

A guide to cyberbullying

# GET WITH IT!



understanding and identifying  
cyberbullying to help protect  
your children

A joint initiative by:



Office for  
Internet Safety  
*An Oifig Sábháilteachta Idirlín*



Barnardos  
No child gets left behind



National Centre for Technology in Education  
*Ionad Náisiúnta don Teicneolaíocht san Oideachas*





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# 1. Introduction

The ease of access to powerful communication tools such as social networking websites, video and photograph sharing sites, internet enabled camera-phones and games consoles means that, all over the world, people are saying new things in new ways to new audiences. Individuals are sharing ideas and views like never before. Email, instant messaging, texting, and social networking sites such as: Bebo, Facebook, MySpace and Nimble, are allowing children in Ireland to connect with each other and engage with society in ways that were previously unimaginable.

At the same time we are seeing how the anonymous, instant, and far-reaching communication capabilities have brought a new dimension to child protection issues such as bullying. Bullying is not a new phenomenon. However the ways in which it happens are changing. Technologies are being used by young people for a wide range of activities that annoy, harass, and intimidate each other. Depending on the context, these behaviours can be considered anywhere on a spectrum from relatively harmless to very damaging.

The issue is further clouded by the fact that this generation of teenagers is dealing with a massive amount of communications that don't have the nuance of tone-of-voice or body language; two factors that play such an important role in how we interpret messages. In the past, throw away comments disappeared into the ether as soon as they were spoken whereas nowadays messages are persistent, almost permanent. In fact these communications are archived online and are not only visible to many but may be searchable, even when they are believed to have been removed. The internet gives us a window into many previously unknown aspects of children's lives, things that previously happened without our knowledge.

## 2. What is Cyberbullying?

Bullying is repeated aggression, verbal, psychological or physical conduct by an individual or group against others. Bullying is always wrong and is unacceptable behaviour which should never be overlooked

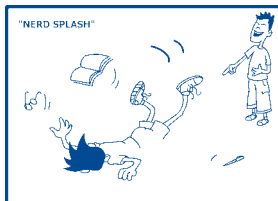


or ignored. Cyberbullying refers to bullying which is carried out using the internet, mobile phone or other technological devices. Cyberbullying generally takes a psychological rather than physical form but is often part of a wider pattern of 'traditional' bullying. It can take the form of sending nasty, mean or threatening



messages, emails, photos or video clips; silent phone calls; putting up nasty posts or pictures on a message board, website or chat room; saying hurtful things in a chat room; pretending to be someone else in a chat room or message board or text message and saying hurtful things; or accessing someone's accounts to make trouble for them.

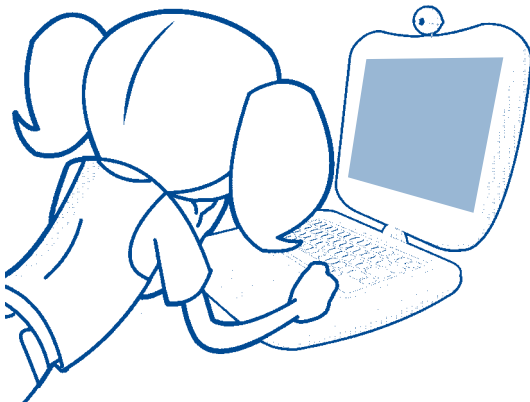
We need to be careful not to rush to see bullying where it doesn't exist. Once-off posting of nasty comments on someone's profile or uploading photographs intended to embarrass someone is not very nice but it is not, by itself, bullying. Bullying is widely agreed to be behaviour that is sustained or repeated over time and which has a serious negative effect on the well-being of the victim and is generally a deliberate series of actions.

