

Insafe insights on... cyberbullying

The Insafe network of awareness centres, helplines and youth panels, in partnership with INHOPE (the International Association of Internet Hotlines, dedicated to the removal of illegal online content), operate Safer Internet Centres (SICs) in 30 European countries in the drive to keep children and young people safe online. Through a range of services, SICs respond to the latest online issues, helping to promote the many opportunities the online world offers, while also addressing the challenges. And while Europe's children and youth are the main benefactors of this work, BIK also reaches out to, and collaborates with, a range of other stakeholders - parents and carers, teachers and educators, researchers, industry, civil society, decision makers and law enforcement.

The "Insafe insights..." series draws on the experience and expertise of the Insafe network to tackle some of the most topical issues encountered in its day-to-day operations. Drawing on statistics and helpline case studies, this document aims to outline the issue and some possible responses, while also pointing to sources of further information and support.

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Cyberbullying... a definition

A definition of cyberbullying is important and most tend to include the words "deliberately" (or intentionally) and "repeatedly".

Wikipedia cites the definition from Megan Moreno¹ which states that cyberbullying is: *"an aggressive, intentional act or behaviour that is carried out by a group or an individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself"*.

The Department for Education in the UK defines cyberbullying as: *"the use of technologies by an individual or by a group of people to deliberately and repeatedly upset someone else"*.

The Insafe network defines cyberbullying in the following way: *"Bullying usually involves a child being picked on, ridiculed and intimidated by another child,*

¹ <https://www.meganmeierfoundation.org/megans-story.html> and <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/aug/06/hannah-smith-online-bullying>

other children or adults, using online technologies. Bullying may involve psychological violence. Cyberbullying can be intentional and unintentional."

Cyberbullying can be very destructive and there have been several high-profile cases in recent years where children and young people have allegedly committed suicide as a result of cyberbullying.² When some young people contact a helpline it is up to the counsellor to determine how to log the contact and which category to use. Helpline colleagues are very clear that a majority of contacts will have an element of what could be deemed to be cyberbullying.

It is important to recognise that individuals can be very upset by comments made about them online, but that these comments may not have been made intentionally. Although this type of action may not fit into the definitions of cyberbullying, it can still cause significant problems which need to be addressed. Young people often talk about situations where they have said something to an individual online with no malice intended but it was subsequently misinterpreted. Without the benefit of facial expressions, body language, context and tone of voice it can be more difficult to determine how something was supposed to be understood. Emojis or emoticons can be used to help to provide this context, but the reality is that they too are open to different interpretations.

A recent EU-funded project called ENABLE (European Network Against Bullying in Learning and Leisure Environments) focused on tackling bullying in a holistic way, helping young people to exercise their fundamental rights in the home, school, class and community. The project combined social and emotional aspects of learning with peer support in order to provide teachers and school staff with the skills to be able to establish an effective peer support scheme.

There have also been other projects which have focused on the role of the bystander in bullying situations and more recently some powerful video resources³ which have looked at the online versus offline aspects. The videos try to highlight the different ways in which people will behave online alongside what is deemed to be acceptable and unacceptable.

Experiences from the Insafe network

Cyberbullying currently accounts for around 16-18 per cent of calls to Insafe helplines. The most recent data collection covered the period October-December 2017 and 16 per cent of calls related to cyberbullying with around a quarter of helplines finding that cyberbullying was the most common issue for young people to contact them about. Across the network cyberbullying has consistently been the biggest issue for young people for over five years.

Further statistics can be found at www.betterinternetforkids.eu/helpline-statistics.

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URvC6T_xhE0 and <https://www.bbc.com/ownit/its-personal/mean-comments-film>

Insafe helpline case studies

There is often a blurring of the boundary between on and offline bullying and, frequently, they can be connected as can be seen by this case which was dealt with by the Maltese helpline:

"A 12-year-old girl called the helpline as she was being bullied and cyberbullied by her school mates. Four girls created a Facebook page and uploaded edited (Photoshopped) images of the girl with unpleasant and harsh comments about her. The four also told the girl that if they met her outside of school they would beat her up and this did happen on one occasion. The girl was very scared and spent the whole of the summer staying at home as a result. The girl and her mother were advised to report the matter to the police. The girl was also offered one-to-one support."

