

What is Trolling?

People who deliberately upset or stir up trouble online are known as Internet Trolls. Trolling is common on sites which allow public comments such as social media, blog sites and game chat and tends to be sent using fake profiles. It is illegal in the UK if it includes a threat or false information, is indecent or highly offensive and was intended to cause distress or anxiety. You may have read of recent instances of extreme pornography being sent to unsuspecting groups in a practice known as Zoom bombing.

Zoom Bombing

The use of Zoom video conferencing by schools and others during the Covid-19 lockdown, has led to an increase in the objectionable practice of posting rude, disruptive or inflammatory comments or images on Zoom calls.

What do I need to know?

There has been a recent spate of TikTok and YouTube videos celebrating the trolling of online lessons. Sometimes it just involves shouting or loud noises, but it can also be more graphic or discriminatory. Unfortunately, this can risk normalising such behaviour. To be popular, or to gain attention, children may feel tempted to push the boundaries of what is acceptable. Even if they aren't the perpetrator, they may encourage others by approving or sharing inappropriate content or by sharing details of passwords or other details of upcoming school conference calls. Obviously, trolling is unacceptable in any environment, but parents need to be vigilant about their child's behaviour in the online classroom environment, to protect both the teachers, other children and their own child's reputation.

What to talk about with your child

- ★ **Ask** if they have ever come across trolling online and, if so, how it made them feel (*please don't give them ideas by mentioning problems with online lessons or the existence of YouTube videos!*)
- ★ **Remind** them always to behave respectfully online, especially in class situations.
- ★ **Talk** about peer pressure and encourage them to resist it when it is harmful.
- ★ **Remind** them that even the things we 'like' or 'share', can affect our reputation.
- ★ **Talk** about laws affecting online behaviour – defamation, laws against harassment, obscene or threatening behaviour, hate crime/anti-discrimination laws.
- ★ **Explain** that live streaming can be particularly problematic, as things done on the spur of the moment may lead to poor decision making.
- ★ **Remind** them not to react to trolling if it is directed at them (the troll is hoping for an emotional reaction). They should tell you so you can help them to block the sender and report unacceptable behaviour to the platform concerned, or the Police if it is serious.