

Turning The Tide On



Image 1



Image 2

In an ever-evolving online environment, the way we interact has changed dramatically. Bullying and harassment are nothing new but online exposure has given rise to

Developments in Social Media, and the prevalence of new platforms, have transformed the way we communicate. Not just in terms of technology, but in the language we use and the way in which we portray our public image.

Raising our profile online however, also increases the risk of online abuse. Internet-bullying has been compared by some to other forms of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences), such as isolation and even the trauma of physical abuse.

The media platforms use security measures that allow us to protect our privacy and restrict the information we share, but these features also afford a level of anonymity to those who may challenge or even target online profiles.

Whether it is our appearance, opinions, religion, sexuality or culture — offensive and repeated attacks are abuse.

Online abuse, also known as cyber-bullying is a growing problem...
...so how can we protect ourselves online?

(Ferrara *et al.*, 2018; Bill Belsey, 2019)

Cyber-Bullying Statistics

A study compiled by *Public Health England* in 2014, found that almost 18% of the 5,335 children surveyed aged 11-15, had experienced online bullying via messages and images.

The data, which looked at online experiences from the two months leading up to the survey, concluded that of those surveyed, instances of cyber-bullying was twice as likely amongst girls. For boys and girls however, the frequency of the bullying doubled, the older they were.

The report also found that socio-economics were a significant factor, with affluence increasing the chances of young people from wealthier families being the target of bullies.

The Children's Society's most recent cyber-bullying inquiry from 2018, also highlights the effect of bullying on young people's mental health. 38% of young people surveyed reported a negative effect on their self-image, as a result of social media interaction. Despite the benefits of having an extended social circle, no less than 50% had experienced feelings of both isolation and exclusion.

At the *University of Warwick*, research found that there was a direct link between victims of cyber-bullying and other incidents of more traditional forms of bullying. Only 1% of the 29% of young people surveyed, reported cyber-bullying as sole form of abuse.

This appears to suggest that cyber-bullying is in fact an extension of traditional forms of bullying, rather than something unique. It was *Bill Belsey* however, who first coined the phrase 'cyberbullying', making a clear distinction from playground bullying and noting that online abuse never stops. Cyber-bullying does not end when you leave the school gates, it makes the act of bullying itself more accessible in an 'always on' generation, feeling to some as though it is never-ending.

(Public Health England, 2017; The Children's Society, 2018; University of Warwick, 2017; Bill Belsey, 2019)

Image 3

According to a research study by *Opinium*, by far the most incidents of cyber-bullying through social media, occur on the *Facebook* platform. Of the 2000 young people surveyed, 87% cited their *Facebook* profile as



There are measures you can take such as blocking, un-friending and reporting abusive messages, comments, images and user profiles.

In an effort to protect subscribers, *Facebook* have partnered with the *Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence* and a range of charities and organisations to focus on anti-bullying strategies and support.

The aim is to work with young people, parents, teachers and also those being accused of bullying by providing support and guidance. The emphasis is on communication though, and this is made easier, with their Bullying Prevention Hub.

Anti-bullying charity, *Ditch the Label* produces an annual report to support not only those who are bullied, but also the bullies themselves, acknowledging that it is often learnt behaviour that underlies the abuse in a vicious cycle.

The latest report, published in 2018, highlights just some of the many forms of bullying experienced online, such as *hate speech*, *misogyny*, *make-up shaming* and *in-game abuse*. Data gathered is then used to explore aspects of abuse to understand social media interaction.



Image 4

Charity organisation *Ditch the Label* also works in conjunction with *Instagram*, which is perhaps the most popular social media platform amongst teens.

Instagram themselves have announced recently a commitment to fight cyber-bullying. They have acknowledged the platform has been used to share harmful content and unsolicited images.

Interaction on social media is not all negative though, there are many positive aspects. Used in a safe and responsible way, communicating online can be extremely beneficial, especially for those on the fringes of society, whether through a lack of social skills, disability or due to the remoteness of where they live.

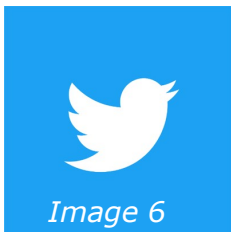
With the advent of social media groups, it has been possible to create virtual communities, to enable connectedness and empower individuals who may otherwise not have a voice in their local community. The potential to connect with others outside of their immediate vicinity is invaluable.

Image 5



For young people, the ability to interact with other likeminded peers can be beneficial and for those who sometimes struggle to feel included or accepted, even more so.

Studies have shown that for some younger people, having experienced issues of bullying online, there has been a reluctance to report abuse, sometimes for fear of repercussion. There were fears that highlighting issues could result in a reduction of their internet time, in an effort to protect them.



As awareness and understanding increases, extra support and guidance has become available and greater pressure is put on the media providers to take responsibility for the content shared on their platforms. Promoting positive outcomes not only benefits the wellbeing of subscribers but helps to

Research into the use of social media in schools has found by focusing on positive uses, rather than negative, encourages participation. Some schools have been sharing class *Twitter* accounts to enhance the classroom experience. Embracing media experience through education can also be beneficial for improved teacher and pupil relationships.

(Allen *et al.*, 2014; Sampasa-Kanyinga, Chaput and Hamilton, 2019; Krutka and Carpenter, 2016)

Leaflet Rationale

The theme selected for the leaflet was cyber-bullying, a form of bullying via online resources, typically through social media, text messages and internet platforms. Cyber-bullying was chosen as a contemporary issue because of its transformation in recent years from traditional methods of bullying. Englander *et al.* (2017) acknowledge the difficulty in defining the difference between cyber-bullying and what was known as ‘playground bullying’, because the presence of the three core factors of *intent*, *repetition* and *power imbalance* are not always obvious.

Milosevic (2017) suggests that the advent of social media has not only transformed communication, but also provided an anonymous environment, in which the perpetrators of bullying can flourish. An increase in connectedness, meaning opportunities for abuse also become more accessible. Kowalski and Limber (2013) however, propose that it is the disconnection between victim and bully, that fundamentally separates traditional bullying from cyber-bullying. Milosevic (2017) also intimates that inclusion of technology has also enabled the media to shift a significant of blame for online bullying to the social media providers, in a similar way to incidents of aggressive behaviour having been linked to the prevalence of violence in video games.

A recent report from the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, into the effect of social media usage on young people’s health found that their greatest concern from responders was fear of online bullying. Despite the potential threat of abuse, the committee reported a rise in the length of screen time being reported by responders (Parliament UK, 2019). With this in mind, young adolescents were chosen as the primary target audience of the leaflet.

Minimal use of imagery in the leaflet was determined by the substantial word count required. To break up paragraphs, colour was employed to separate text into manageable sections. The British Dyslexia Association (2018) style guide recommends the use of sans serif fonts, such as Verdana, and ensuring the small amount of images used, relate directly to the text.

Finally, the social media platforms included in the content were determined by recent YouGov (2018) statistics that revealed the most popular social media platforms among young people were Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

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Images References

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