



## Guidance for workers

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## Internet, email and texting communication guidelines for workers

### Rationale

- ⊕ As a children's or youth worker in the Methodist Church, we recognise that using the Internet (and other forms of technology) is an important part of the lives of the children and young people we work with.
- ⊕ We understand that for many children and young people, using the Internet is a regular part of their lives and has a significant impact on their social development.
- ⊕ In accordance with The Methodist Church's Safeguarding Policy, we recognise that we must take all possible steps to protect young people from significant harm or risk whilst using the Internet or any other form of technology.
- ⊕ We also recognise the importance of establishing and updating procedures to ensure workers are protected whilst they work with children and young people.
- ⊕ All workers are responsible for reading any policies produced regarding safeguarding and communication matters and are expected to adhere to the guidelines in the current policies.
- ⊕ At the end of this document, you will find a notes section which relates to specific parts of this policy.

### Reasons for contacting a young person via the Internet or email

- ⊕ It is not appropriate to have private non-work related contact in the form of electronic communication with the children and young people with whom we work.
- ⊕ We recognise that there will be times when it is necessary and important to use electronic communication. However, we recognise the need for an appropriate response and always encourage face-to-face contact as opposed to a contact or reply via online methods of communication.

- ⊕ Workers should only use electronic communication for reasons relating to work with children and young people, not for general socialising (see guidelines below).
- ⊕ Workers should make their line manager or youth group leader aware when they are using electronic communication. This must be set up as part of a group communication and not individual.

## Parental awareness and consent

- ⊕ Parental consent for using electronic forms of communication is essential and should be included on your annual consent forms or by letter with a return slip agreeing to the use of this form of communication. You should outline what means you will be using for communication and what you will be communicating.
- ⊕ It is important to explain this policy and practice to parents and careers and seek to ensure they are aware and are happy that we use electronic communication and what type of electronic communication we are using (eg email).

## Specific definitions

- ⊕ 'Internet' communication specifically refers to the use of social networking sites such as Bebo, Facebook, Twitter and other websites of a similar nature.
- ⊕ 'Email' communication specifically refers to the use of emails, including written text and/or pictures sent from personal or work accounts.

## Email communication

- ⊕ Email should only be used to communicate specific information (times and dates of events, for example). It should not be used as a relationship building tool.
- ⊕ We recommend having a 'shared' staff email account where all staff can access any emails, regardless of whether it is private or public. This would allow communication amongst staff and young people to remain safe.
- ⊕ Only group emails should be used.
- ⊕ Workers should encourage appropriate 'face to face' contact where possible. Conversation (repeated sending of emails between two individuals) via email is discouraged.
- ⊕ Workers should make their line manager or team leader aware when they are using email to contact young people.
- ⊕ Email histories should be kept and dated.

## Email and accountability

As specified above, email should only be used to convey information and not used as a relationship tool. However, if a young person discloses information or anything of a concerning matter arises via email, the following procedure must be followed:

1. Read and follow the Methodist Church Safeguarding Procedures relating to disclosures.
2. Do not respond to the email. Make attempts to contact the young person via other methods of communication and where possible, arrange to meet face to face if necessary.

## Language

- ⊕ All language should be appropriate and where possible 'standard responses' should be used (eg if you have sent an email out containing event details and receive a reply asking for further details, create a standard response with additional details so that all young people receive the same information).
- ⊕ Workers and volunteers should take great care over the language used to reduce the risk of misinterpretation.
- ⊕ When sending emails, workers should not use informal language such as shorthand or 'text language' as this can often be misunderstood and lead to further complications.

## Hours of communication

- ⊕ When using email/the Internet for communication with young people (within the guidelines above), it is advised that it should take place between the hours of 9am-5pm.
- ⊕ If a project takes place in the evening (after 5pm) and it is necessary to send an email/use the Internet, Workers should seek advice from their line manager but there should be no email communication after 9pm.

