

TEACHING ABOUT ONLINE BULLYING:

THE VIEWS OF YOUNG PEOPLE



Funded by



Department
for Education

**NATIONAL
CHILDREN'S
BUREAU**

Part of the family

© National Children's Bureau – Registered charity No. 258825. Registered in England and Wales No. 952717. Registered office: 23 Mentmore Terrace, Hackney, London E8 3PN. A Company Limited by Guarantee.

INTRODUCTION

In late 2020, we conducted consultations with young people about online bullying and how they felt teachers approached anti-online bullying and online safety teaching. This document includes some of their tips and advice to help teachers and other children's workforce professionals deliver effective anti-online bullying practice to children and young people. It also includes the elements of the new Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education curriculum that relate to online safety and bullying.

The quotations used in this document were taken directly from the young people we spoke to.



1 – Online bullying in England and Wales: year ending March 2020 – Office of National Statistics – <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/onlinebullyinginenglandandwalesyearendingmarch2020>
2 – Wolke, D., Lee, K. & Guy, A. Eur Child Adolesc Psychiatry (2017) 26: 899. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-017-0954-6>
3 – Kowalski RM, Limber SP (2013) Psychological, physical, and academic correlates of cyberbullying and traditional bullying. J Adolesc Health 53(1 Suppl):S13–S20. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2012.09.018 / Jose PE, Kljakovic M, Scheib E, Notter O (2012) The joint development of traditional bullying and victimization with cyber bullying and victimization in adolescence. J Res Adolesc 22(2):301–309. doi: 10.1111/j.1532-7795.2011.00764.x 10. Fredstrom BK, Adams RE, Gilman R (2011) Electronic and school-based victimization: unique contexts for adjustment difficulties during adolescence. J Youth Adolesc 40(4):405–415. doi: 10.1007/s10964-010-9569-7

HOW PREVALENT IS ONLINE BULLYING?

1/5 children have experienced bullying online.

children aged 10 to 15 years in England and Wales (19%) experienced at least one type of online bullying behaviour in the year ending March 2020, equivalent to 764,000 children¹.

There is evidence that cyberbullying may have unique **negative effects on self-esteem, and increase depression and anxiety symptoms**⁴.



9/10 are also bullied face to face.

Studies have shown that online bullying creates very few new victims. It generally starts face to face and then 'goes' online². Research suggests that 9 out of 10 adolescents who report experience of cyberbullying are also bullied by traditional (face to face) forms of bullying³.



Both **disabled young people**⁵ and **LGBT young people**⁶ are more likely to be cyberbullied.

One report⁷ showed three areas of a child's life which can be directly linked to your likelihood of being bullied online:

- 1.** young people who reported **positive family communication**, especially with a father, were less likely to experience online bullying
- 2.** positive perceptions of the **school environment** were associated with lower levels of online bullying
- 3.** feelings of safety in young people's **local neighbourhood** were associated with lower levels of online bullying

5 – PIGGIN, R. (2010) Striking back against bullying. SEN: The Journal for Special Needs, no.47 (Jul/Aug). Pp 60–61
6 – Stonewall School Report 2017
7 – Cyberbullying: An analysis of data from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey for England, 2014

WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK ABOUT ONLINE BULLYING?

The young people we spoke to spent a lot of time online. They enjoyed being online and valued the possibilities it gave them to have fun, be inspired, learn and stay connected to friends. They did, however, talk about some of the issues they faced relating to online bullying.

1. Everyone is online

The young people we spoke to felt a lot of pressure to be online and on social media sites sharing their lives. They are seen as an extension of their lives rather than something you choose to do. They didn't see distinctions between being online and offline in the way that many adults do.

2. It's not quite the same as real life

"Social media is a very selfish platform. it's all about people seeing what you do and liking you"

"Things that young people share online can easily be turned around, twisted and used against them"

It was felt that what people post and share is often a projection of how they want their lives to be seen rather than how it actually was. For example, you share the highlights of your day rather than seeing the times you didn't feel happy or were bored. There is a lot of pressure for young people to 'get likes' and positive comments.

"There's no line between what's online and what's in colleges and schools"

"Young people are scared of missing out on stuff"

3. People can go too far and not acknowledge the impact of their behaviour

Banter gone too far was a big issue for the young people we spoke to. There was a feeling that to be online your threshold for what constitutes banter (i.e. the playful and friendly exchange of teasing remarks) needed to be very high. Which meant that you had to 'laugh along' at exchanges that were hurtful.

"There's ignorance of what could be hurtful"

"Often it's passed off as "banter" but it can quickly escalate to be malicious"

"When it's online there's an emotional disconnect...[the ones doing the bullying] can get further because there's less ability to stand up to it"

"Sometimes it's difficult to determine what tone someone is using in a text message, when they post something etc"

"It's seen as a weakness to say that you don't find something online about you funny"

4. Easier to bully and to share bullying content

It was felt that it was easier to be unkind behind a screen and not see the impact of your words/actions online. However, for those experiencing online bullying it can feel very exposing with peers being able to share and reshare bullying content many times with an unlimited audience. Where you might have a bullying incident in school between a limited number of people, the online world enables that incident to be shared and replayed time and again which can re-victimise young people numerous times.

