Key advice to parents and carers on Cyberbullying

When a child is the target of Cyberbullying — bullying via mobile phone or the Internet — they can feel alone and very misunderstood. It is therefore vital that as a parent or carer you know how to support your child if they are caught up in Cyberbullying. This short guide will help you.

1. Prevent Cyberbullying

Where to start

The best way to deal with Cyberbullying is to prevent it happening in the first place. Although it may be uncomfortable to accept, you should be aware that your child may as likely Cyberbully as be a target of Cyberbullying, and that sometimes children get caught up in Cyberbullying simply by not thinking about the consequences of what they are doing. It is therefore crucial that you talk with your children, and understand the ways in which they are using the Internet and their mobile phone. In this guide there is an anti-Cyberbullying code which contains seven key messages for children, which you may find a helpful starting point for a discussion with them about issues, such as being careful about posting images on personal websites and where to go to get help.

Use the tools

Most software and services on the Internet have in-built safety features. Knowing how to use them can prevent unwanted contact. For example, IM services such as MSN Messenger have features that allow users to block others on their contact list, and conversations can be saved on most IM services. Social-networking sites such as MySpace and Bebo also have tools available, e.g. young people can keep their profile set to 'private' so that only approved friends can see it.

With bullies using text and picture messaging, it is also important to check with your children's Internet or mobile-phone provider to find out what protections they can offer, including whether it is possible to change your mobile number.

2. Responding to Cyberbullying

It is vital that you have strategies to help your child if they come to you saying that they are being Cyberbullied.

The anti-Cyberbullying code

Start by teaching your children the seven key messages in the anti-Cyberbullying code. This includes advice on not replying or retaliating to Cyberbullying, as well as not assisting a cyberbully by forwarding a message, even as a joke.

Keep the evidence

Keeping the evidence of Cyberbullying is helpful when reporting an incident and may help in identifying the bully. This means keeping copies of offending emails, text messages or online conversations.

Reporting Cyberbullying

There is a number of organisations that can help you if you need to report incidents of Cyberbullying.

- **The school:** if the incident involves a pupil, or pupils, at your child's school, then it is important to let the school know. All schools have a legal duty to have measures in place to support the person being bullied and to apply disciplinary sanctions to the pupil doing the bullying. Schools are increasingly updating these policies to include Cyberbullying.
- **The provider of the service:** most service providers have complaints and abuse policies, and it is important to report the incident to the provider of the service, i.e. the mobile-phone operator (e.g. O2 or [1]Vodafone), the IM provider (e.g. MSN Messenger or AOL), or the social-network provider (e.g. Bebo or Piczo). Most responsible service providers will have a 'Report Abuse' or a nuisance call bureau, and these can provide information and advice on how to help your child.
- **The police:** if the Cyberbullying is serious and a potential criminal offence has been committed you should consider contacting the police. Relevant criminal offences here include harassment and stalking, threats of harm or violence to a person or property, and any evidence of sexual exploitation, e.g. grooming, distribution of sexual images, or inappropriate sexual contact or behaviour.

B. Key advice to children and young people on Cyberbullying

Anti-Cyberbullying code

Being sent an abusive or threatening text message, or seeing nasty comments about yourself on a website, can be really upsetting. This code gives you seven important tips to protect yourself and your friends from getting caught up in Cyberbullying, and advice on to how to report it when it does happen.

1. Always respect others
Remember that when you send a message to someone, you cannot see the impact that your words or images may have on the other person. That is why it is important to always show respect to people and be careful what you say online or what images you send. What you think is a joke may really hurt someone else. Always ask permission before you take a photo of someone.

If you receive a rude or nasty message or picture about someone else, do not forward it. You could be assisting a bully and even be accused of Cyberbullying yourself. You could also be breaking the law.

2. Think before you send
It is important to think before you send any images or text about yourself or someone else by email or mobile phone, or before you post information on a website. Remember that what you send can be made public very quickly and could stay online forever. Do you really want your teacher or future employer to see that photo?

3. Treat your password like your toothbrush
Don't let anyone know your passwords. It is a good idea to change them on a regular basis. Choosing hard-to-guess passwords with symbols or numbers will help stop people hacking into your account and pretending to be you. Remember to only give your mobile number or personal website address to trusted friends.

4. Block the Bully
Most responsible websites and services allow you to block or report someone who is behaving badly. Make use of these features, they are there for a reason!

5. Don't retaliate or reply
Replying to bullying messages, particularly in anger, is just what the bully wants.

6. Save the evidence
Learn how to keep records of offending messages, pictures or online

conversations. These will help you demonstrate to others what is happening and can be used by your school, internet service provider, mobile phone company, or even the police to investigate the Cyberbullying.

7. Make sure you tell
You have a right not to be harassed and bullied online.

There are people that can help.

- *Tell an adult you trust who can help you to report it to the right place, or call a helpline like ChildLine on 0800 1111 in confidence.*
- *Tell the provider of the service you have been bullied on (e.g. your mobile-phone operator or social-network provider). Check their websites to see where to report.*
- *Tell your school. Your teacher or the anti-bullying coordinator at your school can support you and can discipline the person bullying you.*

Finally, don't just stand there. If you see Cyberbullying going on, support the victim and report the bullying. How would you feel if no one stood up for you?