## 'Adding friends' on Facebook and similar sites

- ⊕ You should not add children or young people on your personal social networking page who are part of the children's and youth ministry/project at your church or group and who are under the age of 18. You can set up a Facebook group for your project or group and invite them to be members (that is, if they are over the required minimum age limit – which is 13 for Facebook).
- ⊕ Workers should only use an agreed social networking account for contact with children and young people with whom they are working. This should normally be an account set up specifically for this purpose on behalf of a group rather than an individual (use project accounts, never personal accounts). You can set up a group via a personal Facebook account but ensure that your personal settings are secure and have limited viewing. It is possible also to set the Facebook group privacy settings so they can't see the profiles of others who have joined (on Facebook, click on the little star-like icon in the top right hand corner, then select 'Privacy Settings' from the drop-down menu).
- ⊕ Workers should not use their personal social networking or instant messaging accounts for contact with children and young people.
- ⊕ Workers should seek to ensure that their personal profiles on any social networking sites should be set to the highest form of security to avoid young people accessing personal information or seeing any pictures of a personal nature.

# Security when using Facebook

## How to create a secure profile when setting up a group:

1. Select the friends list from your profile.
2. Each young person has a 'add to list' option. Add the young people to the 'limited profile' group.
3. Once every young person is in the group limited profile, select 'Settings' and 'Privacy Settings' from the top of your Facebook page.
4. Select 'Profile' within the privacy settings page.
5. The privacy settings are then broken into profile, basic info, photos etc.
6. On each item that needs to be kept private select 'Edit custom settings'. A pop-up box will appear. At the bottom it will say "Except these people". Type "limited profile" into that box.

Do this for every part of your profile to be kept private.

You can also change the privacy settings to 'Only Me'. Click on 'Privacy Shortcuts' (the padlock icon in the right hand corner of your Facebook page), then click on 'Who can see my stuff?', and then select 'Only me' from the drop-down menu under 'Who can see my future posts?').

The process is now complete.

## How are pages different from groups? Which one should I create?

**Pages** allow real organisations, businesses, celebrities and brands to communicate broadly with people who like them. Pages may only be created and managed by official representatives.

**Groups** provide a closed space for small groups of people to communicate about shared interests. Groups can be created by anyone.

Other differences include:

### Pages

- ⊕ **Privacy:** Page information and posts are public and generally available to everyone on Facebook.
- ⊕ **Audience:** Anyone can like a page to become connected with it and get news updates. There is no limit to how many people can like a page.
- ⊕ **Communication:** Page admins can share posts under the page's name. Page posts appear in the news feeds of people who like the page. Page admins can also create customised apps for their Pages and check Page Insights to track the page's growth and activity.

### Groups

- ⊕ **Privacy:** In addition to an open setting, more privacy settings are available for groups. In secret and closed groups, posts are only visible to group members.
- ⊕ **Audience:** Group members must be approved or added by other members. When a group reaches a certain size, some features are limited. The most useful groups tend to be the ones you create with small groups of people you know.
- ⊕ **Communication:** In groups, members receive notifications by default when any member posts in the group. Group members can participate in chats, upload photos to shared albums, collaborate on group docs and invite members who are friends to group events.

### How do I create a group?

1. From your home page, go to the 'Groups' section and click on 'Add Group'.
2. Click on 'Create New Group'.
3. A pop-up box will appear, where you'll be able to add a group name, add members and select a privacy setting for your group. Click the 'Create' button when you're finished.
4. Once the group is created, you will be taken to the group's page. To get started click  at the top right of the page and select 'Edit Group'. From here you can add a group description, set a group email address, add a group picture and manage members.

### Create a Facebook page

It's free to set up a page and it only takes a few minutes to get started.

1. Choose a category and a name that represents your business.
2. Pick a logo or another image that people associate with your business to use as a profile picture.
3. Write a sentence about your business so people understand what you do.
4. Set a memorable web address for your page that you can use on marketing material to promote your presence on Facebook.
5. Choose a cover photo that represents your brand and showcases your product or service. It's the first thing people will see when they visit your page.

## Chat facilities

### Messenger and live chat

- ⊕ Use of live chat facilities between workers and children or young people is not permitted. Youth workers should refrain from engaging in conversation via these mediums. Live chat services and chat facilities cannot be kept on record and are therefore an unsuitable form of communication between workers, children and young people.

