Gooseberry Guru Parent: Bullying Online

What is Bullying?

Bullying is behaviour by an individual or group, **repeated** over time, that is **intended** to hurt or harm another individual or group, either physically or emotionally. It can take many forms including physical (either actual or threats), verbal and indirect actions such as social exclusion and spreading rumours. Bullying often involves an imbalance of power and is often targeted at those seen as different because of their race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, special educational needs or disability.

Online bullying involves the same types of behaviour (other than actual physical harm) but it takes place using technology, such as social media websites and apps, online games and mobile phones. It can take the form of exclusion, either from gaming parties or online social groups. It may involve sharing embarrassing images, or using images in ways that were not intended, perhaps by adding comments, editing them or creating memes. It may involve mis-using someone's phone or creating fake social media accounts in the victim's name to send fake messages. It may even take the form of encouraging someone to self-harm.

Key Features of Online Bullying

- It can be relentless – it can take place at any time of the day or night, at school or at home.
- It can be very public – potentially viewed, spread and contributed to by a wide number of people, both known and unknown.
- It can involve embarrassing or humiliating images which can potentially be shared again, or which may pop up unexpectedly online at a later date.
- Technological advances mean that online images can be manipulated - naked images can be created from fully dressed ones or people's faces can be realistically superimposed on other bodies.
- Parents and teachers are less likely to be aware that it is happening.
- Anonymity (or a perception of distance) online can lead to disinhibition and encourage people to be more unkind than they would be face to face
- A culture of unkindness online can influence the way both children and adults behave. .
- Social media and other public platforms provide bullies with an audience to play to.

What is the Impact of Bullying?

Bullying can damage a child's confidence, self-esteem and ambitions. The longer it goes on, the more serious the impact is likely to be and the impact can be long lasting, including into adulthood.
It can lead to children missing education and leaving school early. It can impact on educational attainment and on mental health, including problems such as depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicidal thoughts and behaviours.

Possible Signs of Online Bullying

Children often do not tell anyone if they are being bullied. Research by the anti-bullying charity **Ditch the Label** suggests that the reasons are varied ranging from those who felt they could cope alone or didn't think it was serious enough, to those who were scared that telling would make things worse (38%), they were embarrassed (34%), they were worried they would be called a "snitch"(38%) or they didn't think it would be taken seriously (27%).

As a parent it is important to be alert to changes in your child's behaviour or wellbeing that might indicate distress or unhappiness, but you should not assume that it will always be obvious. Some signs that are worth being aware of include:

- Being regularly upset or low in mood

- Becoming withdrawn or unwilling to talk or secretive about their online activities and device use.

  - Lots of new phone numbers, texts or email addresses on their device.

  - Not wanting to go to school and/or avoiding activities or meetings with friends and school mates.

  - Difficulty sleeping.

How to Respond to Online Bullying

- **Don't reply** – bullies are looking for a response so don't give them what they are after. If it's happening on social media – take a break for a while.
- **Block or Mute the bully** – most messaging apps allow users to block unwanted contact so that they can no longer see posts or communicate with the victim.
- **Unsubscribe or "un-follow"** accounts that produce or share offensive material.
- **Keep the evidence** – Teach children not to delete bullying messages and how to use the PrintScreen or screenshot functions on their phones or other devices and how to save the resulting image.
- **Report it to the Platform**. Bullying is against the rules of all major platforms. By reporting it, the site may decide to remove content and disable or suspend the offending accounts, although they won't be able to guarantee a bully will not set up another account once their account is closed. It helps to take a screenshot of the material that includes the web address or to note the username, content, time and date to identify the item.
- **Report it to the Police** if it is discriminatory, harassing or otherwise against the law
- **Report to the mobile provider**: All UK mobile phone providers have procedures to deal with malicious calls or texts. They will work with the police if necessary and can usually trace malicious calls for them.
- **Report it to school**: you can report bullying even if it may have occurred outside of school.

