

READING PASSAGE

Cyber-bullying: laugh and you 'll be considered guilty

Children who think it is harmless fun to pass on digital images or messages designed to humiliate another child or an adult are being targeted in a campaign to stamp out cyber-bullying. From today, children contacting friends through the internet forums MySpace, Bebo, MSN instant messaging or Yahoo will be faced with a pop-up advertisement showing examples of text message and cyberspace abuse and bullying. They will carry the message: "Laugh at it and you're part of it."

The government has announced new measures to curb bullies who use the internet and mobile phones to target other children and adults. The government research into the extent of cyber-bullying found that a third of 12 to 15 year olds reported having been victims. There are also examples of adults being ridiculed, threatened and subjected to false allegations online by children. The government reminds parents whose children bully classmates by mobile phone or the internet that they could face parenting orders and fines of up to £1,000 if they fail to put a stop to their child's actions.

The campaign is backed by the mobile phone and internet industries, as well as children's charities and teaching unions. It follows complaints from teachers, pupils and parents that cyber-bullying is ruining lives and has got out of control. The government has thus released practical tips to avoid cyber-bullying, including not responding to malicious texts or emails, saving evidence of cyber-bullying and reporting them, keeping passwords safe, and not giving mobile phone numbers and other personal details over the internet.

Ed Balls, the Children, Schools and Families Secretary, said that cyber-bullying was particularly poisonous as it could follow young people wherever they go, including normally safe spaces such as their bedrooms, and it was often difficult to find out who the bully was. "One message I want to get across to young people is that bystanders can inadvertently become perpetrators," he said. "Simply by passing on videos or images they are playing a part in bullying. It is important that pupils are aware that their actions have severe and distressing consequences and the participating in such activity will not be tolerated."

Time Online, September 21st, 2007