3/22

***Advice on Cyberbullying***

**Who is this advice for?**

This advice is for everyone about cyberbullying. It provides advice and information about how they can protect children and young people from cyberbullying and how to tackle it if it happens.

**Overview**

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place using technology. Whether on social media sites, through a mobile phone, or gaming sites, the effects can be devastating for the young person involved. There are ways to help prevent a child or young person from being cyberbullied and to help them cope and stop the bullying if it does happen.

Everyone needs to be aware that most children and young people have been involved in cyberbullying in some way, either as a victim, perpetrator, or bystander. By its very nature, cyberbullying tends to involve several online bystanders and can quickly spiral out of control. children and young people who bully others online do not need to be physically stronger and their methods can often be hidden and subtle.

Cyberbullying can also involve adults; even though technology has provided wonderful opportunities for both teaching and learning, it has led to some teachers becoming the victims of internet messaging that undermines or ridicules them. It is important that we make clear that this is not acceptable behaviour and lead by example. What was once a conversation at the school gate between small groups of parents and carers can now become a conversation with perhaps hundreds of “friends” on social networking sites, permanent, with a large audience, and easily shared. Whilst we all have the right to be critical of decisions made by schools, colleges, or even individual staff members, they should raise concerns in an appropriate way and not become abusive, or libellous. Open conversations on social networking sites are not private and can easily be reported to school or college staff, even if it was not the intention to share their views directly.

***Social networking***

Children and young people routinely access social media and much of their social lives are online. This can create a false sense of security; for example, chatting online feels different from chatting face to face. It can be easier to say and reveal things that wouldn’t be said face to face; be cruel, aggressive, or flirtatious. It is important for children and young people to remember that there are offline consequences to online behaviour.

Comments intended to be funny can often be misinterpreted online whereas if said face to face they could be acceptable as facial expressions, body language, tone of voice and to contexts all help to ensure that comments are taken the right way. This is not the case online. We also know that increasingly younger children are signing up to social network sites and may not have the maturity to handle their online identity in a safe and responsible way.

Social networking can increase existing social pressures and reinforce a sense of isolation; for instance, by people purposefully not liking a young person’s status update or photo so they seem unpopular, or by excluding them from group chats. Online bullying often involves a large audience, and this increases the pressure.

We need to understand the way children and young people communicate with others, and the potential risks. By asking children not to use technology, is not a realistic way to prevent or react to cyberbullying. Internet Matters provides an overview of cyber-bullying in more detail and NSPCC - bullying and cyberbullying prevention.

We have a challenging job and need to know what children and young people are doing online and help them to do it in a safe way. With technology changing on a day-to-day basis, the best way to stay informed is for parents to be involved. Think you know provides helpful tips on letting your child teach you.

***Set boundaries***

A good way to supervise children’s and young people’s internet access and set boundaries about what they can and cannot do online is to create an agreement with them. If a child breaks the rules, restrict internet access for an agreed length of time. Think know, provides helpful tips on agreeing and setting boundaries.

Ensure you use the privacy settings, parental controls and built-in internet safety features provided by the major internet service providers.

We need experience of internet safety issues with their children and young people. The Parent Zone provides a national helpline service at - help@theparentzone.co.uk and The Parent Zone – help.

***Being involved and talking to children***

Social Networks have a minimum age restriction, usually age thirteen. We should talk to children, about the reasons behind the age restriction as they are there for a reason. Accessing such sites too early can expose children and young people to unnecessary bullying.

It is also very important to ensure children and young people feel comfortable about telling their parents and carers things that have happened online. Talking to children will help us to understand the ways in which they are using the internet, social media, and their mobile phone. Talking to children and young people about responsible behaviour is important as sometimes children and young people who are victims of cyberbullying, may also be involved in cyberbullying others. Ensure they know they can go and talk to an adult or parent or tutor if they are being bullied and need support. How we talk to their children will depend on their age.

