SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

WORKING TOGETHER TO KEEP OUR YOUNG PEOPLE SAFE

Anti-Bullying Week: Break the Silence

Bullying can seriously affect a young person's confidence, wellbeing and sense of belonging. Yet many teenagers stay silent, fearing judgement, exclusion or making things worse. This November, Anti-Bullying Week's theme, Break the Silence, highlights the importance of recognising bullying, speaking up and supporting others. Parents and carers play a vital role in helping young people feel confident when seeking help.

What is bullying?

Bullying usually involves repeated, hurtful behaviour and an imbalance of power but even a single incident can cause harm.

The message for young people: You don't have to prove something is bullying before asking for help. If someone's behaviour is affecting your wellbeing, you deserve support.

Bullying: What does it look like?

Bullying isn't always obvious. Alongside physical intimidation and name-calling, it can take more subtle forms:

- Social exclusion: deliberately isolating someone or turning friends against them.
- Humiliation: spreading rumours, sharing embarrassing content or repeated hurtful jokes.
- Discriminatory bullying: targeting someone's identity, appearance or differences.
- Online bullying: hurtful messages, group chat pile-ons, fake accounts or sharing screenshots.

Why might teenagers stay silent?

For teenagers, speaking up can feel socially risky. They may worry about:

- Being labelled a 'snitch' or making the situation worse.
- Losing friendships or being excluded from their social group.
- Adults overreacting or taking control of the situation.
- Having their phone confiscated or losing access to social media.
- Not being believed, particularly when bullying is subtle or happens online.

This is why it's important to reassure young people that asking for help isn't a sign of weakness, and they deserve to feel safe and respected.

The power of the bystander: Silence can make a difference. Bullying often happens in front of others, both in school and online. Laughing along, sharing hurtful content or staying silent can sometimes encourage it. Encourage teenagers to make a difference by refusing to join in, checking on someone being targeted or telling a trusted adult.

Start the conversation

Try asking your child:

"Why do you think people sometimes stay silent when they see bullying?"

"Can something be bullying even if the person responsible says it's just a joke?"

"What could you do if someone in your group chat was being targeted?"

What really matters

Breaking the silence isn't always about speaking out publicly. It might mean checking on a friend, refusing to join in or finding the courage to tell someone that something isn't right.

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The Com: A dangerous online network targeting young people

'The Com' (short for 'community') is a dangerous online network whose members target and exploit children and vulnerable young people through social media and messaging platforms.
Members may build trust through online friendships, particularly with young people seeking connection or belonging, before using manipulation, threats or blackmail to pressure them into sharing intimate images, self-harm or other dangerous acts.

What makes these networks particularly concerning is that exploitation can begin through what appears to be an ordinary online friendship.

Which platforms are being used?
Harmful networks can exploit platforms popular with young people to make contact and draw them into private communities.

Discord
Allows users to join communities (servers) and communicate privately. Harmful groups have used these spaces to groom, manipulate and exploit young people.
TikTok
Accounts linked to The Com have shared disturbing content promoting self-harm and violence, sometimes directing young people towards harmful private groups.
Telegram
This messaging app allows large group chats, channels and private conversations. Groups linked to The Com have used it to share harmful material, threaten victims and coordinate abusive activity.

How are young people drawn in?
Online grooming often develops gradually. Someone may initially offer friendship, emotional support or a sense of belonging, particularly to a young person who feels lonely or misunderstood.
Over time, they may:

- Encourage private conversations or move communication between apps.
- Ask for personal information, photographs or intimate images.
- Become controlling, demanding constant attention or secrecy.
- Use threats or blackmail to pressure someone into harmful acts.

3 WAYS TO HELP PROTECT YOUR CHILD

TAKE AN INTEREST IN THEIR ONLINE WORLD

Ask about the apps, group chats and online communities they use. Find out who they communicate with and whether they know these people in real life.

HELP THEM RECOGNISE MANIPULATION AND CONTROL

Talk about warning signs such as requests for secrecy, personal images or moving conversations to private apps. Explain how online friendships can become controlling or exploitative.

MAKE IT SAFE TO SPEAK UP

Reassure your child that they can share concerns without judgement or automatically losing access to their devices. If you suspect grooming, exploitation or blackmail, seek support.

Start the conversation
Try asking your teenager:
"Have you ever come across an online group that made you feel uncomfortable?"
"What would you do if an online friend started asking you to keep secrets or send pictures?"
"Would you feel comfortable telling me if someone online was threatening you?"