## Skype and other visual methods

- ⊕ Use of Skype and any other webcam or visual communication via the Internet is not permitted. Workers should refrain from using such methods on a one-to-one basis as they cannot be recorded.
- ⊕ It can be used for conference call and is considered appropriate if a project or group uses a webcam/Skype in a group environment for project purposes and has clear aims and objectives for its use. Always seek to inform a line manager or group leader when this is taking place and keep a record of it.

## Internet cafés in churches

- ⊕ These should adhere to the Methodist Church guidelines on safeguarding and best practice, which can be found online at [www.methodist.org.uk/safeguardingpolicy](http://www.methodist.org.uk/safeguardingpolicy).
- ⊕ Filtering software should be installed on all computers used at the church. GetNetWise ([www.getnetwise.org](http://www.getnetwise.org)) has lists of filtering and monitoring software.

- ⊕ Safety guidelines on using the Internet and other forms of communication should be displayed where children and young people can see them (also have details for ChildLine, CEOPS and the Anti-Bullying Alliance available).

## Cyberbullying and the law

Most children and young people use mobile phones and the Internet appropriately. However, when technology is abused there may be legal consequences.

### Mobile Phones

The rationale for texting and calling is the same as social networking and email contact.

Risks	Solutions
Accusation of an inappropriate message or receipt of one	Be very careful in what language you use. It is not encouraged for workers to give out their personal mobile number to young people. We recognise that this may be needed at times.
Texting late in the evening – potential to be viewed as inappropriate	No texting after 9pm.
Young Person’s perception of relationship	Discourage text conversation or phone conversation where it is not about communicating information.
Texting/calling whilst YP in school/college	Make calls between 12noon-1pm and 4-9pm.
Data protection of YP numbers on workers personal mobiles	Have a lock on phone and do not allow access. Use texting software package rather than personal phone for texting.

When you have received a phone call/text or made a phone call/text to a young person that is not giving out information you must make a record of the conversation and report it to your line manager or group leader

As much as possible do not give children or young people your personal number, if you have a works phone use that. Or set up an online texting service that only allows outward communication to a group and is managed online. But in all cases gain parental consent and limit your texts to the above guidelines.

This policy works in conjunction with the Methodist Church Social Media Guidelines (which can be downloaded from [www.methodist.org.uk/socialmediaguidelines](http://www.methodist.org.uk/socialmediaguidelines)) and the Methodist Church Safeguarding Policy (downloadable from [www.methodist.org.uk/safeguardingpolicy](http://www.methodist.org.uk/safeguardingpolicy)).

## Notes relating to the document

- ⊕ Where consultation with your line manager is advised in this document, it may be more appropriate to inform another colleague as well as your line manager. It is good practice to have a communication policy that all are aware of and adhere to.
- ⊕ With regards to young people who have left the group or are now over the age of 18, please use discretion with regards to this policy and seek advice where necessary.
- ⊕ For useful resources and support material to use with Parents, volunteers and children and young people visit [www.ceops.org.uk](http://www.ceops.org.uk) or [www.thinkuknow.org.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.org.uk).
- ⊕ Training material for workers, parents, children and young people to use alongside this policy will be available in the autumn of 2013.
- ⊕ Other policies include guidelines for parents, guidelines for 5-11 year-olds and Guidelines for 11-18 year-olds. These are all available to download from [www.childrenandyouth.org.uk](http://www.childrenandyouth.org.uk).

Use these guidelines in consultation with the Methodist Church Safeguarding Policy.

Sign up to our Amaze best practice partnership where you can access a raft of free downloadable guidelines to support your ministry. Email [admin@amaze.org.uk](mailto:admin@amaze.org.uk)

### Monitoring social media

**Decide who will be responsible** for setting up, managing and moderating (overseeing/reviewing/responding to posted content) your web page or profile. This person will oversee the content that will appear, will decide which links to other sites to accept, and will have online contact with the children and young people who interact with your webpage or profile.