***Advice for children***

The following are some things that we may wish to consider teaching children and young people about using the internet safely:

* Make sure you use the privacy settings.
* Always respect others – be careful what you say online.
* Be careful what pictures or videos you upload. Once a picture is shared online it cannot be taken back.
* Only add people you know and trust to friends/followers lists online. When talking to strangers, keep your personal information safe and location hidden.
* Treat your password like your toothbrush – keep it to yourself and change it regularly.
* Block the bully – learn how to block or report someone who is behaving badly.
* Do not retaliate or reply to offending e-mails, text messages or online conversations.
* Save the evidence. Always keep a copy of offending e-mails, text messages or a screen grab of online conversations and pass to a parent, carers, or a teacher.
* Make sure you tell an adult you trust, for example, a parent, carers a teacher, or the anti-bullying co-ordinator or call a helpline like Childline on 08001111 in confidence.
* Most social media services and other sites have a button you can click on to report bullying. Doing this can prevent a bully from targeting you and others in the future. Many services take bullying seriously and will either warn the individual or eliminate his or her account. While you are on your mobile phone make sure you also pay attention to your surroundings.

***Possible signs of cyberbullying***

It is not always easy to spot the signs of cyberbullying as it can happen all the time, which is a feature that makes it different from other forms of bullying. Be alert to a change in a child’s behaviour, for example:

* Being upset after using the internet or their mobile phone use.
* Unwilling to talk or secretive about their online activities and mobile phone use.
* Spending much more or much less time texting, gaming, or using social media.
* Many new phone numbers, texts or e-mail addresses show up on their mobile phone, laptop, or tablet.
* After texting or being online they may seem withdrawn, upset, or outraged.
* Not wanting to go to school and/or avoiding meeting friends and school mates.
* Avoiding formerly enjoyable social situations.
* Difficulty sleeping.
* Low self-esteem.

***What to do if you suspect a child is being cyberbullied***

If you suspect a child or young person is being harassed or bullied either over the internet or via mobile phone, ask them to give you details. If a child or young person tells you that someone is bothering them online, take it seriously. Offer practical as well as emotional support. Print out the evidence for future reference. Talk to a tutor if other pupils at the college are involved. You can also contact the colleges Safeguarding Lead and follow the procedures the college has in place on the Safeguarding Policy.

***Support for children who are bullied***

Collage staff should support all students who are bullied and develop strategies to prevent bullying from happening. Children and young people who have been a victim of images or videos of a sexual nature being uploaded and shared will be particularly vulnerable and in need of support before returning to college. The Safeguarding department within UKCB can help.

Cyberbullying on social networks can be upsetting and really knock their confidence. Childline has produced guidance for young people on building their confidence after online bullying available at: Childline - Building confidence after online bullying.

It is also important to involve the child in resolving the issues as this can help to strengthen their self-confidence and restore a sense of emotional safety.

The Anti-Bullying Alliance has helpfully put together a fact sheet outlining the range of support that is available to colleges, parents, carers and young people from the anti-bullying sector advice and support from the anti-bullying sector.

Facebook has produced a support sheet Empowering Parents and Families which gives guidance on what to do if your child is being bullied.

***Useful Resources***

***Getting offensive content taken down.***

If online content is upsetting and inappropriate, and the person or people responsible are known, you need to ensure they understand why the material is unacceptable or offensive and request they remove it.

If the person responsible has not been identified or refuses to take down the material you should contact the social networking site directly to make a report and request the content is taken down. The material posted may be in breach of the service provider’s terms and conditions of use and can therefore be removed.

Some service providers will not accept complaints lodged by a third party. In cases of mobile phone abuse, where the person being bullied is receiving malicious calls and messages, the account holder will need to contact the provider directly.

Before you contact a web service provider, it is important to be clear about where the content is, for example by taking a screen shot of the material that includes the web address. If you are requesting, they take down material that is not illegal, be clear to point out how it breaks the site’s terms and conditions. Where the material is suspected of being illegal you should contact the police directly.