



WE LISTEN, WE SUPPORT,  
WE TAKE ACTION  
For Scotland's vulnerable  
children and families

## Briefing from CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> to the Education and Culture Committee Cyberbullying

For 130 years, as the RSSPCC and now as CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup>, we have campaigned for every child in Scotland to enjoy a better start in life and for no child to grow up in fear of abuse and violence. We will continue to be a strong public voice for vulnerable children and young people in Scotland, listening to them, to influence public policy and attitudes. Then, now and for another 130 years, as long as Scotland's children need us.

CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> has 52 local services and four national services across Scotland, and we work closely with many local authorities as well as working in partnership with other organisations. All our services are child centred and the children, young people and families we support are key partners in all aspects of our work. We also provide ParentLine Scotland, the confidential helpline and email service for anyone caring for or concerned about a child.

CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> knows from listening to parents and carers and children who use our services, that cyberbullying can be a devastating experience. It can spread rapidly and uncontrollably and can feel inescapable to those who experience it as it can happen at home, which should be a place where children and young people feel safe. One of the key issues in relation to cyber bullying is that it follows children wherever they are.

We believe that focusing the evidence session on how schools should respond to cyberbullying is too narrow and does not take account of the nature and reality of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying often happens outside of school, and in children and young people's leisure time. The focus should include how parents, carers and children and young people can be supported to respond to and to understand the dynamics of cyberbullying in any part of their lives. It is important to involve children and young people, in any policy or solution to cyberbullying.

It is vital that parents, carers and professionals educate themselves about mobile technology and online communities, so they are aware of the risks facing young people and to ensure that they are using technology in a responsible way. The best way to protect children online is to understand what they are doing on the internet and talk to them about keeping themselves safe and using technology responsibly. CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> has an internet safety factsheet which provides key tips and is available to download free at <http://www.children1st.org.uk/media/88025/internet-safety-factsheet.pdf>

The internet provides fantastic opportunities for children and young people, and is an important tool for them use and understand. Clearly there is a role for providers to do all they can to prevent cyberbullying and to address it when it does occur. But it is people not technology that keeps children and young people safe – it's everybody's responsibility to protect children.

## Evidence

- A 2010 ParentLine survey of 124 parents and carers - 21 acknowledged that their child had suffered from some form of cyber bullying either through social networking sites or via nasty text messages<sup>i</sup>.
- In CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup>'s online survey 19 out of 24 respondents considered cyber bullying an issue and 7 out of the 24 respondents' children had suffered from cyber bullying<sup>ii</sup>.
- In a survey of almost 2,500 young people, carried out by Beatbullying, half the respondents said they'd been cyber bullied; 725 told no-one about being cyber bullied; 1825 said they knew who was sending them bullying messages and 275 admitted to being a cyber bully.<sup>iii</sup>
- In 2012 CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> conducted surveyed nearly 500 parents and carers on internet safety and found that over half of parents hadn't set parental controls on their online devices – the most common reason being they 'didn't think they needed to'.

## Recommendations

CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> believes that it is everybody's responsibility to protect children. We want people not to feel afraid to act when they have concerns about the safety and wellbeing of a child, but to feel confident about speaking out. By speaking out people can help make a real difference and help keep Scotland's children safe. We can all do our bit to tackle cyber bullying.

- Policy makers and practitioners must ensure that anti bullying strategies also focus on cyber bullying.
- All professionals, and not just teacher, who work with children, need to feel confident and competent that they can recognise and understand the issues connected with cyber bullying.
- Cyberbullying and its impacts should form part of specific anti bullying policies within schools but schools should not be the only place where the issue should be addressed.
- Children should be taught about good cyber behaviour and the importance of maintaining healthy social relationships online, not just in school, but in other services they use e.g. in youth clubs, leisure centres and libraries.
- Parents and carers need to know where they can access support to recognise and identify the signs that their child is bullying or being bullied and know what to do to support their child. Out Twelve Top Tips provide a good starting point <http://www.children1st.org.uk/media/86734/spr-pub-043.pdf>
- There are excellent resources, activities and organisations working to prevent and address cyberbullying which everyone working with children should be encouraged to use and promote consistently.

## **Examples of calls to ParentLine Scotland about cyberbullying**

### **Abbie Case study**

The mum of nine-year-old Abbie called ParentLine Scotland because her daughter was being bullied on a social networking site. The mum admitted “giving in” to her daughter who was too young to join the site. “All her friends had joined,” said the mum, “and at the time it was easy to say yes.”

Now, given what had happened to Abbie, she said: “I feel really guilty.”

The bullying was being carried out by another girl the same age as Abbie. It was making her very upset and causing her to have bad dreams.

One of the first things the mum did was shut down access to the social networking site but she also wanted some advice on how to help rebuild her daughter’s self-esteem which was really low.

The call taker at ParentLine Scotland discussed with the mum how they might stop the bullying. One suggestion was that because they knew the girl, the mum should speak to the girl’s parents. And they discussed how the mum should find time and space to talk with Abbie and to really listen to her. They also talked about how the mum could protect Abbie from future instances and information about useful websites, such as CEOP and RespectMe, was given.

### **James Case Study**

James called ParentLine Scotland one evening distressed and anxious about his 15-year-old daughter Sarah being bullied on Facebook. She was being bullied by a group of older girls who were saying really horrible things about her. He was determined that this would not continue as Sarah was not sleeping well and was reluctant to go to school. The girls bullying her did not attend the same school but Sarah was worried that pupils at her school might believe some of the lies written about her. James said he had been in touch with the police, who were taking it seriously and had asked him to print out what has been happening and take it to them.

Sam, our call taker, acknowledged James’ distress and concern about Sarah being bullied on Facebook. Sam checked out how Sarah was coping and dealing with the bullying and encouraged James that it was good Sarah had been able to talk to him about it and get his support and help in trying to stop it. James had thought about going to the school and discussing Sarah’s fears regarding the bullying. Sam encouraged James to talk to Sarah about her reluctance to go to school, to find out how things actually were at school and to ask Sarah if she felt it would be okay for her dad to arrange a meeting and to see if it would be something they could go to together.

Sam also felt it would be good if Sarah had some friends round and if James could encourage the positive things happening in her life. Sam acknowledged James determination in getting it to stop and said he was taking all the right steps but it might take time and to take one step at a time.

Sam encouraged James to work with the support of the police and asked him if he had contacted Facebook to report the incident. James had done this and had asked Sarah to delete the names and profiles of the bullies. Sam gave James the telephone number of ChildLine for further support for her. For future support and safety using social networks Sam gave James the details for [www.thinkyouknow.org.uk](http://www.thinkyouknow.org.uk) to find help and advice about online safety when using the internet and social networks.

The call ended with James feeling less anxious and more confident in dealing with the situation.

For more information about CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup>, contact the policy team at [policy@children1st.org.uk](mailto:policy@children1st.org.uk) or on 0131 446 2300

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<sup>i</sup> CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> ParentLine survey 6th June 2010 – 6<sup>th</sup> July 2010

<sup>ii</sup> CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> online survey 6th June 2010 – 6<sup>th</sup> July 2010

<sup>iii</sup> [www.cybermentors.org.uk](http://www.cybermentors.org.uk), how many people are affected by bullying?