ISPCC
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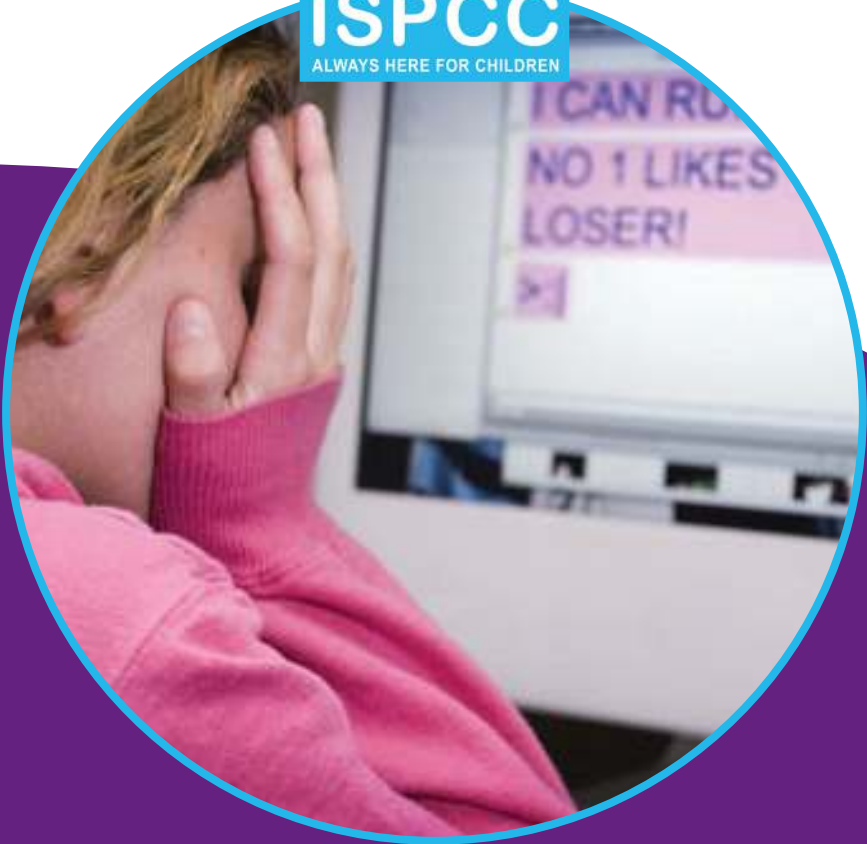LOSER!

Back to School Advice on Cyberbullying

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As the end of August approaches, it brings with it that "back to school" feeling. School books are being bought and children are being measured for the uniforms they have outgrown during the summer. And while for many this is an exciting time (and perhaps a bit of relief for parents not having to entertain their little ones all day long), for some it can be stressful.

Children who are moving from primary to secondary school suddenly find themselves no longer as the "big fish" 6th class students, but instead are the little 1st year students. This can bring with it a sense of uncertainty, especially when rumours and stories are told of first year initiations. And while most adapt very well and respond positively to new challenges, for some, student life can be difficult.

In a new school with new faces and different rules, children have to adapt and their levels of vulnerability can become obvious. New social circles are developed, friendships made, and confidence is built when new achievements are attained. But some students can find themselves in a more difficult situation.

Perhaps they are not as confident as some of their peers or as chatty. Some might find it difficult to make friends or to socialise easily. Some might be worried by the levels of expectations put on them by the school or even their family. All of these things (and the list is not exhaustive) can lead to the transition from primary to secondary school being an unpleasurable and anxiety provoking experience.

Developing a Child's Confidence

Parents can play a very important role in developing their child's confidence including:

-Offering positive levels of support to ensure their child's transition from primary to secondary school runs as smoothly as possible.

-Listening to their children's worries and concerns, and not dismissing them as simply being a part of growing up. Where a child sees that they are being listened to they will be far more likely to confide in you, to explain what is on their mind and most importantly to start developing options and answers for themselves in the knowledge they have your support.

-Establishing a good relationship with your child's school - keeping an open dialogue with the Principal and teachers can help to ensure you are kept in the loop as to how your child is developing. Remember, schools are there not only to educate your children but to give them an opportunity to develop into positive and productive adults.

Cyberbullying

One concern which has always been present is bullying, but in more recent times the newer issue of Cyber bullying has become more prevalent. Even the word itself brings a feeling of uneasiness, a vulnerability which we do not want to see happen to our children. However, the negative behaviour of any type of bullying can be responded to in a positive way. A confident child will react with assertiveness and make sure the bullying does not go unanswered. But a child without this level of confidence or a feeling of not having good support will not react as well. As parents we can help our children develop strong levels of confidence and assertiveness.

Schools can help with this too by demonstrating their refusal to accept any bullying behaviours, supporting those who need it in any bullying situation, and focusing work on positive interactive behaviours, acceptance of differences and the requirement of positive interaction between its students.

Some signs and symptoms of bullying can include:

* Becoming socially isolated

* Changes in mood, becoming angry, aggressive, sad, lonely

* Problems eating or sleeping

• Complaints of stomach pains, headaches, illness

• Reduced academic achievements

When Cyberbullying is brought to our attention it is important not to over react. Instead, explore with your child what they would like to see happen next and what levels of assistance they want. Often we might have the immediate rsponse of taking the computer away from our child as the quickest method of stopping the bullying, but this is unfair as the child is then being punished for being bullied. Such a response makes it more likely children will not disclose any bullying for fear of this reaction from their parents.

It is always wise to have a positive set of guidelines in place with your child as to what you consider being appropriate internet usage and a sound knowledge of internet safety, which you can learn together.

Rules on Internet Safety

There are some simple rules we as parents can go through
with our children when it comes to internet safety:

-Never give out personal information
-Only accept friendship requests on social networking sites from people you know
-Be aware of age appropriate requirements for social networking sites
-Where bullying occurs, do not respond to it online and do not delete the email or text. Save it or take a "screen grab" of the offending material as this is proof of the bullying
-Where the bullying is persistent you might need to consider taking the issue to the child's school or in more severe instances even to the Gardaí, as it can be considered as harassment in certain circumstances

Bullying is a very broad issue and appears to be ever more present in our community environment. What we have learned within the ISPCC is the need for any response to be made at a community wide level. Schools and parents are a part of our community and are well placed to help facilitate any response to the worrisome and negative behaviour of bullying. As parents and wider community members we are often acutely aware of the damaging impact bullying can have on individals, not only for children but also into adulthood as well. Bullying is a behaviour which requires a positive

response from all of us at the community level.

ISPCC's Shield My School Toolkit

In response to increasing concerns over bullying, the ISPCC has developed its new "Shield My School" Self-Evaluation Toolkit for schools. In simple terms, this Toolkit asks the teachers within a school to consider a set of evidence based statements and questions about their schools approach to bullying. These questions prompt the teachers to self-assess where they feel they are in relation to the statement and known evidenced based approaches to bullying. This toolkit also includes an action plan for schools to record the outcome of their evaluation, their proposed actions, time frames and review schedule.

Parents can play an influential role in this regard too. Not all schools might be aware of our newly developed toolkit and it is up to all of us to ensure they are aware of it and have the opportunity to look at and utilise this effective tool.

The ISPCC self-evaluation toolkit is downloadable free of charge from our website **www.ispcc.ie/antibullyingtoolkit**

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SHIELD
MY
SCHOOL

A SELF-EVALUATION TOOL
TO COMBAT BULLYING