

Safeguarding Bulletin



Issue **Autumn Term 2**

Welcome to our first edition, this new academic year, of our Newsletter from **The Bridge Academy Safeguarding Team**. The aim, as always, is to bring you all the latest, relevant help and advice on issues we feel are of importance.

We hope that you all had a relaxing, wonderful summer break, a distant memory now! This edition coincides with World Mental Health Day, Anti-Bullying Week and Black History month. There is lots of support available and we hope you find the links useful. We also want to remind you again of the dangers of vaping and social media apps, please be vigilant and have those discussions, it is as important as ever.

Mental Health Support

World Mental Health Day was celebrated on 10th October, as it is every year. The theme for 2023, set by the World Foundation of Mental Health is 'Mental health is a universal human right.' World Mental Health Day is aimed at raising awareness of mental Health and forging positive change for everyone's mental health. It is a chance to talk about mental health, how we need to look after it and how important it is to get help if you are struggling.

Visit our website for our *Mental Health Handbook*



The Safeguarding Team



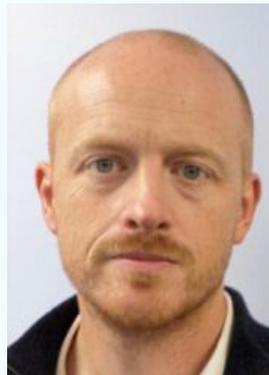
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Respect

Aspiration

Independence

Success

Engagement

MAKE A
NOISE
ABOUT
BULLYING

ANTI-BULLYING WEEK 2023

Too often, we are silent when we see bullying take place, silent about the hurt bullying causes, and silent when we hear bullying dismissed as 'just banter'. Together, we can make a difference and take a stand against bullying.

This Anti-Bullying Week, we came together to have discussions about what bullying means to us, how banter can turn into something more hurtful, and what we can do to stop bullying.

WHAT IS BANTER?

Banter is the **harmless** exchange of social interaction between friends which involves **teasing** or **mocking** one another, either on a **one-to-one basis** or more commonly on a **friendship group basis**.

WHAT IS BULLYING?

The **repetitive, intentional hurting** of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an **imbalance of power**. Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological.

It can happen face to face or online.

IT'S NOT BANTER IF...

1. You would be upset if someone said it to you.
2. It's hurtful.
3. You're not friends.
4. Someone's asked you to stop.
5. The target isn't laughing.
6. It focuses on someone's insecurities.



Respect

Aspiration

Independence

Success

Engagement

"Nurturing and empowering young people to be School Ready, Work Ready & Life Ready"

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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about GROUP CHATS

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Occurring through messaging apps, on social media and in online games, group chats are among the most popular ways that young people engage with their peers online. Involving, by definition, three or more individuals, these groups allow users to send messages, images and videos to everyone in one place. While they are useful for helping friends, people with shared interests or members of a club to communicate and coordinate activities, they can also leave young people feeling excluded and bullied – as well as providing opportunities for inappropriate content to be shared and viewed.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

BULLYING

Unkind comments or images which are purposely aimed at an individual can be shared freely in a group chat – allowing and often encouraging others to join in the bullying behaviour. If this content is shared in a group of their peers (especially a larger group), it serves to amplify the hurt, embarrassment, anxiety and isolation that the victim feels.

EXCLUSION AND ISOLATION

This common issue with group chats can happen in several ways: starting a new group, for instance, but deliberately excluding a certain child. Likewise, the chat may take place on an app which one child doesn't have access to, meaning they can't be involved. A child can also feel isolated when a group chat is used to discuss or share images from an event that everyone else but them attended.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some discussions in group chats may include inappropriate words, swearing and unsuitable images or videos. These could be viewed by your child if they are part of that group, whether they actively engage in it or not. Some chat apps have a disappearing message function, so your child may be unable to report something they've seen because it can only be viewed once or for a short time.

SHARING GROUP CONTENT

It's important to remember that – while the content of the chat is private between those in the group – individual users can easily share a message, photo or video with others outside of the group or screenshot what's been posted. The risk of something your child intended as private becoming public (and potentially going viral) is higher if there are people they don't know well in the group.

UNKNOWN MEMBERS

Within larger group chats, it's more likely your child will be communicating with people they don't really know. These strangers may be friends of the host, but not necessarily friendly toward your child. It's wise for young people not to share personal details and stay aware that they have no control over the messages and images they share after they've put them online.

NOTIFICATIONS AND FOMO

A drawback of large group chats is the sheer number of notifications. Every time someone in the group messages, your child's device will be 'pinged' with an alert; potentially, this could mean hundreds of notifications a day. Not only is this highly distracting, but young people's fear of missing out on the latest conversation results in increased screen time as they try to keep up with the chat.

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Advice for Parents & Carers

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CONSIDER OTHERS' FEELINGS

Group chats are often an arena for young people to gain social status. This could cause them to do or say things on impulse, which could upset others in the group. Encourage your child to consider how other people might feel if they engaged in this behaviour. If your child does upset a member of their group chat, support them to reach out, show empathy and apologise for their mistake.

GIVE SUPPORT, NOT JUDGEMENT

Remind your child that they can confide in you if they feel bullied or excluded in a group chat, instead of responding to the person who's upset them. Validate their hurt feelings and help to put them back in control by discussing how they'd like to handle the situation. On a related note, you could also empower your child to speak up if they're in a chat where others are being picked on.

BLOCK, REPORT AND LEAVE

If your child is in a chat where inappropriate content is being shared, advise them to block the users sending the material, report them to the host app or platform and exit the group. If any of this content could be putting a minor at risk, contact the police. Emphasise to your child that it's OK for them to simply leave any group chat that they don't feel comfortable being a part of.

PRACTISE SAFE SHARING

In any online communication, it's vital for young people to be aware of what they're sharing and who might potentially see it. Discuss the importance of not revealing identifiable details like their address, their school or photos that they wouldn't like to be seen widely. Remind them that once something is shared in a group, they lose control of where it may end up and how it might be used.

AVOID INVITING STRANGERS

Sadly, many individuals online hide their true identity to gain a child's trust – for example, to gather information on them, to exchange inappropriate content or to coax them into doing things they aren't comfortable with. Ensure your child understands why they shouldn't add people they don't know to a group chat – and, especially, to never accept a group chat invitation from a stranger.

SILENCE NOTIFICATIONS

Having a phone or tablet bombarded with notifications from a group chat can be a massive irritation and distraction – especially if it's happening late in the evening. Explain to your child that they can still be part of the group chat, but that it would be healthier for them to turn off or mute the notifications and catch up with the conversation at a time which better suits them.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



National Online Safety®

#WakeUpWednesday