

CYBER BULLYING & ONLINE ABUSE

Over the last decade the impact of the internet on society and the way in which we live our lives has been considerable. Just about every part of society has been touched by the internet and it is now an essential part of day to day life. As the technologies that are used to drive the internet continue to evolve new applications are being launched every day and it is true to say that in the vast majority of cases the youth of today comprehend and embrace this technology and these applications far more quickly and easily than older generations.

The incidence of cyber bullying occurs not only through the misuse of social networking

Whilst the vast majority of information, websites and applications available over the internet have been developed and are used in an appropriate fashion that conforms with the values and norms of family and business life, there are some sites and applications that are either set-up with a malicious purpose or are misused to achieve a malicious purpose. Throughout the world this is considered unacceptable and concerted efforts are made to eradicate these instances. However, when technology and applications are misused to cause harm, action needs to be taken quickly. The incidence of cyber bullying occurs not only through the misuse of social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and instant messaging services, to name but a few, but also through mobile text messaging and video messaging. As the average age of people using mobile handsets is becoming lower the potential for cyber bullying associated with the school environment increases.



A website has recently emerged, Little Gossips. This site is designed for people to write gossip about others or their schools and Colleagues. It has been brought to the attention of the SafeSurf Bahrain team that this is being used maliciously with anonymous posting about people in schools in Bahrain that are abusive, contain explicit obscene sexual innuendos and extreme racial slurs. This site has no moderation or controls in place to monitor the types of gossip posted and allows anonymous posting this increases the likelihood of extreme malicious postings which are clearly evident on the site. In order to safeguard children and schools from this abuse and to limit the incidence of cyber bullying SafeSurf Bahrain has taken the necessary steps to have access to this site blocked from within the Kingdom of Bahrain and to have it removed by its web hosting company in the US. By way of example the screen shot above illustrates the level of obscenity contained in the posting to this site.

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We need you as parents to start taking an active interest in what your son or daughter is doing online.

The example above is just one of hundreds of similar posts attacking one of your children. There is no justification for this use of the internet or any type of social media, we are encouraging schools throughout the Kingdom to start enforcing the school's policies and use the law to take action against those who make the lives of the defenseless a misery.

TRA recently published the Kingdom's first State of the Nation Review for ICT safety, which was the first comprehensive study of not only how adults but also specifically how people under the age of 18 use the internet.

The results of the study (which can be found on the TRA's website http://www.tra.org.bh/en/pdf/SafeSurf_TRA_Report.pdf) highlight that the internet is used as a study aid for homework and is also used as a social medium allowing children and young people to communicate amongst their circles of friends predominately using social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace and Twitter. As long as used sensibly and not abused, Social Networking is a great way to stay in touch and share experiences with people with common interests. It is vital to remember that once something is posted on the internet, whether it is a comment, image or video, there is no way of controlling it. A compromising or damaging posting today could cause significant embarrassment and long term damage in the years to come.

Childnet International has created a superb video that demonstrates very graphically the impact of Cyber bullying. I would urge all parents to watch it with their children:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNumIY9D7uY>

<http://www.childnet-int.org/kia/parents/cd/textVersion/cyberbullying/index.html>

Bullying of any type is bad enough, but cyberbullying - when someone uses the internet or mobile phone to bully others - can be particularly distressing for the person on the receiving end.

Latest research tells us that as many as 1 in 3 children may have been victims of cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying can take a range of different forms, such as receiving nasty or threatening text messages on a mobile, instant messaging, in a chat room, or someone posting humiliating images or messages on a social networking or video sharing website.

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In some ways cyberbullying can be worse than other forms of bullying, in that the bullying can be 24/7, and the target can be reached even when they are in the safety of their own home.

The victim may not know who is bullying them, and this can lead them to be wary of all relationships.

Cyberbullying images or texts can be circulated very quickly and widely. Therefore the humiliation caused by the bullying can be extended.

Then there is the on-going worry of this material resurfacing which makes it harder for those who are bullied to move on.

Every parent and carer will want to help their child if this is happening to them. We've got 6 practical tips that will help.

This is a whole-school community activity and parents need to play their part too.



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TIPS FOR PARENTS

1. Be aware, your child may as likely cyberbully as be a target of cyberbullying. Be alert to your child seeming upset after using the internet or mobile phone.
2. Get involved. Talk to your children and understand the ways they are using the internet and mobile phone. Make sure they know the 6 tips for children listed below.
3. Learn how to use the safety tools on the particular service. Most services have block or ignore buttons, privacy settings, and some allow the recording of online messaging.
4. Remind your child not to reply to bullying messages, at least not in anger.
5. Keep the evidence of offending emails, text, online postings or conversations.
6. Report cyberbullying. You can report to the school, the service provider, and if the cyberbullying is serious you should consider contacting the police.

Finally – don't just stand there.
If you see cyberbullying going on,
support the victim and report the bullying.

How would you feel if no-one stood up for you?

SafeSurf Bahrain Team

Telecommunications Regulatory Authority
Kingdom of Bahrain

Call Center: 80088888 | E. Safesurf@tra.org.bh

TIPS FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE:

1. Always respect others. Remember you can't see the impact your words or images has on the other person, so it is important to show respect to people and be careful what you say or send.
2. Think before you send. Whether photos or text, whatever you send or post online can be made public very quickly and could stay online forever.
3. Treat your password like your toothbrush – keep it to yourself. Only give your mobile number or personal website address to trusted friends.
4. Block the bully. Learn how to block or report someone who is behaving badly, and don't retaliate or reply in anger.
5. Save the evidence. Learn how to keep records of offending messages, pictures or online conversations.
6. Make sure you tell. Please talk to an adult you trust.. You can also make a report to the provider of the service (e.g. your mobile phone operator or social network service provider). You can also tell your school – your teacher can help you.