

## What Parents Need to Know about How to Combat Online Bullying

At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one of many issues which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit [www.nationalonlinesafety.com](http://www.nationalonlinesafety.com) for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

### What Parents & Carers Need to Know about HOW TO COMBAT ONLINE BULLYING

Defined as "ongoing hurtful behaviour towards someone online", cyber-bullying makes its victims feel upset, uncomfortable and unsafe. In the digital world, it has numerous forms – such as hurtful comments on a person's posts or profile; deliberately leaving them out of group chats; sharing embarrassing images or videos of someone; or spreading gossip about them. Cyber-bullying can severely impact a young person's mental health – so, in support of Anti-Bullying Week, we've provided a list of tips to help trusted adults know what to look for and how to respond to it.

- 1. GET CONNECTED**  
Playing online games together with your child or connecting with them on social media (providing they're old enough) is not only fun but also an excellent way of establishing some common ground to discuss things you've both seen or done online – as well as keeping an eye on who your child is communicating with in the digital world.
- 2. KEEP TALKING**  
Regular chats with young people about their online lives are good practice in general, but they can also be an excellent refresher to help prevent cyber-bullying situations. Topics you might want to revisit include why it's important to only connect online with people we know and trust, and why passwords should always remain secret (even from our best friends).
- 3. STAY VIGILANT**  
Observe your child while they're using technology and just after they've used it. Are they acting normally, or out of character? Possible signs of a problem may include seeming quiet or withdrawn, funny or anxious, angry or repeatedly checking their phone. When you feel it's the right time, you may want to check in with them to see if everything is OK.
- 4. MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE**  
If an online bullying incident does occur, it may take a while before your child is ready to open up about what happened. Just gently remind them that they can always come to you with any problems – and that they won't be in trouble. You might also suggest a trusted family member they could turn to, in case they feel too embarrassed to tell you directly.
- 5. BE PREPARED TO LISTEN**  
When conversations about online bullying do take place, they're likely to be difficult, emotional and upsetting for both you and your child. Actively listen to your child while they're bringing you up to speed, and try not to show any judgement or criticism – even if they haven't dealt with the situation in exactly the way you would have hoped.
- 6. EMPOWER YOUR CHILD**  
Depending on their age, your child might not want a parent 'lifting their bottles' for them – in that case, talk through their options with them (blocking the perpetrator, deleting the app and so on). By allowing your child to choose the path they take, you're putting them in control but are also demonstrating that you're there to support them along the way.
- 7. REPORT BULLIES ONLINE**  
Cyber-bullying often takes place through a particular app, social media platform or online game. If this is happening to your child, to support their complaint, most games and apps have reporting tools specifically to stamp out abusive behaviour and protect users.
- 8. ENCOURAGE EMPATHY**  
Protecting themselves online is the priority, of course, but young people should also feel empowered to help if they witness other people losing victim to cyberbullying. Even if they don't feel confident enough to call someone out on their abusive behaviour online, they can still confidentially report that person to the app or game where the bullying occurred.
- 9. SEEK EXPERT ADVICE**  
Victims of online bullying frequently experience feelings of isolation and anxiety, a loss of self-esteem and potentially even thoughts of self-harm or suicide. If you think that an incident of cyber-bullying has affected your child's mental wellbeing, then seek psychological support for them. There are some useful contact details in the central panel below.
- 10. INVOLVE THE AUTHORITIES**  
If the nature of any online bullying makes you suspect that your child is genuinely in imminent physical danger – or if there are any signs whatsoever of explicit images being shared as part of the bullying – then you should gather any relevant screenshots as evidence and report the incidents to your local police force.

#### FURTHER SUPPORT AND ADVICE

If you or your child need additional help with an online bullying issue, here are some specialist organisations that you could reach out to.  
Children: talk to a trained counsellor on 0800 1111 or online at [www.childline.org.uk/get-support/](http://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/)  
National Bullying Helpline: counsellors are available on 0845 225 5787 or by visiting [www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk/cyberbullying.html](http://www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk/cyberbullying.html)  
The NSPCC: the children's charity has a guide to the signs of bullying at [www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/bullying-and-cyberbullying/](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/bullying-and-cyberbullying/) and can be reached on 0800 800 8000

#### Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.

**NOS** National Online Safety®  
#WakeUpWednesday

[www.nationalonlinesafety.com](http://www.nationalonlinesafety.com) @natonlinesafety /NationalOnlineSafety @nationalonlinesafety

Users of this guide do so at their own discretion. No liability is entered into. Current as of the date of release: 09.11.2022

According to Ofcom's 2022 Media Use and Attitudes report, children are now more likely to be bullied via technology than they are to experience it in person. An alarming 84% of 8 to 17-year-olds who reported being targeted said it had taken place via messaging, social media, online gaming and so on, as opposed to 61% who had been intimidated face-to-face.

Just like its offline counterpart, cyber-bullying creates feelings of isolation and anxiety in its victims, along with a loss of self-esteem and potentially thoughts of self-harm or suicide. In support of Anti-Bullying Week, today's #WakeUpWednesday guide has expert tips on how trusted adults can help to prevent online bullying or reduce its damaging effects. Ofcom's research also indicated that two-thirds of parents and carers admitted to being worried about their child becoming the victim of bullying in the digital world – more than half of them specifying online video games as a particular area of unease. Concern was especially high among the parents of slightly older children: the 8–15 age bracket.

Our #WakeUpWednesday guide, to coincide with Anti-Bullying Week 2022, pulls together tips for trusted adults - including how to spot the warning signs in a child who's being bullied online, how you might respond if a young person opens up to you about such a situation and what steps you could take together to help make them safer from internet aggressors.

Please [click here](#) to download the guide