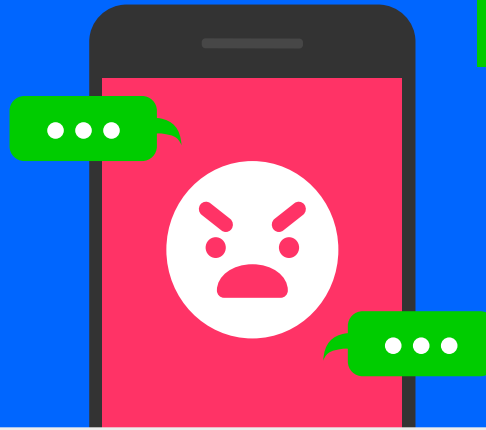# Talking to vulnerable children

Why vulnerable children are more at risk of cyberbullying

Young people in care

- Often find it hard to maintain friendship groups because they are moved around or away from friends

- Socialising online helps them stay connected and can be a lifeline and a distraction from their life offline.

- New people they meet may discriminate against people in care or simply because they are always the new person in the class so could be singled out and bullied

- Their emotional health, feelings of loss and sometimes anger can make it especially hard for them to build trust with new friends

- They need help to integrate and will often take time to trust adults around them

- They often say they had online safety advice 'too late'

Young Carers

- May have a different experience of teenage life because of the responsibilities they have as a young carer

- Being online is an escape and represents an opportunity to have fun with other young people

- Parents may be unwell or unable to support them with online safety advice and they may have to take on the role of the adult in the home
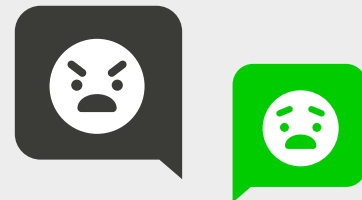
Young people with Mental Health Difficulties

- As they are emotionally vulnerable they may take the cruel things they see online to heart more than other teens

- Research shows they spend more time online putting them more at risk of seeing harmful material which can have a real impact on their wellbeing

- Some people sensing they are depressed are supportive but others can be cruel and give dangerous advice

- They can be helped with online apps to manage moods (See NHS approved apps) and be helped to keep to a known group of supportive friends

Young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

- May be more trusting and socially naïve

- Can find it hard to know when they are being cyberbullied

- Some find making friends online easier than talking to people face-to-face

- Often hide their disability to be more accepted and avoid being targeted by abuse

- May not know that their behaviour might be causing harm

- Some take literal interpretations of content which may affect how they respond

Before you start the conversation

Be aware that disabled children and those with special needs (SEN) are more likely to experience cyberbullying but it doesn't mean it will happen to your child however, they're more vulnerable to experience it

Think about when and where is the best to talk to them - in the car or a neutral place where they feel safe

Jot down what you want to say to focus your mind, and make the conversation relevant to them

Be open and encouraging to make them feel supported

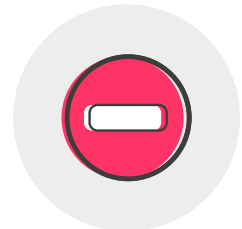Have a few bite sized conversations to give them time to process

What you need to know

Think about your child's understanding of the internet. Are they already clued up or do they need more support?

Think carefully about what you want to get out of the conversation

What boundaries do you want to put in place when it comes to your child being online? Can you come up with an agreement together? What boundaries does your child think is fair?

Be aware that disabled children and those with special needs (SEN) are more likely to experience cyberbullying but it doesn't mean it will happen to your child however, they're more vulnerable to experience it

Although disabled young people are less likely to use the internet don't discourage it, support them

Bullying is a learnt behaviour - so it's important to set a good example and regularly reinforce being a good digital citizen

Tips to prevent cyberbullying

Ask them about what they do online, what apps or sites they use, and if they can show you how to use them

Get a clear idea of how they stay safe online. Do they know not to share personal details with friends?

Do they know the minimum age of popular social media sites like Facebook which is 13 years old?

Encourage them to be good digital citizen and share our 'Top Internet Manners' to help them use their power for good online
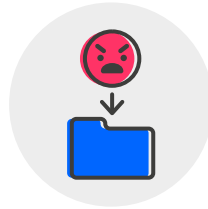
Check if they know how to report things that upset them online or block people. Do they know to come to you to talk about anything they are worried about?

Tips to deal with cyberbullying

Reassure your child that they've done the right thing by telling you, that it's not their fault and that you'll work together to find a solution

Save evidence of cyberbullying and keep a note of times and patterns of when it happens
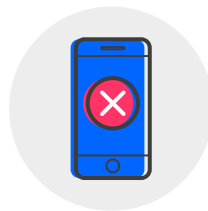
Block the perpetrators so they can't contact your child and report the cyberbullying to the site, school and, or police

Report discriminatory bullying as a hate crime or incident to the police if it is specifically targeting their disability
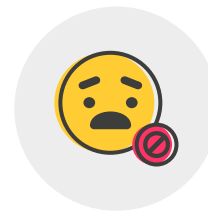
Don't encourage your child to retaliate or respond to the perpetrators

Don't delete their social media activity or take away their device to make sure they don't feel afraid to tell you in future

Give them time to communicate what has happened as they might find it challenging

Don't overreact if they do something you don't want them to online, they might not want to discuss it again

What do to next

Keep an open door so your child feels confident to share anything they're worried about online with you

Draw up a strategy together about how you are going to respond to the cyberbullying and what steps forward you will take

If they need further support on how to use the internet, speak to the school for help

Keep an eye out for signs that they might be being cyberbullied - you know your child better then anyone and will see changes in their behaviour

Have regular conversations about your child's online activity - kick off with these questions: Did you find anything interesting on Facebook/ Instagram (etc.) today? Who did you chat to? What did you chat about? Did you enjoy it? Is there anyone that you don't like online? Why? What is the thing you like best about being online and what's the thing you are most worried about?