

# ONLINE ABUSE

## What is online abuse?

Online abuse is any form of abuse that takes place via the internet on devices such as laptops, mobile phones, tablets, gaming consoles or any other internet-based device.

This form of abuse can be directed at children, young people or adults and it can happen with more than one type of abuse taking place at the same time, examples include:

- Bullying or cyberbullying
- Emotional abuse (may include forms of blackmail)
- Harassment, stalking or threatening behaviour
- Pressured or coerced into sending images of a sexual nature
- Sexual abuse
- Sexual exploitation

Children, young people or adults may also be exposed to other harms, such as inappropriate behaviours or online content.

## How can online abuse take place?

In the digital age we now live in, communication with another is always a click or a tap away, online abuse can take place via:

- Social media
- Text messages and other messaging apps
- Email or private messaging
- Online chats
- Comment on video or livestreaming sites
- Chat in game, including voice chat
- Immersive technologies such as virtual and augmented reality

## Recognising & Responding

It may not be the easiest thing to identify online abuse, however you may be able to see a change in a person's behaviour or them becoming isolated and secretive.

Other things to look out for is a change in emotional state, as an example they may become angry, irritable, in low mood or anxious. There could be noticeable changes to a person's eating or sleeping habits.

There could be a combination of vulnerability factors that make a person a "easy target" to abuse online, these factors may include:

Age, gender, sexuality, isolation, living arrangements (care home or foster care), educational or physical requirements, mental health issues, previous experience of abuse

In all types of abuse the person at the centre may find it difficult or reluctant to speak out, reasons as to why could be:

- They are not aware they are being abused
- Feel ashamed or dirty
- Too embarrassed to speak out or share details
- Afraid of the consequences of speaking out
- Have been told to keep it a "secret"
- Have established an emotional connection to the abuser

In some cases, the abused may blame themselves of the abuse they are receiving, not in any circumstance would this be true, and anyone suffering from online abuse should not be blamed.

If you believe or suspect that a person suffering from online abuse is in immediate danger, call the police on 999 without delay.

If you have concerns or worries regarding a person, please consider the following:

- Contact the NSPCC helpline on 0808 800 5000
- Contact your local protection services
- Contact the police if you believe there is a sexual element to the abuse
- For further information on online abuse please click the link: [Responding to online abuse | NSPCC Learning](#)