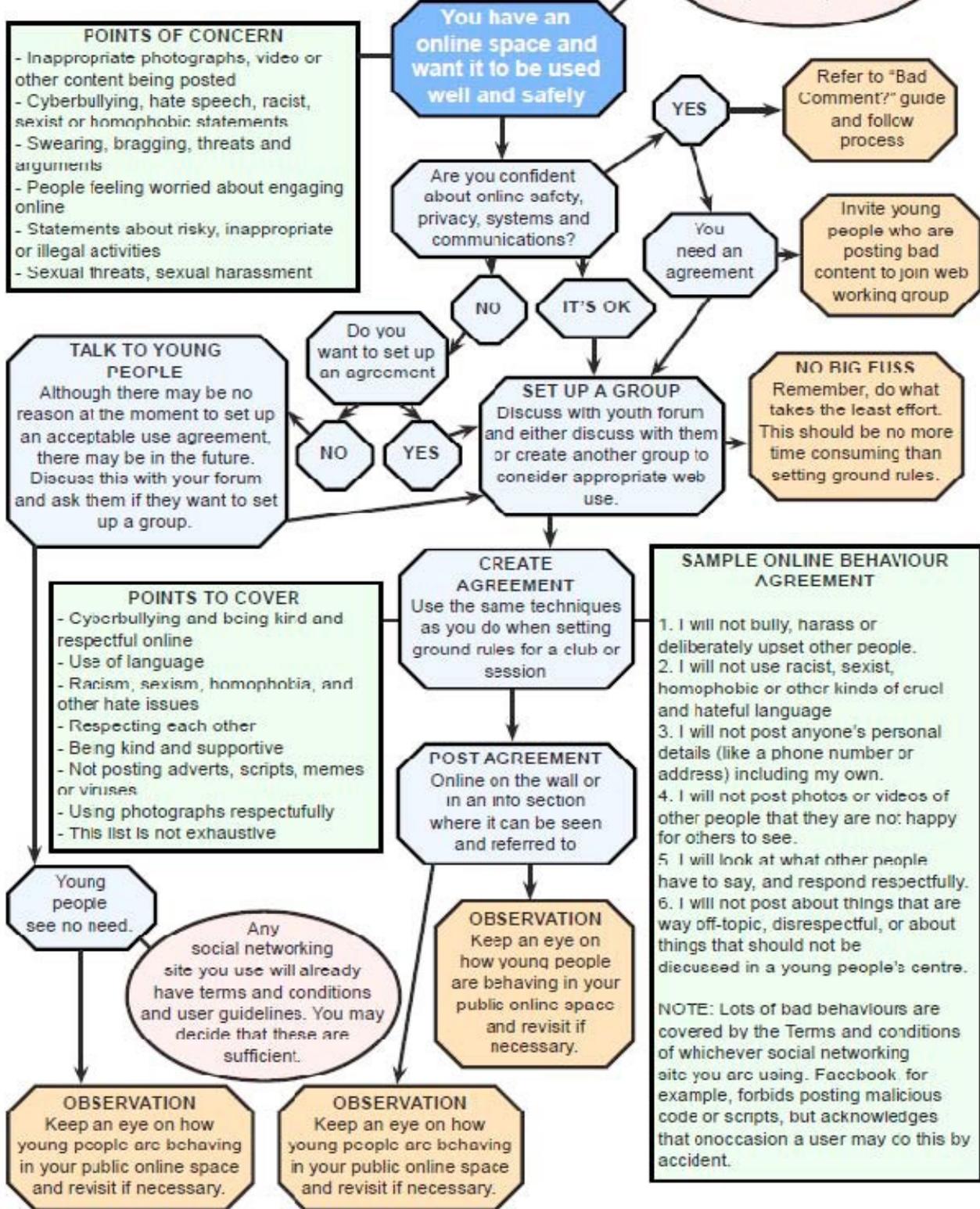
**Keep a record of your activities** on social media. Apply the same level of recording of your online activities as you would in face to face work.

**Monitor pages daily** during normal working hours (provision will need to be made to cover holiday times, bank holidays etc) **removing any content** that is inappropriate.

# Got a public online space for young people?

Follow this flow chart to know what to do

**Note:**  
you can follow this process before you Set up a public online space, or after you've had one for a while, or in response to problems



## Some useful resources

Cyberbullying – a whole school approach (DFCSF)

[www.kidscape.org.uk/assets/downloads/dcsfcyberbullyingsummary.pdf](http://www.kidscape.org.uk/assets/downloads/dcsfcyberbullyingsummary.pdf)

Cyberbullying – Are you switched on?

