How to talk to your child about cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is one of the biggest issues when it comes to social media and the online world.

Children are often braver behind their screens and can take to name-calling, image sharing, and group chat bullying in a bid to fit in or assert control of a situation.

The victims of cyberbullying often feel trapped. Like they can't escape the tirade of threatening messages, late-night onslaughts, and laughing that follows them into the playground.

Many develop anxiety, panic attacks, and suicidal thoughts.

This is why it is important to speak to your children about cyberbullying from as early an age as possible. They need to know what is and isn't acceptable, how to interact responsibly and what to do if they are a victim of cyberbullying.

It can be tough to know exactly what to say to your kids when broaching the subject, so here are some tips that might help:

1. Check your family communication culture
One of the best things you can do is to create a family culture where honest and genuine two-way communication is a feature of daily life. If your kids know they can confide in you, they are more likely to open up about a problem before it becomes overwhelming and 'unsolvable' for them.

2. Understand their world
Parents who have a comprehensive understanding of their child's life will be better able to detect when things aren't going well. Knowing who your kids' friends are, who they 'sit with' at lunchtime, their favourite music, and their boyfriend, girlfriend, or partner needs to be a big priority.

3. Talk about cyber safety like you do sun safety
We instinctively talk to our children about sun safety and road safety from a young age, but cyber safety also needs to be a part of these early safety conversations. Simple messages and make it part of their routine.

4. Limit screen time. Yes, really

Parental controls are a great tool to manage screen time as they help parents teach kids about balance and boundaries.

5. Talk openly with your kids about what to do if they are cyberbullied
This one's essential. Firstly, they need to know to get help from a trusted adult. Blocking the bullying is critical, so ensure they know how to use these features on the social networks they use. Collecting evidence is the next step – make sure they know to take a photo of their screen, not just a screenshot. Reporting the incident is often the fastest way to get the situation resolved. They also need to know that the bully may be lashing out as a cry for help so speaking up might help them too.

As your School, we are always here to support you and we encourage you to come to us with questions or concerns you may have on this topic.