

An Garda Síochána

Crime Prevention Information Sheet



Personal Safety

Online Harassment



Introduction

To use a social-networking website is to be part of a community. The ease of access people now have to powerful communication tools such as social networking websites have brought a new dimension to issues such as harassment and indeed cyber bullying.

However, there are many ways to minimise the risk of online harassment, many of which can be achieved by using simple common sense.

Don't Reply to messages that harass or annoy you. Even though you may really want to, this is exactly what the sender wants.

Keep the Message. You don't have to read it, but keep it. Keep a record that outlines, where possible, the details, dates and times of any form of harassment that you experience. This will be very useful for a subsequent Garda investigation.

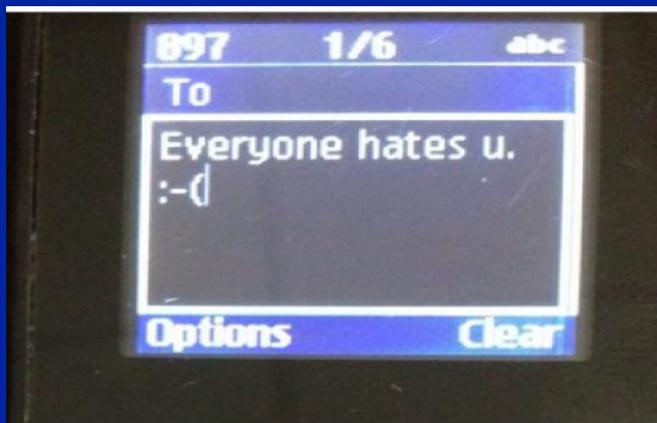
Block the sender. You don't need to put up with someone harassing you. If you are getting messages that upset you on your social network profile or MSN Instant Messenger you can block the person simply by clicking the block button. On some mobile phones you can restrict communications to an approved list of contacts. Mobile networks can't generally bar numbers but they will help you to change your phone number in the case of serious harassment.

Report Problems to the people who are able to do something about it. You can take control by not putting up with offensive content and by reporting it when you come across it. Responsible websites and mobile phone operators provide ways for their users to report things such as pornography, bullying content, or other offensive material. Serious incidents that could be illegal should be reported to the Gardaí. Illegal issues could include someone making inappropriate sexual suggestions, racist remarks, persistent bullying or harassment that can be seriously damaging to the victim's well-being.

Parents should ensure that children do not give away personal information online, especially on public websites or to people they do not know. Personal information includes their name, address, phone number, email address, photographs of themselves, or any financial information such as bank account numbers.

Cyberbullying

Bullying is repeated aggression, verbal, psychological or physical conduct by an individual or group against others. It is widely agreed to be behaviour that is sustained or repeated over time and has a serious negative effect on the well-being of the victim and is generally a deliberate series of actions.



'Cyberbullying' refers to bullying which is carried out using the internet, mobile phone or other technological devices. Cyberbullying generally takes a psychological rather than physical form but is often part of a wider pattern of 'traditional' bullying.

Cyberbullying key advice for parents

As a parent you know your child better than anyone. You are best placed to identify and deal with any incidences of cyberbullying they may encounter. Children who have been bullied will have difficulty in overcoming this problem alone and will need your reassurance and encouragement in tackling it.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS OR OTHER CRIME PREVENTION ISSUES,
PLEASE CONTACT
your local GARDÁ CRIME PREVENTION OFFICER
or
visit the Garda website at www.garda.ie**

What should I look out for?

If your child is avoiding school, or seems upset, sad or angry (especially after using the phone or PC); if your child is withdrawing from usual activities, suddenly showing disinterest in computers or rapidly switching screens when you enter the room, they may be a victim of cyberbullying.

Confirm that you are dealing with bullying behaviour

There are four questions that, when taken together, you can use to help confirm that the behaviour you are dealing with is bullying:

- **Target**—Is your child specifically targeted on their own or is the behaviour targeted at a group of people?
- **Duration**—Has this been happening over a period of time?
- **Frequency**—Is this behaviour part of a recurring pattern?
- **Intention**— Is the behaviour deliberately intended to harm or upset your child?

Report cyberbullying

You should get in touch with your child's school or youth organisation if the bullying involves another pupil from that school or youth group. You should also contact the service provider through its Customer Care or Report Abuse facility. If the cyberbullying is very serious and potentially criminal, you should contact your local Gardaí.



Respond appropriately

If you are concerned that your child has received bullying, offensive or harassing messages, it is very important that you encourage them to talk to you. Responding to a negative experience by stopping their access to mobile phones or the internet might result in you being left out of the loop the next time this happens.

What if I believe my child may be involved in cyberbullying others?

Children need to understand how all forms of bullying, including cyberbullying, can be harmful and how important it is not to stand by when someone is being bullied. It is important therefore, that children learn 'netiquette' (informal code of conduct on the internet). You should explain the following guidelines to them and stress how important it is that they be followed:

- Avoid hurting someone's feelings by emails or other forms of electronic communication;
- Respect other people's online rights;
- Avoid insulting someone;
- If someone insults you be calm;
- Avoid 'crashing' discussion groups or fora;
- Respect the privacy of other people online;
- Be responsible online.

Conclusion:

The information contained in this leaflet has been reproduced by kind permission of the Office for Internet Safety, Department of Justice and Equality, 51 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ph: (01) 602 8258. [Email: internetsafety@justice.ie](mailto:internetsafety@justice.ie)

Following the advice in this leaflet will help to stop you becoming a victim of crime. Your local Garda Crime Prevention Officer can also help in this regard.

The advice contained in this information sheet is not intended to be exhaustive or absolute. Nothing contained in this publication should be interpreted as mandatory, obligatory or designed to conflict with any statutory regulations.



Useful Contacts and Links

Your local Garda Station

An Garda Síochána

www.garda.ie

Office for Internet Safety

www.internetsafety.ie

Child Safety Issues

www.childline.ie

Website of National Parents Council

www.npc.ie

Tips on Internet Safety

www.webwise.ie

Irish hotline for public to report child pornography and other illegal content on the internet

www.hotline.ie