

Why is anonymity significant?

Some platforms allow a bully to hide their identity behind a fake or anonymous profile. That said, everyone's digital footprint is traceable. It's also important to report and block abuse, and to think about who has access to a victim's profile and whether they want to restrict who can make contact.

What is the difference between normal adolescent online 'drama' and bullying?

Parents and adults may not be the best judges of what constitutes bullying. There may be in-jokes or everyday 'drama' that we don't understand. The key is always how a young person feels about it. Something that began as a joke online may become hurtful: humour can be lost with no fact-to-fact interaction. There are bound to be times when adolescents feel excluded; online games or social media platforms can exacerbate this sense of being left out. The key, again, is to take your lead from your child. But harassing someone or sharing their personal data without permission is definitely not OK.

What should I do if I think my child is being bullied online?

Believe and listen to them, praise them for speaking out and remember you are not the only family going through this. Tell them not to retaliate – that's exactly what the bullies want. Instead, take the power back: block them and hopefully the bullying will stop. Every site has a way of blocking and reporting. It's also a good idea to save any evidence of bullying, which can be vital if it escalates. The Malicious Communications Act protects users online, so don't be afraid to approach your local police if the abuse is particularly threatening or serious. It might also be a good idea to sit down and look at your child's friends list and work out together who their real friends are.

How can I increase my child's awareness of cyberbullying?

A good way to broach the subject is to ask your child what they would do if they ever saw someone being bullied online or offline, talking to them about not being a bystander and being kind to others. You can let them know that you will always be there to listen and help if they ever have a problem, worry or concern, and encourage them to think about their support network inside and outside school as well. The best thing you can do as a parent is to keep talking to your child so that they know they can always come to you when they need support or advice.

What if I think my child is bullying someone online?

We all say things that we don't mean, and on the internet it's easy to get brave and say things that you would never say to someone's face. It's important that your child understands when their actions have become bullying and that at such a point they need to stop. First, remain calm. We all make mistakes; the important thing is to learn from them. Listen to your child, don't jump in and blame them. Find out the facts. There's likely to be a reason they are acting this way – but don't accept excuses. Help them to understand the impact of their words both online and offline and don't be afraid to use your support network: think about friends, family and even school staff that you could be speaking to about what is going on.

Please note that this has been adapted from an article in a publication, so it has not been written by Oakwood but it includes useful information for parents.