

An Garda Síochána

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Dear Parent / Guardian,

In my work as Community Garda, I am acutely aware of the risks posed regarding Internet Safety and Cyberbullying. I have taken the opportunity to create an information pack in relation to this topic. This is a very important and relevant issue, and I hope that you will take the necessary time to read the enclosed information, in order to familiarise yourself, and your child with regard to it.

This pack will be distributed through Bandon Bridge National School, with the objective of ensuring that all parents are made aware of the importance of Internet Safety, and the dangers of Cyberbullying. Further information and publications are available on www.internetsafety.ie. Log on to that website, and click on 'Publications' on the left hand side, then click on the 'Get With IT Series'. This brings up several more useful publications.

USEFUL WEBSITES	USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS
www.internetsafety.ie	Samaritans 1850 60 90 90
www.reachout.com	AWARE 1890 303 302
www.spunout.ie	1 Life 1800 247 100
www.webwise.ie	Childline 1800 66 66 66
www.watchyourspace.ie	Parentline 1890 92 72 77
www.hotline.ie	Console 1800 201 890
www.childline.ie	GROW 1890 474 474
www.barnordos.ie	SHINE 1890 621 631

Please take the time to spend some time reading these publications, and informing yourself about the topic, and discussing it with your child.

I wish to express my thanks to the Principal and staff at Bandon Bridge National School for their assistance in relation to the distribution of this information.

I hope you find it beneficial.

Kind Regards,

Damian White, Community Garda, Bandon

CYBERBULLYING - ADVICE FOR PARENTS

WHAT IS BULLYING?

Before we focus on cyberbullying, we need to examine bullying in its traditional format. Bullying is repeated aggression, whether through verbal, psychological or physical conduct by an individual or a group against others.

Bullying is always wrong and is unacceptable behaviour which should never be overlooked or ignored. If any bullying situation or behaviour is not tackled at an early stage, it will allow the problem continue, develop, and get worse, sometimes with devastating consequences. Part of the problem is that sometimes people don't regard it as bullying, they may consider it to be a bit of banter, light hearted, but the victim may have a very different perception, and may be severely affected by these actions.

WHAT IS CYBERBULLYING?

Cyberbullying refers to bullying which is carried out using the internet, mobile phone or other technological devices. Cyberbullying takes a psychological rather than physical form but is often part of a wider pattern of 'traditional' bullying. It can take the form of sending nasty or threatening messages, emails or photos; silent phone calls, posting nasty comments or photos; or accessing someone's account to get them into trouble.

Because cyberbullying cannot be physically seen, as it involves 'virtual' activity such as texts, or online messaging, it also means that it is more difficult to prevent. There is also the scenario that once something negative is posted online, or circulated via text, the victim will be aware that all their circle of friends and schoolmates will have seen this comment, and this creates an added pressure.

It is important to remember that technology is not the problem; it's how we use it. In the same way that driving a car can be dangerous, but especially so if you drive in a manner that is unsafe. Good habits and safety precautions are necessary. If a young person wants to begin to drive, they must undergo a Theory Test and driving tuition with a qualified instructor, but when they begin to access the internet, they are not presented with advice as to 'The Rules of Safe Internet Use'. It is important for behaviour to be appropriate.

SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD IS A VICTIM OF CYBERBULLYING.

- Your child is avoiding school, or seems upset, sad or angry after using their phone or computer.
- Your child shuns using the computer, or quickly changes screens when you enter the room.

To establish if your child is a victim of cyberbullying, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is your child being singled out, or is this behaviour targeted at a wider group of people?
- Has this been happening over a period of time?
- Is the behaviour part of a recurring pattern?

- Is the behaviour deliberately intended to harm or upset the victim?

KEY ADVICE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The following is the key information for young people.

- **Don't Reply** to messages that harass or annoy you. This is exactly what the sender wants.
- **Keep the Message.** Keep a record that outlines the details and dates of any bullying that you experience.
- **Tell Someone** you trust. This is the first step in dealing with the issue.
- **Block the Sender.** You don't have to put up with someone harassing you.
- **Report Problems** to people who can do something about it. Report any offensive content if you come across it

WHAT IF MY CHILD IS THE CYBERBULLY?

It is important that children are aware of how much bullying behaviour hurts other people. This includes cyberbullying. You need to educate your child that there are guidelines for their behaviour, both in the real world, and in the virtual world. The following are good guidelines for them to follow:

- Avoid hurting someone's feeling by any electronic communication.
- Respect other people's online rights.
- Avoid insulting someone, and if they insult you, do not respond.

Discuss how serious this matter, and make them realise that their behaviour is wrong, and against the law. Therefore, there can be consequences for their actions, and their behaviour is not anonymous.

DIGITAL FINGERPRINTS - BEHAVIOUR ONLINE IS NOT ANONYMOUS.

