

If your child becomes involved in phone bullying

Phone bullying is sending mean, embarrassing, untrue, or hurtful message to or about someone using mobile phone messaging. Talk to your child about text bullying and why it is wrong.

Bullies may think this bullying is anonymous and that they can't get caught. They also may use someone else's phone to send the messages. Phone bullying can leave an electronic trail and very often be traced nowadays, leading to the bully, as well as his or her parents, possibly facing criminal penalties as a result.

Consider having a mobile phone use contract with your child that forbids text bullying, including forwarding mean messages, even if someone else starts it.

Victims often respond by sending nasty messages back to the bully, becoming bullies themselves and the situation can quickly spiral out of control unless they can speak to someone who can provide the right support.

Talk to your child about phone bullying and explain the negative impact it has on others. Joking and teasing might seem OK, but it can hurt people's feelings and lead to getting in trouble. Bullying — in any form — is unacceptable; there can be serious (and sometimes irrevocable) consequences at home, school, and in the community if it continues.

Parents can be held responsible for phone or computer bullying, which can include facing legal actions or losing their phone or internet accounts. Seek advice from your child's school if necessary.



The law

If there are a series of calls or the calls are part of a bigger picture of bullying then this may amount to harassment which is an offence under the 1997 Harassment Act.

Every time a mobile phone is switched on or off it sends a signal to the nearest mast and although the caller may have concealed their number from you, this is information which phone companies will have on their system and it's easy for the police to find out the culprit's phone number.

Making anonymous or abusive phone calls is also a criminal offence under section 43 of the Telecommunications Act 1984.

The actual wording is that a person who:

- sends, by means of a public telecommunication system, a message or other matter that is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character: or
- sends by those means, for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience or needless anxiety to another, a message that he knows to be false or persistently makes use for that purpose of a public telecommunication system, shall be guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale or both.'



Engayne Primary School

Did your child receive a smart phone or tablet for Christmas?

Parent / Carer guide to Phone Bullying

Many children get mobile phones as they get near the last years of our school, which is when bullying, including phone/text bullying, is most common.

Text bullying has become a serious problem among children, it has become more common than traditional bullying, especially among girls. It can have devastating consequences, and parents may not even know it's occurring, yet are the very people that can play an important role in preventing text bullying and helping children who have been the victim of a text bully.

You can support a young person to work with their school, their telephone provider or even the police if the situation is very serious. It is important for children who are the victims of text bullying to know that they should not blame themselves for it, and that you care about them and think they are worthwhile regardless of what the bully says.



Types of mobile bullying - There are many ways to get bullied through a mobile phone.

Scary phone calls

Victims of mobile phone bullying can receive abusive phone calls from someone who uses threats of violence to scare them.

Some bullies choose to stay silent on the other end of the phone, which is confusing and worrying for the person who answers the call.

Abusive text messages

People who bully sometimes send text messages that try to scare, upset or hurt someone on purpose. Getting a message like this can be frightening, especially if it is from someone you don't know.

Offensive picture messages

Photos and images that have been sent over mobile phones could be pictures that have been taken without the person's knowledge. They could also be pictures that show situations that should be private.

Embarrassing or violent videos

Most mobile phones come with a video camera now, which means being filmed without knowing it, can happen more often. Bullies may video people when they were not aware, when victims are physically assaulted or in situations that should be private then share them through their phones or video sharing websites like YouTube.



Engayne does not allow children mobile phones during school hours

Because mobile phones are such an important part of a young person's social life it is important to be as calm as possible if an incident comes up. Many will not talk with a parent or any adult about text bullying because they fear their phone will be taken away from them as a means to prevent them being a text bullying victim. It may feel to them that they are being punished for something that is not their fault. Let your child know that you will support them to work on the problem and not isolate them from their friends and social networks by taking their phone away.

There are several factors that can make phone bullying more damaging than traditional bullying for both the victim and the bully:

- It can happen 24 hours a day, even at home, which is usually a refuge from bullying, so it can feel inescapable.
- Text bullies are often much meaner because they don't have to see their victims.
- The victims may not know who is sending the messages, which can be frightening.
- The bullies may think text bullying is anonymous and that they can't get caught. They also may use someone else's phone to send the messages. Text bullying can often be traced, however, and the bully, as well as his or her parents, can face criminal penalties as a result.
- Victims often respond by sending mean messages back to the bully, becoming bullies themselves.
- Sexting is against the law and can result in child pornography charges for the sender or senders



There are steps you and your child can take to protect them from mobile phone bullying. Here is some advice you can share with your child:



- * *Tell them if they ever are the victim that it's not their fault and they won't be punished. They should not respond to the bullying, but instead should save it to report to a parent or other adult they trust.*
- * *Agree to limit the times when your child can use their mobile phones, such as requiring them to turn it off at night, and reserve the right to ask questions about whom they are texting and what they are texting about.*
- * *Make sure they know it is good not to be persuaded by anyone to confide very personal information about themselves or to do anything which they would be ashamed or embarrassed by if it was later circulated to others online .*
- * *Encourage your child to think before sending messages, pictures or videos, and not to send anything they wouldn't want everyone else to see since they don't know if the person they send to may forward it to others, or if they are even texting the person they think they are. Text, pictures and videos are easy to change and could end up in the wrong hands.*
- * *Teach your child not to accept calls from someone they don't know and to only give their number to family and friends they know well and trust.*
- * *No one should leave their name on their voicemail as this confirms to any callers that it's their mobile and can aid bullies*
- * *Tell your child not to let anyone else use their phone to send messages unless it's an emergency and to never leave their mobile unattended.*
- * *Ask your child to tell someone they trust if anyone uses a camera phone in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable.*
- * *Help your child block numbers that are sending mean text messages.*
- * *Find out with your child how to turn their Bluetooth off and use a generic, not a personal name.*

Phone bullying along with other types of bullying often bring about behavioural changes in the victim, these may include:

- Becoming more aggressive or withdrawn from friends and activities**
- Becoming insecure or clinging**
- Lacking of concentration, restlessness, aimlessness**
- Self harming**
- A change in school performance or a reluctance to attend school**
- A preoccupation with their phone or the internet and very protective or secretive of their digital life**

Bullies also often suffer these issues.

If the text bullying is serious, report the bullying to the mobile phone company as they usually operate a 'malicious calls' helpdesk as part of their customer service. Keep a note of the times and dates of abusive messages. Don't reply to them or delete them. Then get your child a new phone number and have them be very careful about who they give it to. If your child knows the sender and attends the same school as they do, contact your child's class teacher as soon as possible - even if the phone calls and text messages happen outside of school hours. Keep a record of the calls and text messages to show to the school. The police will also need the phone evidence should you need to take things further. Report to the police immediately if you are concerned about violent images and scenes being sent to your child's mobile phone or uploaded onto the internet.