



Cyberbullying – What can parents do?

*“Colin is the ugliest boy in the whole school!
Just look at this photo!”
“Beth is a swot and a bitch!”*

There has always been cruel name-calling and malicious whispering in the school playground. But when rumours and insults are posted online, things can get particularly bad for the victims. We frequently hear about dramatic cases of “cyberbullying” in schools. What can parents do if their child is affected?

What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying means causing offence to, threatening or humiliating another person on a social networking site – by spreading rumours or posting spiteful statements or humiliating photos and videos. Insults and arguments – including those online – are not always considered to be cyberbullying. But if the abuse continues over a longer period of time, with the goal of hurting another child, and if the affected child is clearly outnumbered, then this is classified as cyberbullying. In this case the child urgently needs help! What makes the situation particularly stressful for the child in question is the fact that the bullies and the child being bullied usually go to the same school.

- **Schoolchildren are often particularly uninhibited when they post things online.**
- **The insulting posts can immediately be seen by anyone and are very difficult to delete.**
- **Cyberbullying doesn't end when the school day is over. Children who are bullied don't even feel safe within their own four walls – a glance at their mobile phone or their computer is like a form of torture. These children are subjected to constant stress.**

What effects does cyberbullying have on children?

Children will have varying reactions to cyberbullying: many become withdrawn and try to behave in a way that is as inconspicuous as possible, or they may no longer want to go to school. Others become anxious, develop sleep disorders, start to perform poorly at school or develop headaches and stomach aches; some even start to suffer from depression or may have thoughts of suicide. Some children become aggressive to others or towards inanimate objects. The dramatic and traumatic effects of cyberbullying are often underestimated.



What should parents look out for?

- **Has your child suddenly stopped wanting to go to school? Do they say that they feel ill to avoid having to go to school? Does your child often ask to be picked up from school, or have they asked whether they can change schools?**
- **Do they have headaches, stomach aches, sleep disorders or a subdued mood? Are they suddenly behaving in an aggressive manner?**
- **Have items of value/money belonging to the child gone missing? Does your child keep coming up with excuses for items that seem to have gone missing or been damaged? Is your child being blackmailed? Have they stopped inviting friends round to your house?**



If your child is being bullied

Most children who are the victims of bullying or cyberbullying display one or more of the types of behaviour described above. However, there are many different possible reasons for a sudden change in behaviour! Children will seldom volunteer to talk about the fact that they are being bullied. This means that you as their parents will need to initiate the conversation! Initially, those affected by bullying will often avoid giving any specific information about a particular incident, or may try to play down the situation. If you have a definite suspicion, you will need a lot of patience and will need to make further offers to talk. Stand by your child and make it clear to them that together you will be able to do something about the bullying:

- **Speak to the child's teacher and tell the head teacher about any incidents that have occurred. Never issue threats to other children!**
- **Ensure that you have proof and actual evidence – print out a copy of any offensive remarks, take photos.**
- **Talk to other parents and your parent representatives. Make it into an important theme at the school.**
- **Talk to your child about how they might behave in certain situations. Warn your child that the answer is not simply to start bullying themselves! Revenge is often a motive for cyberbullying.**
- **Get in touch with the operator of the website and ask them to delete the offensive content. You can press charges against the individuals doing the bullying and likewise against the operator of the site if they fail to delete the content: www.internet-beschwerdestelle.de**

If your child is bullying someone or is involved in a bullying campaign

Tell your child in no uncertain terms that the bullying must stop. Make sure they understand the seriousness of what they are doing and are clear about the possible consequences. Discuss the matter with your child: What are the reasons for your behaviour? How would you feel if others treated you like that?

Get in touch with your child's teacher and your parent representatives: the social conduct of the class and the theme of cyberbullying will need to be addressed in lessons as a matter of urgency.

What should the school do?

The school must react with resolve so that a clear message is sent out to all – bullies, victims of bullying and those who simply find themselves joining in with the bullying: we as a school community will not tolerate individuals being humiliated or harassed. The school community should initiate an anti-bullying programme and should adopt an anti-bullying convention.

If the school fails to take action on their own initiative: demand that they do so! Because nobody can succeed at school in an atmosphere of fear and hate – ultimately, cyberbullying causes harm to everyone.

Where can you find information and advice?

The EU initiative klicksafe has developed a "Cyberbullying First Aid App" for young people, which can be downloaded via the Google Play Store or iTunes Store free of charge. It provides comprehensive information and helps children to stand up to cyberbullying. There is also extensive information available for parents, children and specialist members of staff on:

www.klicksafe.de

You will also find some well-structured information for both children and parents on the following websites:

www.schau-hin.info

www.mobbing-schluss-damit.de

www.stop-cybermobbing.com

The police can also provide important information:

www.polizei-beratung.de > Cybermobbing



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Bestellung

ane@ane.de

T: +49 30 259006-35

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