Cyberbullying & Trolling

Overview

In this guide, you'll find a range of activities that can be used to engage and inform people on this topic through conversations and insights.

Each section can be used independently or alongside sections from other topic areas. For more tips on how to use the resources in a session see **'How to use Bee Smart online safety resources'.**

A short definition

Cyberbullying and trolling are both forms of online harassment. However, there are some key differences between the two. **Cyberbullying** is when someone uses electronic communication to bully another person. **Trolling** is when someone posts inflammatory or off-topic messages in an online community with the intent of provoking a reaction from others.

Fast Facts

1. In 2020 the Office of National Statistics investigated the most common forms of bullying, which of the following came out on top?

- **a.** Calling names/swearing/ humiliation – 10% ✔
- **b.** Messages with malicious intent – 10% ✔
- **c.** Exclusion from a group or activity – 6%
- **d.** Rumours – 5%
- **e.** Online threats – 2%

2. Is this true or false?
A study by the Pew Research Centre found that 41% of adults have experienced some form of online harassment. **[TRUE]**

3. What percentage of UK adults have experienced any form of online bullying/harassment or trolling?

- **a.** 1%
- **b.** 5%
- **c.** 9% ✔
- **d.** 16%

Questions to ask

- Were you surprised by the findings or statistics?
- Have you come across any of these issues before?
- Do you know anyone who has had experience of these issues?

Take away

Summary actions to tackle the issue

Cyberbullying – What is it?

- Cyberbullying is often defined as the use of electronic communication to upset or bully someone. It is usually seen as a deliberate and repeated action.
- There can be different forms of cyberbullying, e.g. cyberbullying by exclusion where someone is purposely left out of a particular group or chat.

Here are some tips you can use to help tackle these issues.

Prevent

- Think carefully about the online groups that you join. If something starts to feel unpleasant or toxic then perhaps it's not for you.
- Always treat others with respect and in the way that you would like them to treat you. It's okay to have differences of opinion but these should be shared in a thoughtful and considerate way.
- Make use of privacy settings and private accounts on social media platforms as this will give you more control over what happens in these spaces.

Protect

- Familiarise yourself with community guidelines or community standards on the platforms that you use.
- Use safety and privacy tools to control who is able to comment on posts – some sites offer users the chance to prevent other users from using particular words when they respond to your posts or content.
- Some online platforms tend to attract more unpleasantness – you should feel able to use whatever platform you want – but if you're finding it difficult then don't be afraid to take a break or leave that space completely. You can be in control.

Resolve

- Save any evidence of cyberbullying behaviour, take screenshots where possible.
- Don't retaliate – cyberbullies are looking for a reaction and the best way to deal with them is to not respond.
- If you feel able to speak to the person who is cyberbullying you and explain how it is making you feel then this can be a good strategy. Remember you are not to blame.
- Confide in a friend or someone you trust.
- Block or report the person who is cyberbullying you.

Trolling – What is it?

- Trolling is generally about provoking a reaction, whether that's because trolls enjoy seeing people hurt or because they want to be amplified.
- Most people troll others for either revenge, attention seeking, boredom or personal amusement.
- Trolling can have a negative impact on your mental health, leading to increased levels of anxiety and lower self-esteem.

Here are some tips you can use to help tackle these issues

Prevent

- Have private, friends only profiles. This would be one way to prevent anonymous individuals from posting comments on your profile. Private profiles give you a lot more control over your account and what others are able to do. Some platforms will also allow you to prevent specific words/phrases from being used by others in comments. See how here.
- Platforms where users are allowed to post anonymously can often attract more trolling – if you stick to sites where users are unable to post anonymously this can help.

Protect

- Make use of privacy controls. Review these on any platforms you are using to keep you in control of who can see what you post and who can comment and re-share content.
- Be selective about who you follow and who can follow you. Stick to people that you know to prevent trolls being able to access content that you post.

Resolve

- Don't feed the troll – this means not responding to their comments or messages. Trolls thrive on attention so if you ignore them, it is likely that they will get bored and move on.
- Record it to keep evidence. No matter whether it happens once or repeatedly, take a screenshot so that you have a record of the original message/comment.
- Block the trolls. Most social media platforms will have ways to block other users so that they are unable to leave comments or appear in your feed. In some cases, it can be possible to mute them.
- Report the trolls. If someone is harassing you or someone else you know then you should report it to the platform or website where this is happening. Most sites should have community guidelines or policies against harassment and will take action against any users that violate these.
- Take a break – if you're feeling overwhelmed by trolling then take a step back from social media. Go for a walk, read a book, or spend time with friends and family. This can help you clear your head and come back refreshed.

- Seek help if you are worried about what is happening or if you are struggling with it. There are a number of helplines that can provide advice, guidance, and support. You could also reach out to your GP if the situation is having an impact on your mental health and wellbeing.
- When it breaks the law report it to the police. There are some instances where this sort of behaviour breaks the law. In this case the police should be informed. For example, in May 2023, new legislation makes it a crime for online trolls to encourage someone to cause serious self-harm – this is irrespective of whether or not victims go on to injure themselves. There is already legislation in place which makes it illegal to encourage or assist someone to take their own life. The Crown Prosecution Service lists a range of social media offences including trolling. This includes online threats, e.g., threats to kill, harm or to commit an offence against a person, group of people or an organisation.

Explore

Signpost participants to these resources to learn more and get support.

