Cyberbullying information for parents/carers

With increasing numbers of primary age children using social networking sites and getting their first mobile phone, it is really important that those closest to children and young people are able to help and support them. They need to learn how to staff safe and use technology responsibly early and to continue to be supported with this issue as they grow older.

Signs of bullying – You may be unsure if your child is being bullied. If you suspect this may be happening look out for the following signs. For example your child could:
- show signs of stress – being moody, silent or crying, or bullying a younger sibling or friend
- make excuses to miss school, such as stomach complaints or headaches (or your child may be skipping school altogether)
- seem upset after using the internet or mobile, or change their behaviour – for example, no longer wanting to look at new text messages immediately and be secretive and unwilling to talk about their online activities and phone use
- be withdrawn in their behaviour have more bruises or scrapes than usual
- change their eating habits
- have torn clothes, school things that are broken or missing, or have 'lost' money
- sleep badly
- be wetting the bed.

There could be other reasons for these signs, so you need to ask yourself:
- Could there be anything else bothering your child?
- Could there be changes in your family life like a new baby, or divorce or separation that may be affecting your child's behaviour?

When a child is the target of cyberbullying, they can feel alone and misunderstood. It is therefore vital that, as a parent or carer, you know how to support your child if they are caught up in cyberbullying.

The following tips may help

Preventing cyberbullying

- Be aware of what cyberbullying is and how it can happen by reading more in 'Cyberbullying: A whole-school community issue' at http://www.digizen.org/cyberbullying/overview/
- Agree on family rules and procedures about what to do if someone is being cyberbullied, such as saving the message or text as evidence and telling a trusted adult.
- With your children, explore the online technologies and websites they like to use
- Become your child's 'friend' on Facebook or MSN. Have your child show you, or learn together, how to block someone on a chat service like MSN or how to report abuse to a website or service provider.
- Encourage positive use of technology by helping your child to use it to support learning, socialise with peers and explore the wider world. Discuss and promote 'netiquette' – responsible online behaviour – and reward your child for this. Tell them this means:
- ✓ respect others online – treat them how you would want to be treated
- ✓ only post or write things online and in text messages that you'd be happy for anyone to see
- ✓ use appropriate language when chatting or playing games online
- ✓ pay close attention to a website's terms and conditions and make sure you're old enough to be using a site or online service.

Support your child in making responsible decisions on the internet and when using a mobile phone – make sure they are aware of the types of photos and other content that are appropriate to post online (e.g. no photos in a school blazer or sports uniform).

Be aware that as well as being at risk, your child could also be involved in cyberbullying. Be alert to changes in your child's behaviour – especially
after using the internet or their mobile phone. Discuss the emotional impact of   bullying on another person.

Encourage your children to keep passwords safe. Treat your password like your toothbrush – don't share it with anyone!

Responding to cyberbullying

• Support and encourage your child if they tell you they've been cyberbullied – reassure them that it's not their fault and that they've made the right choice by reporting it to you. Tell them that bullying is not acceptable and inform them of
what you will do next by following the tips below.
• Make sure your child does not retaliate or reply to cyberbullying messages of any kind.
• Help your child to save evidence of cyberbullying Use online tools or the 'print screen' button on your computer and don't delete text messages on a mobile phone.
• If you need to, you can help your child to change their contact details (email, online username, mobile phone number) to prevent further bullying. Denying them access to the technologies is not the answer.
• Use the security tools on your family's computer, on websites or on your child's mobile phone.
• Report cyberbullying. You can report the incident to your child's school, the website or service provider, and, in serious cases, the police.

For further support and advice contact the following organisations

Parentline Plus: 0808 800 2222
Immediate support and advice for parents, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
Kidscape: 08451 205 204
A telephone helpline for parents and carers of bullied children.
Advisory Centre for Education: 0808 800 5793
Advice for parents and children on all school matters.
Children's Legal Centre: 08451 202948
Free legal advice on all aspects of the law affecting children and young people.

Childnet international www.childnet-int.org
A non-profit organisation working with others to "help make the Internet a great and safe place for children" which contains useful advice and information for both parent/carers and young people

**The Child Exploitation and Online Protection
Centre (CEOP): www.thinkuknow.co.uk**
The Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre is dedicated to eradicating the sexual abuse of children. CEOP also provides help and advice on
cyberbullying and maintains a website for children and young people about staying safe online.

Oxfordshire web pages for Parent/carers
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/anti-bullying

Oxfordshire Family Information Service: 08452 262636