

Types of online abuse

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can occur online only, or as part of more general bullying. Cyberbullies may be people who are known to you or anonymous. Like all bullies, they frequently try to persuade others to join in. You could be bullied for your religious or political beliefs, race or skin colour, body image, if you have a mental or physical disability or for no apparent reason whatsoever.

Cyberbullying generally comprises sending threatening or otherwise nasty messages or other communications to people via social media, gaming sites, text or email, posting embarrassing or humiliating video on hosting sites such as YouTube or Vimeo, or harassing through repeated texts, instant messages or chats. Increasingly, it is perpetrated by posting or forwarding images, video or private details obtained via sexting, without the victim's permission. Some cyberbullies set up Facebook pages and other social media accounts purely to bully others.

The effects of cyberbullying range from annoyance and mild distress to – in the most extreme cases – self-harm and suicide. This can be a reality for vulnerable people, or indeed anybody made to feel vulnerable through cyberbullying or other personal circumstances.

What to do if you are affected by cyberbullying

- Block cyberbullies' social media, email and instant messaging accounts as appropriate.
- Report cyberbullies to your internet service provider (ISP), mobile phone provider (if bullying is via texts or calls) or social media site/app.
- Consider changing your phone number if the bullying is by text or phone call, and keep the new one private.
- Protect all your passwords and password protect your phone.
- Do not reply, this is playing into the hands of the bully.
- Talk to a friend, family member or other trusted person about what is happening and how it makes you feel.
- Keep upsetting emails, messages and posts as evidence if reporting the bullying.
- Report serious bullying such as threats of physical harm or abuse, to the police.

Further information & advice

- Bullying UK (part of Family Lives): www.bullying.co.uk/cyberbullying
- National Bullying Helpline: www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk 0845 22 55 787 / 07734 701221
- Childline: www.childline.org.uk 0800 1111

Cyberstalking

Cyberstalking is persistent unwanted contact from another person – either someone you know or a stranger. We often read about celebrities becoming victims of obsessed cyberstalkers, anybody can be a target.

Cyberstalkers have many different motives, including those who feel wronged by their target, ex-partners, those with misplaced sexual motives, or those who just derive pleasure from scaring other, often random people. They can exploit your digital footprint by snooping on your social media channels/apps to find out your every movement, who you are in contact with and your plans. As cyberstalkers become more determined, they intrude on more aspects of your online presence, sometimes including hacking or taking over your social media accounts.

Cyberstalking may occur online only, or as part more general stalking or harassment activity. [Stalking became a named offence](#) in England and Wales in 2012.

How to avoid cyberstalking

- Review what online information exists about you and keep it to a minimum.
- Regularly change your e-mail and passwords for key online accounts and keep them safe.
- Review all your social media and search engine privacy and security settings.
- Avoid public forums.
- Ensure that your computer and mobile devices have up-to-date internet security software installed and turned on.
- Ensure your wireless hub/router has security turned on.
- Do not send or receive private information when using public Wi-Fi.
- Limit the personal and financial information you share on or offline.

If you are a victim of cyberstalking

- Gather and document as much evidence as you can.
- Report the stalking to the police.
- Seek help and support from relevant organisations, for example the **National Stalking Helpline on 0808 802 0300**, by email at advice@stalkinghelpline.org or via the website at www.suzylamplugh.org/forms/national-stalking-helpline-enquiry-form
- Most social networking sites have a 'Report Abuse' or similar button to enable you to report cyberstalking and other abuse.

Further information & advice

- Suzy Lamplugh Trust: www.suzylamplugh.org (advice and the National Stalking Helpline)
- Protection Against Stalking: www.protectionagainststalking.org

Grooming

Grooming often takes place before online sexual abuse, as described above. It also happens in the build-up to real-life sexual abuse. Online grooming is the building of a relationship via the internet where trust and an emotional connection is established for the purposes of exploitation such as sexual abuse, trafficking and criminal exploitation, as well as radicalisation.