- Advice for children and young people - Tackling online hate and trolling
- Hacking Hate - Resources for adults working with children and young people
- Stop Hate UK -Support for those who have witnessed or been affected by hate crime
- Report harmful content
- Anti-Bullying Pro - Advice and guidance around online trolling
- Online hate – facts and advice

Interact

Quiz to learn and test understanding of the topic

1. Which of the following is NOT a type of cyberbullying?
   - **a.** Purposely excluding someone from a group chat in order to upset them.
   - **b.** Sharing a photo that you find funny. ✔
   - **c.** Sharing content to embarrass or humiliate someone.
   - **d.** Repeatedly shaming someone online.

2. Which of the following is a good way of dealing with cyberbullying?

- **a.** Block and report the user. ✔
- **b.** Send a response warning them to stop.
- **c.** Forward the post to others to expose the bully.
- **d.** All of the above.

3. What is the main difference between trolling and cyberbullying?

- **a.** Trolling takes place only on personal messaging sites, but cyberbullying can take place anywhere.
- **b.** Trolling is always illegal, but cyberbullying isn't.
- **c.** Trolling takes place where others can see the comments, if messages are private then this is cyberbullying. ✔
- **d.** Trolling is always anonymous.

4. What are some of the effects of trolling?

- **a.** It can make people feel angry, upset or scared.
- **b.** It can lead to people feeling that they need to stay away from some online communities or spaces.
- **c.** It can damage the reputation of an individual, an organisation or an online space/website.
- **d.** It can lead to violence or physical harm.
- **e.** All of the above. ✔

5. Why do people cyberbully?

- **a.** To feel powerful.
- **b.** To take revenge on someone.
- **c.** To express their own pain.
- **d.** They feel some pressure to do it in order to fit in.
- **e.** All of the above. ✔

Play quiz using Kahoot learning platform

Discussion Scenarios

Use these scenarios to spark conversations around the topic and help participants consider different the consequences that can happen when taking different actions to respond to the scenario.

Scenario A

Trolling

Carly has just posted a photo of her new dog on Instagram. She has had several comments saying how sad she is and saying that she's so ugly that she can't find any real friends. The comments continue over a period of time with posts becoming more unpleasant and personal as if they are trying to provoke a response. Some of the comments have photoshopped the original image and suggest that Carly and her dog look the same or that the dog is better looking.

Actions to take

What should Carly do in response to the post?

1. Ignore the messages, block those who are leaving the comments. **(Positive)**
2. Delete the original post. **(Negative)**
3. Report the troll, collect as much evidence as you can about what has happened. **(Positive)**
4. Take a break from social media. **(Positive/Negative)**
5. Delete your social media account. **(Negative)**
6. Seek help, advice and support from a helpline. **(Positive)**
7. Respond, explaining why what they are saying is not true or not fair. **(Negative)**

Potential consequences

1. It is generally accepted that it is better not to engage with online trolls as this is what they are usually looking for: someone to respond and get into an argument with. That's why they are being so provocative in the first place. Ignoring them completely will mean that they are more likely to stop or give up as they are not getting a response.
2. You shouldn't feel that you have to delete what you've said – social media is a place where people should be able to express themselves freely within community guidelines. Those who are trolling you or posting offensive or unpleasant content are the ones who should have content removed.

3. Collecting screenshots and copies of comments or trolling posts is important as this can be used as evidence when reporting to the platform, to the police or to a helpline or other support service.
4. Taking a break from the platform where the trolling has occurred can be a good thing to do, particularly in regards to your own mental health and wellbeing. Trolling can take its toll and keeping a distance between yourself and the unpleasant comments is helpful.
5. Some people feel that trolling is the straw that breaks the camel's back and decide that social media is not for them. Of course this is an effective solution in terms of tackling the troll – but it does mean that you are no longer able to benefit from the opportunities that the platform might offer for friendship, communication and collaboration. It is of course always possible to delete one account and open up another. On some social media platforms you can choose who is able to comment on your posts and you can mute or block posts from individuals.
6. There are many helplines and support services who will be able to help if you are a victim of online trolling.
   a. www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/crisis-services/helplines-listening-services/
   b. www.themix.org.uk/
   c. www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk
7. Responding to a troll is what they are looking for – they want to get into an argument with you. The best thing to do is not to respond directly but take some of the other actions described above.

Other questions to ask and potential answers

What is trolling?

- Trolling is where someone purposely posts something or responds to a post in order to provoke an argument or an emotional reaction. It can often be said that they are trying to bait people. They can say things that they don't even believe are true in order to provoke a reaction and will try to embarrass or humiliate or belittle them. There are strong links to hate speech here too and often the comments can fall into this category.
- Trolls will sometimes try to hide their identity so they won't face any repercussions and this is why it is important to gather evidence in order to report them and have them or their comments removed.
- Trolls may try and claim that you are overreacting and can play the banter card saying that it was only a bit of fun and that you can't take a joke and should get over yourself. This can often make a victim feel even worse.

What are bait out pages?

- Bait out pages are online spaces where users will post content (text or images) of others in order to embarrass or humiliate them. Often people are only given access to such pages once they have shared content. Individuals can be identified and named and shamed for something that they have allegedly said or done.

- Research for the deSHAME project found that 39% of 13-17 year olds had witnessed people setting up “bait out” pages for someone in their school. These pages are often targeted at girls disproportionately.

Summary highlight
Online trolling can be devastating for those who are targeted and it can often feel like they can’t escape from the unpleasant comments. In some cases the trolling can provoke a “pile-on” with large numbers of people who are completely unknown to the target getting involved and adding to the threads. Don’t feed the trolls – they want you to respond and get into an argument with them so ignoring them completely is a really effective strategy. You should also report them and block and mute them.