[www.respectme.org.uk/cyberbullying\\_intro\\_txt.html](http://www.respectme.org.uk/cyberbullying_intro_txt.html)

[www.respectme.org.uk](http://www.respectme.org.uk)

The respectme website offers practical advice and guidance for adults on addressing bullying behaviour. There is also a section specifically for children and children and young people offering practical advice on what to do if they're being bullied.

[www.digizen.org](http://www.digizen.org)

'Digital citizenship' is about building safe spaces and communities, and using online presence to grow and shape your world in a safe, creative way.

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

ChildLine's website has a bullying section for children and young people and adults.

[www.childnet.org.uk](http://www.childnet.org.uk)

Childnet International works in partnership with other organisations to help make the Internet a safe place for children and children and young people.

[www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)

Kidscape has a range of information for both children and adults, with some interactive sections for children and young people on responding to bullying.

[www.stoptextbully.com](http://www.stoptextbully.com)

Stoptextbully has a lot of information on text bullying specific to children and children and young people.

[www.ceop.gov.uk](http://www.ceop.gov.uk)

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre's website.

## Cyberbullying in more detail

Extracted from *Preventing and Responding to Bullying for Youth Activities* developed by SVSYF/YDG/Children's Services, May 2011

Bullying is any form is unacceptable and with new technologies comes new forms of bullying, cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is no difference from any other forms of bullying; the behaviour is the same and the impact is no less devastating.

### 1. What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is the term used to define bullying behaviour that takes place via mobile phone or over the Internet through emails, instant messaging and social networking sites.

## 2. How is technology used to bully?

**How is Technology Used to Bully?**  
Technology can be used both positively and negatively. The table below explores the range of ways today's technology can be used.

Technology:	Great for:	Examples of misuse:
 <b>Mobile phones</b>	Keeping in touch by voice or text, taking and sending pictures and film, listening to music, playing games, going online and sending emails. Useful in emergency situations and for allowing children a greater sense of independence.	Sending nasty calls or text messages, including threats, intimidation, harassment. Taking and sharing humiliating images. Videoing other people being harassed and sending these to other phones or internet sites.
 <b>Instant Messenger (IM)</b>	Text or voice chatting live with friends online. A quick and effective way of keeping in touch even while working on other things.	Sending nasty messages or content. Using someone else's account to forward rude or mean messages via their contacts list.
 <b>Chatrooms and message boards</b>	Groups of people around the world can text or voice chat live about common interests. For young people, this can be an easy way to meet new people and explore issues which they are too shy to talk about in person.	Sending nasty or threatening anonymous messages. Groups of people deciding to pick on or ignore individuals. Making friends under false pretences – people pretending to be someone they're not in order to get personal information that they can misuse in a range of ways – e.g. by spreading secrets or blackmailing.
 <b>Email</b>	Sending electronic letters, pictures and other files quickly and cheaply anywhere in the world.	Sending nasty or threatening messages. Forwarding unsuitable content including images and video clips, or sending computer viruses. Accessing someone else's account, e.g. to forward personal emails or delete emails.
 <b>Webcams</b>	Taking pictures or recording messages. Being able to see and talk to someone live on your computer screen. Bringing far-off places to life or video conferencing.	Making and sending inappropriate content. Persuading or threatening young people to act in inappropriate ways. Using inappropriate recordings to manipulate young people.
 <b>Social network sites</b>	Socialising with your friends and making new ones within online communities. Allowing young people to be creative online, even publishing online music. Personalising homepages and profiles, creating and uploading content.	Posting nasty comments, humiliating images / video. Accessing another person's account details and sending unpleasant messages, deleting information or making private information public. Groups of people picking on individuals by excluding them. Creating fake profiles to pretend to be someone else, e.g. to bully, harass or get the person into trouble.
 <b>Video hosting sites</b>	Accessing useful educational, entertaining and original creative video content and uploading your own.	Posting embarrassing, humiliating film of someone.
 <b>Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs)</b>	School site, usually available from home and school, set up for tracking and recording student assignments, tests and activities, with message boards, chat and IM.	Posting inappropriate messages or images. Hacking into someone else's account to post inappropriate comments or delete schoolwork.
 <b>Gaming sites, consoles and virtual worlds</b>	Live text or voice chat during online gaming between players across the world, or on handheld consoles with people in the same local area.  Virtual worlds let users design their own avatars – a figure that represent them in the virtual world.	Name-calling, making abusive / derogatory remarks. Players may pick on weaker or less experienced users, repeatedly killing their characters.  Forwarding unwanted messages to other devices in the immediate vicinity.

