

# **SAFETY ALERT from Thames Valley Police in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council**

## **NOTIFICATION FOR PARENTS / CARERS**

### **What is cyberbullying?**

Cyberbullying is the use of digital technologies with an intent to offend, humiliate, threaten, harass or abuse somebody. Examples of cyberbullying include:

- Nasty or offensive posts, chat or voice communication on an online game, messaging app or mobile phone
- Embarrassing or harmful photos being put online or sent via a messaging app without your permission
- Rumours and lies about you on a website, messaging app or social media platform
- Fake online profiles being created with an intent to defame you
- Discriminatory and prejudiced behaviour (e.g. racist, faith-based, homophobic, biphobic, transphobic, sexist, disablist)

Research shows that up to 7 in 10 young people experience cyberbullying before the age of 18.

### **Cyberbullying has increased during lockdown**

Thames Valley Police Schools' Officers have evidence that incidents of cyberbullying have increased in Oxfordshire during lockdown as many young people are using digital platforms not just for their own personal use but for learning too.

As a parent/carer, it is important that you speak with your child about being safe and kind to others online. If children are not risk aware and supported in being safe online, there is a danger that they could become a victim of crime, commit criminal offences or get themselves involved in criminal behaviour without knowing.

### **What does the law say?**

As cyberbullying is a relatively new phenomenon, no laws specifically apply to cyberbullying alone. That said, there are several laws which can be applied in cyberbullying cases (e.g. Protection from Harassment Act 1997 and Malicious Communications Act 1988).

Insulting, abusive and threatening language could potentially be deemed malicious communication or harassment which counts as a criminal offence. From the age of 10, children are at the age of criminal responsibility.

### **Take action!**

If your child is experiencing cyberbullying or they know someone else who is, report it immediately by:

- Contacting the service provider (e.g. the website, gaming site or mobile phone company) to report the user and, if possible, to remove the content.
- Contacting your child's school (if the bullying is being perpetrated by other pupils) so they can act in-line with their anti-bullying and behaviour policies.
- Consider contacting the police if the bullying is serious and a potential criminal act has been committed.

### **Where can I find more information?**

- [2020 Oxfordshire Cyberbullying Guidance for Parents and Carers](#)
- [Advice for parents and carers on cyber bullying \(Department for Education, 2014\)](#)