It is often adults who get in touch with the helplines, trying to get help and advice on how to support children and young people in their care:

"A woman called (the Bulgarian helpline) on behalf of the mother of a 17- or 18-year-old girl and explained a situation of cyberbullying: the girl had a boyfriend who was threatening her and saying that if she didn't do what he asked then he would publish her pictures on Facebook which would embarrass and humiliate her in front of all her friends. The boy created fake accounts, uploaded her pictures and then deleted the profiles. The girl was very afraid and confused, as were her parents. The Bulgarian helpline advised that the girl should copy and save all of the threatening correspondence with her boyfriend and then report all of the threats to Facebook. If there were any naked pictures online then these should also be reported to the Bulgarian Hotline, part of the Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre. Helpline counsellors also made it clear that they were available to help with any of the reporting as necessary. They also advised the girl to stop any contact with the boy and to speak to a school psychologist or psychotherapist if they needed further support."

Helplines will often provide very specific advice and guidance about how to address a particular problem on a particular platform, as can be seen from the response below:

"The other part of your inquiry concerns technical aspects regarding social media, and how you may change your settings on your profiles so that it will be harder for others to send you those types of messages. I would be very pleased to help you with this. Today, Facebook is a tool which is an important part of our lives. We use it for all kinds of communication and planning in our lives. So, it is close to impossible to opt out. However, you should not have to put up with the fact that others negatively comment on your photos. Each time you find (or have found) that a particular person writes something negative, then add them to your "Restricted list" (see [more information here](#)). In the future, when you share a photo or a post with your friends, this particular person will not be able to see your post (and thus, comment on it). On ASKfm, you deselect the option of "allowing anonymous questions" in your settings. You should not participate in your own abuse. By using your settings on social media, you also let your followers know that you do not accept being insulted. Strangely, someone may think that you do not mind being insulted for the reason that you do not speak up. Of course, this is completely wrong. Tell them NO – and remember, nothing is wrong with you. The "people"

who write condescending comments are the ones who have a problem. Go through your settings, and ruthlessly use your block function. You don't do anything wrong by saying no to the ones who abuse you. On the contrary, you show strength."

Insafe resources

Safer Internet Centres have developed various educational resources and awareness-raising videos aimed at helping teachers, parents and carers, and children and young people, to discover the online world safely. A selection of resources touching on the issue of cyberbullying are detailed below:

- [Czech SIC: Donkey ears](#)
A video resource dealing with the issue of the cyberbullying of teachers.
- [German SIC: Cyberbullying first aid app](#)
The First Aid App aims to support cyberbullying victims, assuring them that they are not alone and pointing to quick and efficient sources of help in the services where the bullying happened (such as delete and report buttons).
- [Greek SIC: Cyberbullying](#)
A poster resource for older children that explains cyberbullying and what to do in order to protect yourself.
- [Irish SIC: #Up2Us Anti-Bullying Kit](#)
A resource aiming to empower young people to tackle cyber bullying in their communities. This resource contains ten lesson plans on cyberbullying and is designed to be delivered in the classroom, including an innovative interactive poster activity.
- [Lithuanian SIC: Flyers about cyberbullying for children, parents and teachers](#)
A set of flyers containing information and recommendations for children, parents and teachers about cyberbullying. Topics covered include a definition of cyberbullying, forms and places of cyberbullying, how to deal with cases of cyberbullying, and recommendations of how to help children who experience bullying or those who bully others.
- [Luxembourgish SIC: Cyberbullying: concrete help \(in French and German\)](#)
A leaflet informing young people how to react as a victim of cyberbullying. It provides self-help tips, pointers on how to regain (emotional) control over the situation and information on sources of (professional) help.
- [UK SIC: 6 tips for having a conversation with your child about cyberbullying](#)
A blog article with six tips on how parents and carers can have a conversation with their children about online bullying.
- [UK SIC: Cyberbullying guidance for schools](#)
Guidance to support schools to develop effective strategies to understand, prevent and respond to cyberbullying.

Many more resources are available from the full [resource](#) and [video](#) galleries on the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) portal, in a variety of languages, covering a whole range of online safety issues.

Further information and advice

For further information and advice, please contact your national Safer Internet Centre – check the [Better Internet for Kids \(BIK\) portal for contact information](#).

To keep up to date with safer and better internet issues more generally, visit the [Better Internet for Kids \(BIK\) portal](#), subscribe to the quarterly electronic [BIK bulletin](#), or check out the Insafe [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) profiles.