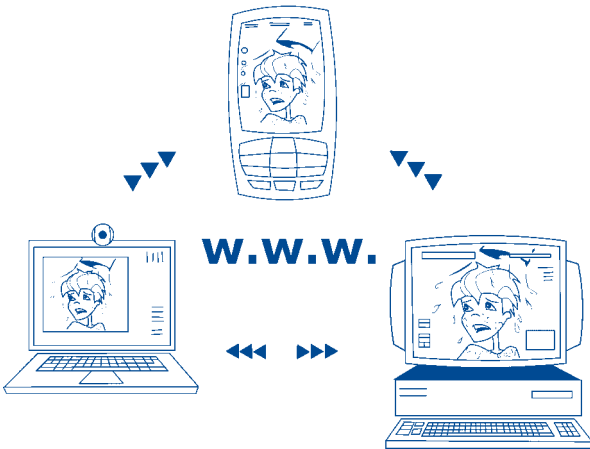


PLAY VIDEO

## Different ways technology can be used to Cyberbully

- **PERSONAL INTIMIDATION** – This behaviour includes sending threatening text (SMS) messages, posting abusive and threatening comments on the victim’s profile or other websites, or sending threatening messages via instant messaging.
- **IMPERSONATION** – This behaviour involves setting up fake profiles and web pages that are attributed to the victim. It can also involve gaining access to someone’s profile or instant messaging account and using it to contact others and subsequently bully while impersonating the account or profile owner.
- **EXCLUSION** – This behaviour involves blocking an individual from a popular group or community such as a school or class group in sites such as Bebo, Facebook, or MySpace.





- **PERSONAL HUMILIATION** – This behaviour involves posting images or videos intended to embarrass or humiliate someone, it can involve users sharing and posting images or videos of victims being abused or humiliated offline, or users sharing personal communications such as emails or text messages with a wider audience than was intended by the sender.
- **FALSE REPORTING** – This behaviour involves making false reports to the service provider or reporting other users for a range of behaviours with a view to having the user's account or website deleted.

## What do you need to know about Cyberbullying?

- Communication between young people is often hidden from adults. They want to be with their friends in a space that isn't influenced by adults and because of the constraints imposed on them, they rarely get the opportunity to do this. This invisibility is exaggerated online where they are increasingly communicating in ways that are unknown to adults and free from their supervision.
- When they are online, young people can hide behind the anonymity that the internet can provide.
- The big difference between writing nasty messages on the back of a school book and posting it on the internet is that the messages can potentially be seen by a very wide audience almost instantly. The message can remain available on the internet even if it is later removed from the site where it was first posted.
- Young people posting messages on the internet tend not to feel as responsible for their online actions as they do in 'real life'. They frequently don't fear being punished for their actions.
- This type of behaviour is often outside of the reach of schools as it often happens outside of school on home computers or via mobile phones.
- Young people are often fearful of telling others about being bullied because they fear that the bullying may actually become worse if they tell.
- They are often also afraid to report incidents, as they fear that adults will take away their mobile phone, computer and/or internet access.
- In most cases, cyberbullies know their targets, but their victims don't always know the person bullying them. This can prove very isolating for the victim in group, club or school settings where they come to distrust all their peers.
- Communications technologies have become widespread. As a result, cyberbullying can happen any time and any place and, for many children, home is no longer a safe haven from bullying.



### 3. Preventing Cyberbullying

The issue of cyberbullying is a complex one that transcends the school environment. Education in its wider sense, within the home and the community, is critically important. There are many ways to minimise the risk of online bullying, some which can be achieved by using simple common sense and others by introducing policies into schools or youth organisations.

All schools and youth groups should have an Anti-Bullying Policy or statement that is made known to the pupils or members of the youth organisations and their parents. Anti-bullying statements should also be incorporated in an acceptable use policy (AUP). Further information on developing an acceptable use policy for general technology use within schools is available on <http://www.webwise.ie/schools>. All members of the community should be involved in the development of bullying policies; these policies should be rigorously implemented and reviewed regularly.

#### Educational Resources

While it is recognised that home factors play a substantial role in the prevention of bullying, the role of the school in preventative work is crucial and should not be underestimated. Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) provides students with opportunities to develop the skills and competencies to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and social development. The National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) working with SPHE curriculum bodies has developed resources that enable students to explore their attitudes and their safety when using the internet and mobile phones. The modules contain lesson plans, activity sheets and interactive online lessons:

[www.webwise.ie/learningresources](http://www.webwise.ie/learningresources)

Creating a positive, supportive atmosphere with clear channels for reporting bullying as well as building awareness of the issues are important steps that can help to reduce the risks and provide an open culture where bullying of this nature can be freely reported and discussed.