"The person bullying can have more confidence [compared to face to face bullying] because they're behind a screen"

"Your home isn't even a safe place anymore because you don't get away from the insults and attacks"

5. They don't always know who to turn to for help

The young people we spoke with felt they didn't always know if they could go to their schools about online bullying. They weren't sure about their schools' duties relating to online bullying and they weren't always confident that schools would know what to do if they were able to get involved.

They felt that social media reporting/responses on the whole had improved in recent years on the main social media sites but that there were still inconsistent approaches to what behaviour is acceptable on platforms and what content would be taken down.

"Teachers shy away from it because they think it's outside of their control"

"Teachers don't understand what online bullying looks like"

"Sometimes when incidents are escalated to teachers they don't do anything about it as they don't know how to"

"Schools have a mentality of if it isn't in our building; we can't do anything about it"

"School staff often think that, because it's not bullying that is physically happening in school, they can't deal with it"

Remember:

Through Section 89 clause 5 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 head teachers have the power to discipline their students for any bullying incidents outside of school "to such an extent that is reasonable." This includes bullying taking place online.

TIPS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE: TEACHING ABOUT ONLINE BULLYING

“ It's a matter of giving teachers the tools to understand what there is to help stop online bullying. ”

There are a wealth of tools and resources from many organisations that can help schools and other settings for young people to understand online bullying and online safety. You can find links to them on our website. Our conversations with young people highlighted some specific tips about how anti-online bullying lessons and school activities can be delivered effectively.

1. Teachers and school staff need to have some level of understanding of social media platforms that their pupils are using

Do you know what young people are doing online? Whilst the age restrictions for social media sites tend to be over the age of 13, this is currently very easy to get around for young people. You may be surprised at some of the content that young people are seeing online, even at primary age.

It is vital you have a good understanding of the online sites, apps and games that your pupils are using. You do not need to understand every detail of each social media or gaming platform that a child might be using but the basics would be helpful. Ask yourself 'do I know how to report content on the most popular apps?' and 'Do I know what the new popular apps are being used for?'

“

“Teachers need to have some sort of training”

“People [teachers and pupils] need to have a basic knowledge of what each platform can be used for and the potential dangers and consequences of it”

“You can't just bundle all of 'social media' into one category.”

”

There are many organisations that can provide information, advice and support about supporting young people with online safety.



Professional Online Safety Helpline provided by the UK Safer Internet Centre

internet matters.org



Net Aware)))

2. Teachers should acknowledge that many pupils know much more about these platforms than they do

The young people we spoke to said that sometimes it was quite obvious when adults didn't know much about certain apps/sites they use. The trends and platforms that young people use can change very quickly. The most important thing is to listen. Try to use open questions and don't jump to conclusions about the type of content pupils are posting.

“

“Assemblies about social media would be quite patronising to some people”

“[Teachers can be] very out of touch with what our lives are like”

”

3. Let young people take the lead

The young people we spoke with said they wanted schools to listen to them and allow them to share what they do online.

This would give them some time to tell you all the positive things that they do online and then give them space to raise the fears they have or even to highlight things that they might not have realised were things that may leave them exposed.

“They should look to learn from students' experiences”

“They should draw on real life examples of online bullying”



Young people's suggestions about how to include pupils better in learning about online bullying and safety:



A 'take over' lesson. Where you ask pupils to teach school staff about the online world, what they like to do online and how they keep safe. This could inspire your pupils to share all the things they enjoy whilst also highlighting where the gaps are in their knowledge.



An annual workshop/ event (which could take place on Safer Internet Day or Anti-Bullying Week) could bring together staff and students to talk about their activity online, review policies and revise an e-safety strategy together.



Use real life examples in the media and case studies to help bring issues to life and start a conversation. You could even ask the young people to think about real life examples from the media and ask them to bring them to the lessons to share.



4. Include everyone

We know that some groups are more likely to experience online bullying than others. We have consulted with disabled young people and those with SEN about their experiences of online bullying. We found that many children with SEND:



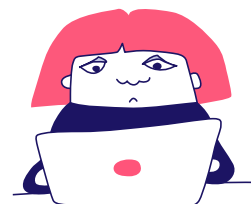
- **had experienced bullying online.** This was often an extension of the face-to-face bullying they experienced, it often went unchallenged, or they were not supported to respond to it.



- **were not using the internet**, despite being able to do so. For some this was because they were not given the support to do so. For others it was because they had been discouraged from using the internet or were afraid to do so for fear of experiencing online bullying. This means young people are also missing out on the many positive aspects of the internet.



- **had not been supported to learn about online bullying or internet safety.** This meant they were not aware of how to stay safe online, what to do about online bullying, or made it difficult for them to know if some of the things happening online were bullying.



Remember:

It is vital that we support all pupils to understand about online bullying and safety. For some children that might take more time or a differentiated approach.

THE RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX EDUCATION AND HEALTH EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Read government guidance about the new Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education curriculum.

