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Cyber-Bullying

An Information Sheet for Teachers and Other Professionals Who Work With Young People

The Benefits of Technology

This information may make the Internet, or mobile phones, or email accounts all seem rather dangerous - but technology is morally neutral and can be a channel for comfort as well as threats. The phone line that carries a threatening text message may also carry information and advice to an anxious parent or a worried child. Whilst technology can be used to bully, the Internet also can be a sanctuary for the victims of bullying by masking their "differences" and allowing them to be part of communities beyond their local one.

The Problems

The digital age has seen the development of new ways in which to bully, slander and abuse. We are now faced with bullying by email, over the phone and by text message; with the use of digital cameras and camera phones to intrude on the privacy of individuals; with so-called 'happy slapping' attacks - the filming and sharing of physical attacks on individuals by groups; the posting of offensive websites; the impersonating of individuals through hijacking email accounts; abusive and threatening behaviour in chat rooms, on discussion boards and through instant messaging. We have also seen reports of school reunion sites being used to slander ex-pupils and teachers alike. A Scottish secondary school had to take its chat room offline due to aggressive bullying activity (Edinburgh Evening News 29.3.06). Recently a phenomenon called "bluejacking" (the sending of anonymous text messages over short distances using "Bluetooth" wireless technology) has been reported. All these examples of cyber-bullying may be taking advantage of cutting edge technology, but the motives of those who are doing this and the excuses they make for their behaviour are age-old.

Some Issues

- Technology allows the user to bully anonymously or from an unknown location, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- No place, not even a bedroom, provides sanctuary from the intrusion of a threatening text message or an abusive e-mail.
- Cyber-bullying leaves no physical scars so it is, perhaps, less evident to a parent or teacher, but it is highly intrusive and the hurt it causes can be very severe.
- Young people are particularly adept at adapting to new technology, an area that can often seem a closed world to adults. For example, the numerous acronyms used by young people in chat rooms and in text messages (POS - Parents Over Shoulder, TUL - Tell You Later) make

it difficult for adults to recognise potential threats.

Advice for Professionals

If you manage a website, email service or chat room that is used by young people, then you should make sure that it is used safely:

- Find out about any relevant guidelines that are published by your local authority or governing body.
- Be prepared to close down any website or chat room if it is used to send bullying or threatening messages.
- Agree a code of conduct. If the service is one, such as a chat room, that is used by a relatively small number of young people, any discussion could involve all users. If the service involves large numbers of young people, a representative group should be assembled and tasked with agreeing a code. All users should be required to agree to abide by this code.
- Make sure that young people who use your messaging, email, mobile or web service know that any messages they send or post may be read by an adult.
- Make sure that young people for whom you are responsible know that sending abusive or threatening messages is against the law.

A Code of Conduct

Here are some points that could be included in the code of conduct that you discuss and agree with young people. Use these points to help you start the discussion, but aim to end up with a small number (up to five or so) of short statements that are suitable for the age of the users.

- If you feel you are being bullied by email, text or online, do talk to someone you trust.
- Never send any bullying or threatening messages. Anything you write and send could be read by an adult.
- Serious bullying should be reported to the police - for example threats of a physical or sexual nature.
- Keep and save any bullying emails, text messages or images.
- If you can, make a note of the time and date bullying messages or images were sent, and note any details about the sender.
- Why not log into a chatroom with a different user ID or nickname? That way the bully won't know who you are. You could change your mobile phone number and only give it out to close friends.
- Contact the service provider (mobile phone company, your internet provider) to tell them about the bullying. They may be able to track the bully down.
- Use blocking software - you can block instant messages from certain people or use mail filters to block emails from specific email addresses.
- **Don't** reply to bullying or threatening text messages or emails- this could make matters worse. It also lets the bullying people know that they have found a 'live' phone number or email address. They may get bored quite quickly if you ignore them.
- **Don't** give out your personal details online - if you're in a chatroom, watch what you say about where you live, the school you go to, your email address etc. All these things can help someone who wants to harm you build up a picture about you.

- **Don't** forward abusive texts or emails or images to anyone. You could be breaking the law just by forwarding them. If they are about you, keep them as evidence. If they are about someone else, delete them and don't reply to the sender.
- **Don't** ever give out passwords to your mobile or email account.
- **Remember** that sending abusive or threatening messages is against the law.

Some Useful Resources

- [Chat Danger](#) - a website all about the potential dangers of interactive online services like chat, instant messaging, email and mobiles.
- [Stop Text Bully](#) - resources on this website include a Top 10 Tips poster for young people and a school resource pack 'Putting U in the Picture'.
- [Childnet International](#) - plenty of advice and teachers' resources. Look for the 'Prank or Pain' link through their 'Know it All' project link.
- [Internet Watch Foundation](#) - support website with information on filtering, protection, and an area to report illegal content.
- [Kidsmart](#) - part of the Childnet stable of websites, dealing with Internet safety programmes for schools, young people and parents.
- [Cyberbully](#) - contains links to useful online documents such as a guide to cyber-bullying and an educator's guide.
- "Staying Safe in a Wired World: a parent's guide to Internet safety" by Rob Nickel. A recently published book about most of the technologies used on the Internet and instructions on how to keep children safe while in cyberspace. Available from [Amazon](#).
- [Yahoo's Parents' Guide to Safer Surfing](#).

Please note that we are not responsible for the content or availability of the websites above.

Some Useful Contacts

If you feel you are being bullied through your mobile phone, either with phone calls or text messages, you will be able to seek help from your phone network provider using the phone numbers below:

Orange - 07973 100 150, or 150 from an Orange phone
Vodafone - 08700 700 11, or 191 from a Vodafone phone
O2 - 08705 678 678, or 4445 from an O2 phone
Virgin Mobile - 0845 6000 070, or 789 from a Virgin Mobile phone
3 Network - 08707 330 333, or 333 from your 3 Network phone
T-Mobile - 0845 412 5000

If you are experiencing bullying phone calls through your landline, the numbers of the providers below may be useful:

British Telecom Nuisance Call Advisor - freephone 0800 661 441 (View [this pdf leaflet](#) for more information)
NTL - 0845 454 0000
Telewest - 0845 142 0220

If you are experiencing cyber-bullying through your email account, you may

want to contact your Internet service provider for help. Use [this weblink](#) to find a comprehensive list of providers. Click on the 'info' button after each name to access phone numbers:

Report abuse on Yahoo's Messenger service by following this [weblink](#).

Report abuse on MySpace by following this [weblink](#).

Bebo users - read some Bebo [safety tips here](#). To report abuse, you can use the 'Report Abuse' link on the offender's profile.

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Any comments or questions about this information sheet should be directed to [Andrew Mellor](#) at the Anti-Bullying Network.
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