An Anti-Bullying Policy, which includes specific measures to deal with bullying behaviour within the framework of an overall Code of Behaviour and Discipline, can be the most influential measure in countering bullying behaviour in schools and youth organisations. This can be effective in sending a clear message about bullying by setting down:

- What the organisation is doing to prevent bullying behaviour
- What students can do
- What parents can do
- What teachers and other school staff can do
- Who to contact in the event of a problem
- How incidents are handled

The National Youth Health Programme and the Child Protection Unit in the National Youth Council of Ireland have produced an anti-bullying resource and accompanying training for the out-of-school setting:

### **Lets Beat Bullying**

This resource is available to download from  
[www.childprotection.ie](http://www.childprotection.ie) or [www.youthhealth.ie](http://www.youthhealth.ie)

## Prevention at Home

### Get Involved in your Child's Online Life

Use the parenting skills that you apply to every other aspect of your child's life to help them stay safe in their online lives. The single biggest thing you can do to keep your child safe online is to engage with what they do. Let your child know that you are there to listen and that you are available to help them should they get involved in cyberbullying in any way.



#### **Know your child's internet and phone use**

To be able to guide your child with regard to their internet and phone use, it is important to understand how children use these technologies. Encourage your child to show you which websites they like visiting and what they do there. Acquiring knowledge of how children use these technologies can make it easier to make the right decisions with your child on their internet and mobile phone use.



#### **Register as a contact on your child's phone**

Mobile operators in Ireland provide a 'Dual Access' service. This service allows both parent and child to have access to the account records held by the mobile phone company including; account balances, numbers called and the services available on the mobile phone. Access to certain services such as the Internet may be barred or restricted on your child's handset. Contact your mobile phone provider to request further information.

#### **Encourage Respect for others**

As in everyday life, there are informal ethical rules for how to behave when relating to other people on the internet. Talk to your child about the harm that can be caused by cyberbullying and ensure that they understand what the consequences might be for everyone involved.



## 4. Key Advice for Children and Young People:

**Don't Reply** to messages that harass or annoy you. Even though you may really want to, this is exactly what the sender wants. They want to know that they've got you worried and upset. They are trying to mess with your head, don't give them that pleasure. If you respond with an even nastier message it makes them think that they really got to you, and that's just what they want. They might even complain about you!

**Keep the Message.** You don't have to read it, but keep it. Keep a record that outlines, where possible, the details, dates and times of any form of bullying that you experience. This would be useful where any investigation were to be taken by your school, youth organisation, or even the Gardaí.

**Tell Someone** you trust. Talking to your parents, friends, a teacher, youth leader or someone you trust is usually the first step in dealing with any issue. In the case of school related bullying messages you should also talk to a teacher you trust or guidance counsellor about it. If you need to speak to someone in confidence straight away you can call Childline on 1800 66 66 66, or get help through their online services at [www.childline.ie](http://www.childline.ie).



**Block the Sender.** You don't need to put up with someone harassing you. If you are getting messages that upset you on your Bebo profile or on MSN you can block the person simply by clicking the block button. On some mobile phones you can restrict communications to an approved list of contacts. You might need to check the manual or ask an adult to help you do this. Mobile networks can't bar numbers but they will help you to change your phone number in the case of serious bullying.

**Report Problems** to the people who can do something about it. You can take control by not putting up with offensive content and by reporting it when you come across it. Responsible websites and mobile phone operators provide ways for their users to report things such as pornography, bullying content, or other offensive material.

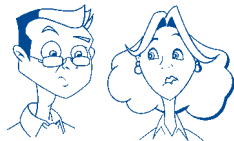
### **Step 1: Report to the website or mobile phone operator**

If something that is intended to be hurtful or offensive to someone is posted on a website or circulated by mobile phone, your first step should be to contact the owners of the service. For information on how to do this please see Section 6 of this publication. If this doesn't have any effect, move on to step 2.

### **Step 2: Report Serious Issues**

Serious incidents that could be illegal should be reported to the Gardaí. Illegal issues include someone making inappropriate sexual suggestions, racist remarks, or persistent bullying that is seriously damaging to the victim's well-being. If you are being bullied by mobile phone, contact your mobile phone operator, they can help by changing your phone number.