The new Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education curriculum are compulsory from September 2020. The Department for Education has said that schools should start teaching from that date if they meet the statutory requirements. If they are not ready, or are unable to meet the requirements, they should begin teaching by at least the start of the summer term 2021.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The government statutory guidance says that the new RSE and Health Curriculum for primary schools should cover the following elements relating to online safety and bullying:

Caring friendships:

- how important **friendships** are in making us feel happy and secure, and how people choose and make friends.
- the **characteristics of friendships**, including mutual respect, truthfulness, trustworthiness, loyalty, kindness, generosity, trust, sharing interests and experiences and support with problems and difficulties.
- that **healthy friendships** are positive and welcoming towards others, and do not make others feel lonely or excluded.
- that most **friendships have ups and downs**, and that these can often be worked through so that the friendship is repaired or even strengthened, and that resorting to violence is never right.
- how to **recognise who to trust** and who not to trust, how to judge when a friendship is making them feel unhappy or uncomfortable, managing conflict, how to manage these situations and how to seek help or advice from others, if needed.



Respectful relationships:

- the importance of **respecting others**, even when they are very different from them (for example, physically, in character, personality or backgrounds), or make different choices or have different preferences or beliefs.
- **practical steps** they can take in a range of different contexts to improve or support respectful relationships.
- about **different types of bullying (including cyberbullying)**, the impact of bullying, responsibilities of bystanders (primarily reporting bullying to an adult) and how to get help.
- what a stereotype is, and how stereotypes can be unfair, negative or destructive.
- the importance of permission-seeking and giving in relationships with friends, peers and adults.



Online safety:

- that **people sometimes behave differently online**, including by pretending to be someone they are not.
- that the same principles apply to online relationships as to face-to-face relationships, including the importance of **respect for others online** including when we are anonymous.
- the rules and **principles for keeping safe online**, how to recognise risks, harmful content and contact, and how to report them.
- how to **critically consider their online friendships** and sources of information including awareness of the risks associated with people they have never met.



Health education:

Under Health Education it also states that by the end of primary education:

- isolation and loneliness can affect children and that it is very **important for children to discuss their feelings** with an adult and seek support.
- that **bullying (including cyberbullying) has a negative and often lasting impact on mental wellbeing**.
- **where and how to seek support** (including recognising the triggers for seeking support), including whom in school they should speak to if they are worried about their own or someone else's mental wellbeing or ability to control their emotions (including issues arising online).

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The aim of RSE is to give young people the information they need to help them develop healthy, nurturing relationships of all kinds, not just intimate relationships. It should enable them to know what a healthy relationship looks like and what makes a good friend, a good colleague and a successful marriage or other types of committed relationships. The guidance sets out categories under Relationships Education and states what pupils should know by the end of secondary school. We have outlined below the elements of each that are pertinent to bullying and online bullying:

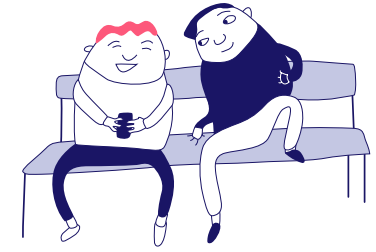
Respectful relationships, including friendships:

- the characteristics of **positive and healthy friendships** (in all contexts, including online) including: trust, respect, honesty, kindness, generosity, boundaries, privacy, consent and the management of conflict, reconciliation and ending relationships. This includes different (non-sexual) types of relationship.
- practical steps they can take in a range of different contexts to improve or support **respectful relationships**.
- how **stereotypes**, in particular stereotypes based on sex, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or disability, can cause damage (e.g. how they might normalise non-consensual behaviour or encourage prejudice).
- that in school and in wider society they can expect to be treated with respect by others, and that in turn they should show due **respect to others**, including people in positions of authority and due tolerance of other people's beliefs.
- about different types of bullying (including cyberbullying), the impact of bullying, responsibilities of bystanders to report bullying and how and where to get help.**
- that some types of behaviour within relationships are criminal, including violent behaviour and coercive control.
- what constitutes **sexual harassment and sexual violence** and why these are always unacceptable.
- the legal rights and responsibilities regarding **equality** (particularly with reference to the protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010) and that everyone is unique and equal.



Online and media:

- about **online risks**, including any material someone provides to another has the potential to be shared online and the difficulty of removing potentially compromising material placed online.
- not to provide material to others that they would not want shared further and not to share personal material which is sent to them.
- what to do and where to get support to report material or manage issues online.**



Health education:

Under Health Education it also states that by the end of primary education:

- how to critically evaluate when something they do or are involved in has a **positive or negative effect on their own or others' mental health**.
- how to **identify harmful behaviours online** (including bullying, abuse or harassment) and how to report, or find support, if they have been affected by those behaviours.





ANTI-BULLYING ALLIANCE



ABA and our members provide lots of tools and information to help you with your anti-bullying activity. You can find out more on our website.

We have free CPD online training relating to bullying which you can find on our website.

www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/onlinetraining

**NATIONAL
CHILDREN'S
BUREAU**

Part of the family

© National Children's Bureau – Registered charity No. 258825. Registered in England and Wales No. 952717. Registered office: 23 Mentmore Terrace, Hackney, London E8 3PN. A Company Limited by Guarantee.