Risks children face online: Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place via technology. Whether on gaming sites, through a mobile device or via a social networking site, the effects can be devastating for the young people involved.

With online technologies accessible 24 hours a day, cyberbullying can be relentless. It can also intrude on spaces that were previously personal, for example at home; it can feel that there is no escape from it.

21% of 8 to 11 year olds have been deliberately targeted, threatened or humiliated by an individual or group through the use of mobile phone or the internet and **28% of 11 – to 16 year olds.**

Beatbullying, Virtual Violence II

The use of technology can increase the audience of the bullying and multiply the number of bullies involved, as young people re-post, send or 'like' bullying content. Bullies can also attempt to be anonymous which can be extremely distressing for the victim.

As hard as it can be to admit, it is also possible that your child is or has been a bully. They could have set up or joined a malicious profile or 'liked' a mean comment they have seen about someone online. They could be acting in this way due to peer pressure or in retaliation for something that has happened to them. When talking to your child about bullying it is important to let them know how you as a family feel about the act. Talk to them about how it makes others feel and the consequences of their actions.

What to do if my child is being Cyberbullied

Offer reassurance and support. Your child may be in need of emotional support or feel like they have nowhere to turn. It is rare that cyberbullying is only taking place online and is often someone your child knows through school or a group they attend. Their school should have policies and procedures for dealing with cyberbullying.

Your child could visit Cybermentors. This is an online counselling service with a difference; the counsellors are also children and young people. This site has proved very popular and offers practical advice - www.cybermentors.org.uk

Tell your child that if they are being bullied to always keep the evidence. Whether it's a text message or email, tell them not to reply to the bully or delete the comments. Ask your child if they know the bully or where the messages are coming from. Often it is someone within the school environment and can be dealt with quickly and effectively with assistance from the school.

Block the bullies
If someone is bullying your child on a social networking or chat site encourage them to block or delete the individual so that they can't be contacted by them anymore.

Report any bullying content to the website it's hosted on. If content has been posted, for example a video or image, which is upsetting your child you should report it to the website, for example, Facebook. Learn how you would report content on sites like Facebook and YouTube; every site is different. Contacting the website is the only way to get the offensive content removed, unless it is illegal. In cases of illegal content for example indecent images or videos of young people under 18, contact your local police or report it to www.clickceop.police.uk.

CLICK CEOP
Advice Help Report

Risks children face online: Online grooming

What is online grooming?

Grooming is a process used to prepare a child for sexual abuse. An offender's aim when grooming will be to gain access to a child and build a relationship with that child. Grooming can take many different forms, from one off contact which may include sexual advances, to a series of events over time. It may start with an adult scanning websites to identify a vulnerable child or befriending a child, perhaps by pretending to have common hobbies or interests or using flattery to trick a child into trusting them.

Online it is easier for an offender to lie and gain one to one contact with a child, for example through a social networking or gaming site. They can share images or videos relating to their claimed common interests and build a 'relationship' away from any adult supervision.

Once a relationship is established an offender may then introduce sexual themes to the conversation, for example, asking the child about their sexual experiences, sharing pornography with them or asking them for sexual pictures of themselves. Different offenders will have different approaches so whereas this process may be very quick it can also take days, weeks or even months. Often an offender will attempt to get a child to meet them in the real world in order to abuse them. Increasingly some offenders are also persuading children to perform sexual acts on webcam.

Signs of grooming

Look out for an unhealthy or heightened level of internet usage. Has your child become more secretive about who they are talking to and where they conduct their online conversations?

To your knowledge has your child engaged in any sexual behaviour online or via text, chat or webcam? Have they got any new electronic devices or gifts that they may not have been able to obtain for themselves?

Talk to your child about meeting their online friend's offline. If they intend to meet any of these online friends you need to set clear boundaries, tell them why you are concerned for their safety and that they must take you or a trusted adult with them to the meeting.

What can parents and carers do to protect their child online?