## 5. Key Advice for Parents

As a parent, you know your child better than anyone. You are best placed to identify and deal with any incidences of cyberbullying they might encounter. Children who have been bullied will have difficulty in overcoming this problem alone and will need your reassurance and encouragement in tackling it.

### What should I look out for?

If your child is avoiding school, or seems upset, sad or angry (especially after using phone or PC); if your child is withdrawing from usual activities, suddenly showing disinterest in computers or rapidly switching screens when you enter the room, they may be a victim of cyberbullying.



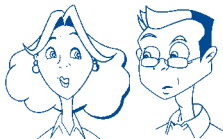
### Confirm that you are dealing with bullying behaviour

There are four questions that, when taken together, you can use to help confirm that the behaviour you are dealing with is bullying:

- Target – Is your child specifically targeted on their own or is the behaviour targeted at a group of people?
- Duration – Has this been happening over a period of time?
- Frequency – Is this behaviour part of a recurring pattern?
- Intention – Is this behaviour deliberately intended to harm or upset your child?

### Report cyberbullying

You should get in touch with your child's school or youth organisation if the bullying involves another pupil from that school or youth group. You should also contact the service provider through its Customer



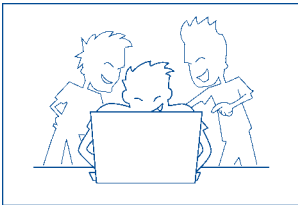
Care or Report Abuse facility. If the cyberbullying is very serious and potentially criminal you should contact your local Gardaí.

### **Respond appropriately**

If you are concerned that your child has received a bullying, offensive or harassing message, it is very important that you encourage them to talk to you. Responding to a negative experience by stopping their access to mobile phones or the internet might result in you being left out the loop the next time this happens.

### **What if I think my child may be involved in cyberbullying others?**

Children need to understand how much all forms of bullying, including cyberbullying, hurts and how important it is not to stand by when someone is being bullied. It is important, therefore, that children learn “netiquette” (informal code of conduct on the internet). You should explain the following guidelines to them and stress how important it is that they be followed:



- Avoid hurting someone’s feelings by email or other forms of electronic communication;
- Respect other people’s online rights;
- Avoid insulting someone;
- If someone insults you, be calm;
- Avoid “crashing” discussion groups or forums;
- Respect the privacy of other people online;
- Be responsible online.

**Webwise Seminars for Parents** – The NCTE and the National Parents Council have developed an Internet Safety seminar for parents. For more information about how to get a speaker to your school visit [www.npc.ie](http://www.npc.ie).

## 6. When and How to Contact the Service Provider

### Video and Photo Sharing sites

If a photo or video that you feel violates your privacy is posted on a website, you should contact the uploader directly using the sites message function. Sometimes they aren't aware that you feel uncomfortable with the posting of the content.

If you can't contact the uploader or they refuse to remove the content in question, you should notify the website owners of your concerns. If the content is illegal or goes against their terms and conditions, they will remove it from the site within a reasonable amount of time.

Report content on YouTube:

<http://help.youtube.com/support/youtube/bin/request.py>

Report content on Flickr:

[http://www.flickr.com/report\\_abuse.gne](http://www.flickr.com/report_abuse.gne)

### Social Networking sites

The first thing you should do if you are having issues with content on a social networking website is report the matter to the website owners. You can use the website reporting tools to do this, for example on Bebo you can click on the 'Report Abuse' link.

#### Bebo

If you are not a member of the Bebo website you can report abuses on the Bebo site by submitting your issues through the [Contact Us](http://www.bebo.com/ContactUs.jsp) (<http://www.bebo.com/ContactUs.jsp>)

In all cases when reporting abuse, you should be aware that Bebo will need any of the following details that apply to what is being reported so that they can identify the content concerned: Username or member ID #, Email address, Name of the School or the exact location of the content (name of the photo, club, poll, forum, or quiz).



There are similar services available for other Social Networking sites such as:

MySpace

ie-cyberbullyreport@support.myspace.com

Nimble

abuse@nimble.ie

Facebook

www.facebook.com/help

If you are experiencing difficulties with other Social Networking Sites not listed above, you should contact the site administrators directly for advice and assistance.