Educating children about Bullying Online

- **Kindness and Respect:** Encourage a culture of kindness and respect both offline and online.
- **Lead by example:** Make it clear that any type of bullying is not acceptable and lead by example.
- **Impact**: Explain that bullying can have a serious, sometimes lifelong effect on the victim.
- **Reputation:** Remind them that others will make judgements about them based on their behaviour online. A damaged digital reputation can affect them now and in the future.
- **Privacy:** Talk about keeping private online and the need to think carefully before posting anything online to consider the impact both on themselves and others.
- **Escalation:** Remind them that brief text communications can easily be misinterpreted and that once someone has taken offence or others have become involved, things can quickly escalate online.
- **Age:** Discourage them from using social media platforms before they are mature enough to cope.
- **Boundaries**: Talk about the sort of content that is never acceptable to share online – eg discriminatory, threatening, harassing or indecent comments or images.
- **Consequences:** Ensure children are aware of the consequences if they bully. It could affect their future education or employment. They could also be blocked from platforms and risk a potential criminal record in serious cases.

- **Sharing, Liking and Forwarding**: Explain that even if they do not instigate bullying, they will both add to the harm and be implicated in it, simply by forwarding, liking or sharing bullying content.
- **Audience: E**xplain that bullies often play to an audience and they can help reduce the incidence of bullying by not taking part, even as a bystander to bullying online. Help them learn how to use blocking and reporting functions on the platforms they use.
- **Always Tell:** Encourage children always to tell you or another trusted adult if they are being bullied or if they are aware that a friend is being bullied.
- **Evidence:** Teach your children to save evidence of online bullying by taking screenshots, saving emails and text messages and passing them on to you or a teacher.

Supporting Your Child if they are Bullied Online

- **Help them to tell**. Be alert to changes in behaviour and even if there are none, ask them from time to time how they are feeling and if anything is worrying them. Do this when you are not too busy and when you are away from other children. Sometimes a conversation in the car can be helpful as revealing worries without direct eye contact can make it easier.
- **Listen carefully** without over-reacting and give them time to explain all the details. Encourage them to be honest by assuring them of your support whatever may have happened. There are often two sides to a story. Bullying is intentional behaviour over a period of time – it is different from a brief spat between friends that is not intended to harm.
- **Be understanding** – Suggesting they stop using technology is not realistic for today's children – it is integral to their lives.
- **Seek support** - Talk to a teacher if the bullying involves other students at the school. Schools have anti-bullying procedures and will often display their policies on the school website. Take time to read them so that you understand what support and action to expect.
- **Involve your child** in decisions about how to address the bullying. Remember that children often don't tell because they worry it will make things worse – be sensitive to this concern.
- **Wellbeing** – Bullying can have serious and long-lasting effects. Help can be found in many forms from counselling, mindfulness apps, new activities, physical exercise and simply talking. Don't assume the problem will go away overnight and be alert to your child's ongoing vulnerabilities and need for support.

Mobile Phone Service Providers

All UK mobile phone service providers have malicious or nuisance calls, texts or picture message centres set up and have procedures in place to deal with them. These are:

O2 – 4445 or 202 from a mobile. 08705 678 678 for Pay as you go. 0870 241 0202 for Pay monthly contracts.

VodaFone – 03333 040 191 for Pay as you go. 03333 048 069 for Pay monthly contracts.

EE – 0800 956 6000 for Pay as you go. 0800 956 6000 for Pay monthly contracts.

Orange – 07973 100 450 for Pay as you go. 07973 100 150 for Pay monthly contracts.

T-Mobile – 07953 966 150 for Pay as you go. 07953 966 150 for Pay monthly contracts.

Virgin – 0345 6000 789 for Pay as you go. 0345 6000 789 for Pay monthly contracts.

BT- 08000 328 751 for Pay as you go. 08000 328 751 for Pay monthly contracts.