### NB: Mobile phones – be aware

'Happy Slapping' is a term used to describe the filming of violent incidents on mobile phones. This is assault and should be treated as such. It should not be such as 'just' a bullying incident. The footage is evidence that an assault has taken place and must be reported to the police for investigation.

## 3. How to encourage responsible use of technologies

Adults have an important role to play in explaining a child or young person's rights and responsibilities when using new technologies. Knowing how to identify when they or others are cyberbullying, or being cyberbullied will help with building a safe environment.

When used appropriately, new technologies can and do provide excellent opportunities, opening a new world for finding resources and meeting new and existing friends.

#### 4. Important points to discuss with children and children and young people.

- ⊕ Online relationships are no different from offline relationships.
- ⊕ Be mindful of the fact that you are communicating differently, and without the benefit of being able to read gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice it is easy to misinterpret what may be seen onscreen (NB: It may be worthwhile familiarising yourself with abbreviations (eg, LOL: 'Laughing out loud') and codes of 'netiquette'.
- ⊕ Be respectful of other people's privacy.
- ⊕ Never give away personal information.
- ⊕ If you wouldn't say it, don't send it.
- ⊕ Be polite.
- ⊕ There's always a history, so anything you send/say can be traced.

#### 5. Additional pointers for organisations

If appropriate you may want to discuss an organisational code of conduct. Get the children and young people involved and discuss and record acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Put this code of conduct on the wall as a visual reminder.

#### 6. What to do if a child tells me that are being cyberbullied

- ⊕ DON'T PANIC! Your initial reaction is vital. Listen, learn, involve and resolve.
- ⊕ Assure them that they have done the right thing by telling you.
- ⊕ Listen and learn.
- ⊕ Decide a plan of action with the young person.
- ⊕ Go through any messages that they have received and kept.
- ⊕ Ask them not to open any further online or text messages from these addresses and phone numbers, but to allow you to open them instead.
- ⊕ Get them to change their mobile phone number.
- ⊕ Get them to change their online profile.
- ⊕ Involve other agencies.
- ⊕ Support the young person.

#### 7. What do I do if I discover that a child is cyberbullying?

- ⊕ Remain calm.
- ⊕ Ask them what's been happening and find out what's behind their behaviour.
- ⊕ Don't label the young person a 'bully'.
- ⊕ When you've established the catalyst or reasons behind the cyberbullying behaviour, explain why this behaviour is wrong.
- ⊕ Explain the consequences of bullying.
- ⊕ Agree a way forward.

#### 8. Cyberbullying and the law

Most children and young people use mobile phones and the Internet appropriately; however when technology is abused there may be legal consequences.

There are four UK statute laws that are relevant to the use of IT in relation to bullying:

1. the Protection from Harassment Act 1997
2. the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994
3. the Malicious Communications Act 1998
4. the Communications Act 2003.

Visit [www.respectme.org.uk/Cyberbullying-and-the-law.html#harassment](http://www.respectme.org.uk/Cyberbullying-and-the-law.html#harassment) to see how each law relates to bullying and specifically to cyberbullying.

If the bullying is based on sexual, racial or religious grounds, prosecution could be sought through anti-discriminatory laws.

**Remember:**

Bullying is never acceptable. It is not a normal part of growing up.

## Contact Us

Our website: [www.childrenandyouth.org.uk](http://www.childrenandyouth.org.uk)

Our email: [childrenandyouth@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:childrenandyouth@methodistchurch.org.uk)

Our [www.facebook.com/pages/Methodist-Children-Youth/126895266084](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Methodist-Children-Youth/126895266084)