Children and young people can be groomed online by people that they know such as a professional, a friend or a family member as well as strangers.

Groomers gain the trust of their victims through a variety of means:

- Hiding their real identity online and pretending to be of a different sex or age.
- Sharing interests with their victims, often researching things that their victim is interested in to forge a connection.
- Giving advice and showing understanding.
- Paying lots of compliments and giving lots of attention.
- Sending or buying gifts.
- Taking them on trips once they have met in person.

Groomers can create trust in different ways by providing what they perceive their victim needs. It could be taking on a relationship role in a romantic sense or becoming a father figure. Trust could also be built in a mentor or 'peer' role or by someone who claims to be or is an authority figure.

A groomer then typically tries to isolate the victim from their friends or family, making them feel a sense of dependency on them. This gives the groomer power and control over the situation. Groomers often introduce secrets or blackmail the child so that they feel guilty or ashamed. This is how groomers reduce their risk of being caught.

Children's feelings regarding online groomers are often complex. They often do not realise that they have been groomed and will struggle to believe it. They may continue to feel love, loyalty and even admiration for their groomer.

Sexting

Sexting is where someone shares sexual content online usually via private messages. This can include sending nude or semi-nude images or videos or sexually explicit written content in a message. Sexting is often engaged in willingly by both participants who are of a similar age.

However, it can become online sexual abuse and/or sexual exploitation if someone receives unsolicited sexual content or is coerced into taking or sending sexual or nude images. This also applies if one of the participants is much older and/or is in a position of authority.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse can and does happen in person. However, sexual abuse can also be a form of online abuse. This occurs when someone is tricked or forced into any sexual activity. This can be tricking or forcing someone to watch, make or share a sexual video or view a sexual image, as well as taking part in sexual activities or sexual conversations online whether written, verbal or live streamed.

Of course, there is a definite overlap with sexting (as described above). Sexting becomes abuse when it is not solicited, when one person is much older or is in a position of authority or when sexting involves coercion. Online sexual abuse is often a precursor to physical sexual abuse.

Trolling

Not dissimilar from cyberbullying, trolling means intentionally upsetting, shocking or winding up selected individuals, groups of people or a more general audience who are usually people not known to the troll. It generally causes offence as a result of expressing extreme views, or purely for its own sake. Racist, religious, homophobic, political or social abuse are commonplace forms of trolling, but you could also be victimised for something as basic as the football team you support. It may also be directed against people – famous or otherwise – known for their philanthropy, charity, altruism and other good qualities ... by trolls who disagree with their motives.

One of the most upsetting forms of trolling takes place when obscenities or insults are posted against deceased people, which they cannot defend. This can result in considerable trauma for surviving relatives and friends.

Trolling can be carried out by individuals, or groups of trolls with a common aim – to upset innocent victims.

What to do if you are affected by trolling

- Block trolls' social media accounts.
- Report trolls to your internet service provider (**ISP**), mobile phone provider (if bullying is via texts or calls) or social media site/app.
- Do not get wound up or show that you are, this is playing into the hands of the troll.
- Talk to a friend, family member or other trusted person about what is happening and how it makes you feel.
- Keep upsetting emails, messages and posts as evidence if reporting the trolling.
- Report serious trolling to the police if it is defamatory or likely to incite hatred.

Creeping

Creeping refers to persistently checking up on someone on social media by browsing their timeline, updates, conversations, photos/videos, profiles and friends. It can also include checking what people have written on other people's timelines, or retweeted.

Creepers tend to hide from you the fact that they are creeping you by not inviting, commenting or responding on Facebook and other social media platforms, and not looking at your LinkedIn page (as this is notified to you by the site).

Unlike cyberstalking, creeping is not in itself harmful and does not constitute an offence, though it is considered 'creepy', hence the name.

Doxxing

Doxxing (sometimes spelled 'doxing') is a kind of harassment that takes place when someone gets hold of personal information about you – such as your real name, address, job, other personally identifiable data, health information or financial details – and posts it on the internet without your consent.