Every device which allows connection to the internet will also register online activity. This can be used to trace any comment, post or email sent via the internet. The information which you have uploaded to the internet is **NOT PRIVATE**. You have placed it on a public forum, voluntarily. It is now in a public arena, so you cannot claim that the information is private, or confidential. If you want something to remain private, then do not post it online, or circulate it via text.

These rules apply to everybody, not just those who are under 18. You need to show good example, and ensure that your own behaviour online is respectful. Always keep your profiles private. If your profile is public, anyone online can look at your information. Guard your personal information online. Is this information necessary? Does the world really need to know this piece of personal information about me?

It's not enough to delete information. The information which you have posted may have been copied or downloaded before you deleted it. You also lose control of photographs. Once they are posted online, photos can be copied and later altered and placed on different websites.

CAREFUL WITH FRIENDS

Friend is just a term used by social networking sites to describe a contact. Only accept your 'real world' friends as online friends. Strangers online should be treated with caution. Those online can lie about their age, interests and what their real motives are in order to win your trust. Contacts with strangers may begin innocently, but may lead to dangerous situations.

HOW THE INTERNET IS ACCESSED.

- Smartphones are the most used device on a daily basis for 9 – 16 year olds. Smartphones (35%), followed by laptops (29%), and tablets (27%).
- Most internet use is at home. 63% of children report using the internet daily at home.
- Nearly half of children (46%) access the internet in their own bedroom daily. This rises to 77% for older teenagers.
- Internet access when out and about is limited. (87%) of children say they never do this.
- The most popular devices for 9-16 year olds to own are:

Games Consoles	(44%)
Smartphones	(40%)
Tablet	(28%)
Mobile phone which is not a smartphone	(27%)

WHAT THE INTERNET IS USED FOR.

The Internet is most frequently used for entertainment, listening to music and watching video clips online. One in 3 13-16 year olds use instant messaging (Skype, WhatsApp), on a daily basis.

- 90% of all 15-16 year olds in Ireland have a profile on a social networking site. (40%) of 11-12 year olds also have a social networking account, even though there is an age restriction of 13 on most sites.

SOCIAL NETWORKING AND MEDIA SHARING PLATFORMS

Social networking is one of the most popular activities undertaken by children on a daily basis.

- 54% of children in Ireland have at least one profile on a social network.
- There is a steep rise from 11-12 to age 13-14, where the use of social networking more than doubles.
- There is no great difference between girls/ boys, although slightly more girls than boys are more active on social media.

Given the greater use of smartphones, this allows for the creation of media content, which can be uploaded and shared. This leads children into having a profile on media sharing platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, or Flickr.

- 36% of all 9-16 year olds have a profile on a social media sharing platform. This rises from a third of 11-12 year olds to half of all 13-14 year olds.

(Statistics are taken from the **Net Children Go Mobile: Initial Findings from Ireland**). O' Neill, B. & Dinh, T. (2014). *Net Children Go Mobile: Initial Findings from Ireland*. Dublin: Dublin Institute of Technology.

SMARTPHONE USERS

- Smartphone users are engaged in more online activity on a daily basis compared to non smartphone users.
- Children who use a smartphone are more likely to take up online activities on a daily basis, and thereby incorporating the internet more deeply into their daily lives.

ONLINE SEXUAL COERCION AND EXTORTION

This occurs when an offender tries to approach a young person online, in a bid to get sexual photos or videos of them. To achieve this, they will try to gain the trust of the young person by pretending to be their friend. They may lure their victim into sexualised conversation and performing sexual acts online.

Once they get hold of these sexual photos or videos, they may demand more explicit images, or demand money, threatening to post the images on the internet or share them with the victim's family and family if their demands are not complied with.

This is a crime; speak to your teenagers about this type of behaviour. Assure them that they must be aware, and say no. Let them know that they can always come to you, keep the lines of communication open. If an incident like this occurs, report it, they are not alone. There is an informative video on this specific topic on www.europol.europa.eu/sayno

DELETING HISTORY

When you delete a message or text from your mobile phone, it only deletes the item from the front pages of the phone's memory. The deep memory of the phone still stores the message or image. Gardai have a **PHONE XRAY** machine which will restore these images if necessary. The same applies to your computer. History is only deleted from the front pages of the computer, but deeper searches can be carried out to restore history which you may think you have deleted.

INFORMATION NEVER DIES

The information which you upload on to the internet will remain there forever, it cannot be taken off. Be careful what personal details you allow others access to, in years to come; it may embarrass you, or may be used against you in some way.

Future employers or colleges will search for your details on Facebook, or other social media sites. Remember, you have placed this information on the network voluntarily, so if embarrassing details are present, a deep search will highlight them.

USEFUL WEBSITES

www.internetsafety.ie
www.webwise.ie
www.watchyourspace.ie
www.hotline.ie
www.childline.ie
www.barnardos.ie