**Internet Chat**

Windows messenger Live

You can report any illegal or inappropriate behaviour, such as harassment or threats, on MSN Messenger by notifying Microsoft using the form on this webpage:

<https://support.live.com/eform.aspx?productKey=wlmessengerabuse&ct=eformts>

Skype

<http://support.skype.com>

Yahoo Messenger

<http://help.yahoo.com/l/us/yahoo/abuse/>

If you are experiencing difficulties with other operators not listed above, you should contact your operator directly for advice and assistance.

### **Internet Service Providers**

If you are experiencing bullying or harassment through a social networking service (SNS) and you are encountering difficulty in reporting this behaviour, your internet service provider may be able to assist you in providing information on how and where you can report such abuse.

Please remember however that bullying or harassment occurring on an SNS is a matter for that SNS abuse team. In the first instance it should be reported to them using their online complaint facility (usually a "report abuse" button that appears on the profile display or a link at the bottom of the page).

### **Mobile Phones**

#### O2 Customer Care:

1909 (Bill paying customers)

1747 (Speak easy prepay)

1850 601 747 (from a landline)

#### Vodafone Customer Care:

1907 (Bill paying customers),

1850 20 87 87 (Ready to Go)

#### 3 Customer Service:

From your 3 mobile 333,

From other phones 083 333 3333

#### Meteor Customer Care:

1905 (Pay Later and Pay As You Go customers)



## 7. Useful Websites

**Please note that these links are intended as assistance and the Office for Internet Safety does not accept responsibility or endorse any of the external websites listed nor the information contained within them.**

**You can get further information on general internet safety issues, including cyberbullying from the following websites:**

[www.internetsafety.ie](http://www.internetsafety.ie)

Website of the Office for Internet Safety

[www.webwise.ie](http://www.webwise.ie)

Provides parents, teachers and children with educational resources, advice and information about potential dangers on-line

[www.watchyourspace.ie](http://www.watchyourspace.ie)

Advice on managing children's profiles on social-networking sites

[www.childline.ie](http://www.childline.ie)

Child Safety Issues

[www.hotline.ie](http://www.hotline.ie)

Irish hotline for public to report child pornography and other illegal content on the internet.

[www.barnardos.ie](http://www.barnardos.ie)

Charity for the protection of children

[www.ncte.ie](http://www.ncte.ie)

The National Centre for  
Technology in Education  
provides advice and support  
on technology in education

[www.o2.ie/childprotection](http://www.o2.ie/childprotection)

Information on child protection  
Services offered by O2

[www.npc.ie](http://www.npc.ie)

Website of the National Parents Council

[www.nyci.ie](http://www.nyci.ie)

Website of National Youth Council of Ireland





## Expert Review Group

The Office for Internet Safety convened an Expert Review Group to review the content of this guide to ensure that it accurately reflected the wide ranging and diverse views of the key stakeholders in the area, including representatives of the ISP and mobile phone industries, Government Departments and Agencies and non-governmental bodies that had a specific interest in issues addressed in the booklet.

The following bodies were formally represented on the Expert Review Group

Office for Internet Safety  
National Centre for Technology in Education  
Barnardos  
National Parents Council Primary  
An Garda Síochána  
Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland  
Irish Cellular Industry Association  
National Youth Council of Ireland  
O2  
Google Ireland

The Office for Internet Safety would like to take this opportunity to express its gratitude to all the members of the Expert Review Group for their work and professionalism in contributing to the publication of this guide.

# GET WITH IT!

## This booklet is about helping you

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Increasingly easy access to powerful communication tools such as social networking websites, video and photograph sharing sites and internet camera-phones means that, all over the world, people are saying new things to new audiences. However, these sometimes anonymous, instant and far reaching communication capabilities have brought a new dimension to child protection issues such as cyberbullying. Technologies can be used by young people for a wide range of activities that annoy, harass and intimidate each other.

Parents worry about the dangers of cyberbullying. This booklet is intended to increase awareness of all aspects of cyberbullying in the new media world and to help parents and their children understand the often confusing issues of new media technologies and tools which children and young people are using for this behaviour.

This publication was produced as a joint initiative between the Office for Internet Safety, the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE), O2 and Barnardos

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The content of this booklet was produced by the National Centre for Technology in Education and the Office for Internet Safety in conjunction with Barnardos.

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