Cyber bullying

Although physical and verbal attacks are still seen as the most common form of bullying, cyber bullying is steadily on the increase. Young people now spend so much time using technology it is like they have two separate lives, their online world and their offline world. And while technology certainly has many positive aspects, cyber bullying is not one of them.

Cyber bullying can be described as the use of technologies by a young person to deliberately and repeatedly harm others. It can involve threatening texts to social exclusion on social networking sites, and can have devastating effects on a young person's social and emotional development.

It is not always easy to know how and when to step in, as the digital world can seem intimidating. However by familiarising yourself with the technology your children use and by becoming involved in their online world you can help keep them safer online.

By talking to your children in an open and honest way about technology and cyber bullying you can encourage responsible, respectful, and safe behaviour online and at the same time curb the spread of online cruelty.

If your child is being bullied online, they often may not want to tell for various reasons, the fear of losing access to the internet and mobile phone being one of them. It can be helpful to know some of the signs to look out for

- visibly upset or angry during or after internet or phone use

- withdrawal from friends or activities

- drop in academic performance

- school or activity avoidance

- depressed, sad, fearful or anxious

- Physical complaints

If you feel they are being bullied, bring up the topic of cyber bullying and share your concerns with them. Give them the support and comfort that they need at that time and reassure them that you will work it out together. Above all, listen to what they tell you, as difficult as that may be.

From a practical point of view there are things that you can tell your child to do. It is important that they do not respond to the bully as they are looking for a reaction. Delete or block the person who is doing the bullying and report bullying on the social networking sites or with your mobile phone provider. Finally, document, document,

document - Save the evidence in a folder on your computer or print out the comments, msg's, pictures etc.

Remember, to fight cyber bulling it is important to talk and listen to your children. Do this by

> ➢ Educating yourself about cyber bullying and how it affects children at different ages
> ➢ Being aware of what your children are doing online
> ➢ Teaching your children to stand up and not stand by when they witness cyber bullying

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