sent nasty messages?

It used to be the case that cyberbullies “sent” nasty messages to their targets. However, they, like many online abusers, are getting smarter. Now they tend to put the messages in places that they know the recipient will see, rather than send them. They think it keeps the evidence away from those who might investigate. It doesn't.

Behavioural changes often happen first. The cyberbullied child may become withdrawn, or show a reluctance to go near anything techy! Alternatively, they may become irritable and angry. Their impotence can cause them to lash out.

OK, so my child IS being cyberbullied, but I can't prove it.

Learn how to take a screenshot. Cyberbully's NEED their victims to see the unpleasantness, or it doesn't work, so learning how to capture a screenshot is important. Usually, it involved pressing and holding the CTRL button while tapping the PrtScn button. Nothing looks like its happened, but don't worry. Now open a Word document, and just press CTRL and tap V. That should print your screenshot onto a Word document. Now you are beginning to gain the proof you need.

I've got 10 screenshots, now what?

Now, it is best to put some distance between you and the bully – if it is another child, you should not try to deal with it directly, unless you know the child's parents will cooperate.

You should tell your child's school that this has happened. Your child will certainly not be performing as they should in school, so they need to know. It is also reasonable to expect your child's school to confront the bully in this matter.

Cyberbullies need help to modify their behaviour, and the school will be able to start this process.

When I looked at the messages, my child has used some pretty awful language.

Which, at this stage, doesn't matter. If you tell them off for it, they will not come to you next time. (If there is a next time) because telling you this has been happening has given them a negative experience. There may be a time to address this, but it is not until the bullying has been dealt with.

What should I tell my child?

First, tell them what it is that the bully wants. Its POWER – pure and simple. The Cyberbully wants to know how upset/angry they have made your child – and they will keep going until they succeed.

So, lesson 1 **NEVER reply to a cyberbully**. It is what they want, and not replying puts your child back in charge. Cyberbullies hate not knowing what effect their messages have had, so deny them this.

Lesson 2.

Take screenshots of messages wherever possible. If they are coming by text or email, then keep them in a folder. Your child doesn't need to read them, but they may be needed as evidence.

Lesson 3

No matter how upset you are at what your child is going through, never take the law into your own hands. Always refer the matter to your child's school – they will want to know if your child is upset.

Sometimes a chat with the bully's parents is worthwhile, but remember, they will be defensive of their child, and it may harm your friendship with them.

It is now time to think the unthinkable – **What if MY child IS the cyberbully?**

Every parent's worse nightmare is to discover that their child has been victimising someone else. This is especially hurtful if what they have been doing uses language that you do not approve of, and if they have been doing it for some time, unknown to you.

Cyberbullies are often behaving like this because something is happening to them that they don't like or can't control. Sometimes, they are being threatened or being coerced to act in this way.

It has been known for a child to tell their parents that they are bullying people online but can't stop themselves.

Bullying creates an adrenaline rush. It is exciting – adrenaline is our fight and flight hormone – it is very powerful and intoxicating.

The first thing is to **STOP** the behaviour. Now. Immediately. Sometimes a child can do this, sometimes, you may have to remove the equipment from their control, but remember, there is nothing to stop them doing it on another computer elsewhere.

Next, **TALK** to them. Try to find out what is provoking this behaviour – are they not doing well at school? Have they just had a falling out? Have they got boyfriend/girlfriend issues? Are they going through puberty and having a rough time of it? There can be many and sometimes complex reasons behind it. Sometimes it can be like peeling an onion (complete with tears along the way) before you get down to why this is happening.

IMPROVE. Now is the time to catch them being good – reward the behaviour you want. It may be that you have to start in very small slices. Once they have their computer back, if they can go 5 minutes without saying something nasty – that may be a significant milestone. Then make it 10, then 20, then half an hour, then an hour. Increase the time periods as you see fit, but be prepared to go back a step if you have to.

REDRESS This is tricky as it depends a lot on whether or not your child knew the hurt they were causing. Sometimes, they do, sometimes they don't. Telling someone who has been bullying how upset they have made their victim may open their eyes for them, or, on the other hand, it may just tell them how successful they have been. The ideal position here is that you talk to them enough so that they want to make a genuine apology. It's no use forcing them to, and be prepared for the victim to NOT want to speak to your child ever again. This is the most sensitive stage of recovery for both parties.

Sometimes, the best you can hope for is that it never happens again. Your child will know (should know) how disappointed you are in their behaviour (NOT in them), and that it is unacceptable. It will take time for both you and your child to re-establish trust.

Sometimes, it is necessary to tell a child who has been bullying that they have broken the law. It is an offence to send threatening, racist, sexual and other kinds of message with the intent of causing harm or distress.

Again, you are not in this alone. Cyberbullying is, sadly, on the increase. Your child's school will have anti-bullying policies, but more importantly, will have access to support for behaviour modification. They may be able to give you some good ideas, and to work with you to achieve a successful outcome.