Parents and carers need to be mindful that part of the fun of being online is communicating and often sites are designed for you to do so with people you don't know. It is important to talk to your child about who they are friends with and how to manage these online relationships.

Not sure where to start? Talk to your child about:

* What sites they use

* The friends they have and how they know them

* How they communicate with these friends

* The type of information they can share

Risks children face online: Online grooming

Top tips

Talk to your child about online grooming. Explain how easy it can be to lie online and the reasons why an adult may wish to contact them.

* **For primary age children** talk to them about the topic in the context of stranger danger. Strangers are people you or they don't know. In the online world there are strangers too and they must not talk privately with them or give out any personal information online.

* **For older children**, the conversation might be a little more difficult. They may have built quite an online network over the years, and might feel you're intruding into their private matters. Why not use one of the Thinkuknow resources to open a conversation. Our age appropriate education films are available through the parents and carers website (www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents) or CEOP YouTube channel (www.youtube.co.uk/ceop)

Talk about their online friends. Ask them to think carefully about who they chat and share information with. If they don't know them in the real world they need to delete or limit what they share with them, for example not sharing their photos, videos or their locations.

Let your child know that you are always there for support. Let them know that you understand how easy it can be to get into difficulties online. Get them to talk to you if anyone makes inappropriate/ sexual comments and ensure they know that, no matter what's happened, you are there to help.

Learn how to report any inappropriate contact made to your child online. This can be done via the ClickCEOP button at www.ceop.police.uk

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)

CEOP is a police led, child protection agency which specialises in tackling sexual abuse on and offline. Through its education programme, Thinkuknow, CEOP offers a range of safety information for children, young people, practitioners and parents/carers. For more information visit www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents.

Reporting to CEOP

If someone has acted inappropriately towards your child, it may be sexual chat, being asked to do something that makes them feel uncomfortable or someone being insistent on meeting up, you must report it to ClickCEOP at www.ceop.police.uk.

THE THINGS I WISH MY PARENTS HAD KNOWN

Children's COMMISSIONER

YOUNG PEOPLE'S ADVICE ON TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT ONLINE SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Summary of top tips

1 Start speaking to your children about these issues before you first give them a phone or set up a social media account. This might feel very early, but you can do it in an age-appropriate way. It is better to be proactive than reactive.

Don't wait for the crisis.

2 Keep the conversation going. Adapt to your child so you can support them.

Don't mention it once and think that's enough.
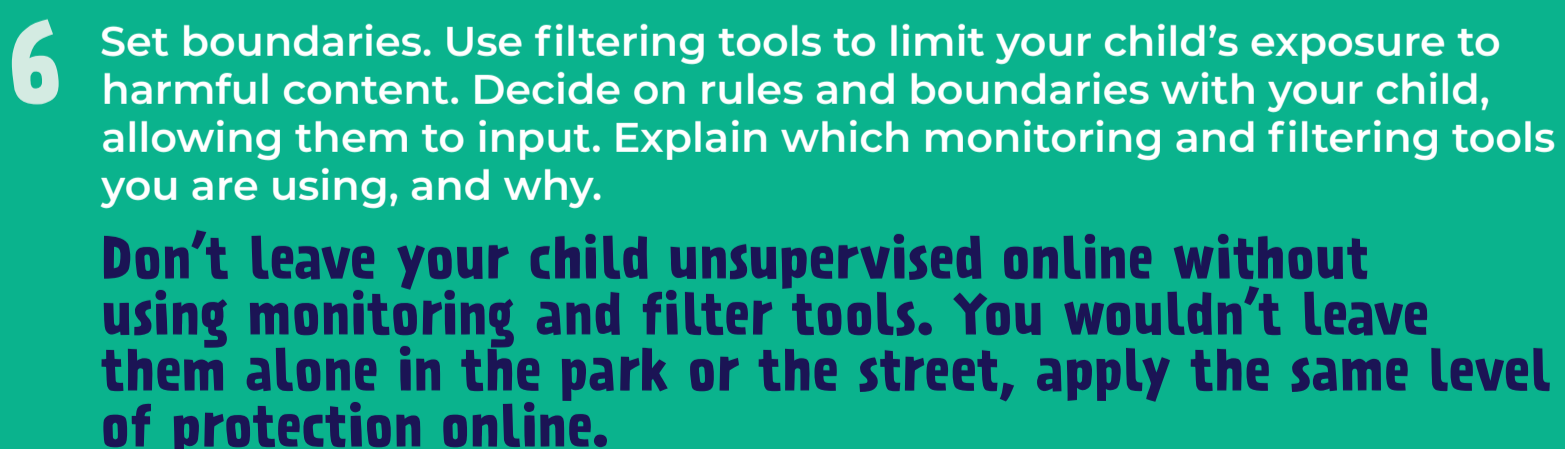
3 Keep it casual, find everyday opportunities to speak about these issues with your child – like when you're walking or driving somewhere.

Don't scare them with 'the big talk'.

4 Focus on your child's emotions first and work out what they may have seen online. By listening to your child and understanding if they accessed harmful content, you can help to support them.

Don't punish them before listening and understanding.

5 Keep curious about the technology your child is using and stay up to date with platforms, apps and trends.

Don't pretend these issues don't exist

6 Set boundaries. Use filtering tools to limit your child's exposure to harmful content. Decide on rules and boundaries with your child, allowing them to input. Explain which monitoring and filtering tools you are using, and why.

Don't leave your child unsupervised online without using monitoring and filter tools. You wouldn't leave them alone in the park or the street, apply the same level of protection online.

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Our full guide shares information on each of these topics:

All quotes from young people aged 16-21

👁 Pornography

"I feel like the best time for parents to have a conversation about porn is a bit earlier for boys than girls. From my experience of male friends, they definitely see porn earlier than my female friends. I mean like early: year 4, year 5, year 6."

📷 Sharing nudes

"A lot of parents might just blame the child instantly instead of trying to support them."

👎 Sexualised bullying

"A lot of my male friends feel like they can't do certain things as they feel like they will get bullied, or even worse than bullied... they feel like they're in danger if they don't do a certain thing."

✏️ Editing photos and body image

"It is still as damaging ... you know it's edited, you still wanna look that way. It is hard to get over the fact you don't look that way. It's hard to navigate through that."

💬 Peer pressure

"You see people like those comments and get lots of likes. It makes you think to post more comments like that, you see people like them so you start posting more hateful comments."

All quotes from young people aged 16-21

www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

A third of 5 to16 year olds are believed to have a mobile phone, so it's essential that parents/carers are aware of how they can be used safely.

 Research conducted by YouGov for the Carphone Warehouse found that nearly half of parents said they are unaware that parental controls for mobile phones exist. With more than two in five of 8 to 15 year olds in the UK having accessed inappropriate content from their mobile phones. Professor Tanya Byron has been advising the Government on child internet safety since 2007 and worked with the Carphone Warehouse to procude a guide for parents on mobile web safety.

Mobile phone safety advice for children and young people:

- Only give your mobile number to your friends and people that you trust.
- Don't share it on social networking websites.
- Don't lend your phone to someone you don't know or trust, or put it in a place where other people could get hold of it.
- Lock your phone with a PIN code so if anyone steals your phone they won't be able to use it.
- If you have Bluetooth on your phone, keep this switched off when you are not using it.
- If your mobile phones uses GPS technology then make sure you only share your location with trusted friends and family
- Always check your privacy settings on applications you use on your mobile phone as sometimes these will be different to when you use websites online
- Always remember that once you've sent a text, picture or video (even to someone you know or trust) they can send it to other people without you knowing, so always think before you post
- If something happens on your mobile phone that makes you feel worried or uncomfortable then always speak to an adult you trust straight away.

Kent website