**Primary School Children using Social Media**

Most social media sites do not allow children under the age of 13 to use them. There are a number of reasons for this (mainly to do with COPPA – the Children’s Online Privacy Protect Act. COPPA protects a child’s personal information from being collected and shared) but another less legalistic reason is that young children are not mature enough to deal with the problems that can come with social media such as cyberbullying.

If parents allow their children to use social media, they need to be ok themselves with the risks they are opening up to their children. Firstly, there’s the lie. To sign up your child, you have to lie about his/her date of birth. At very least, a moral discussion is needed here. If you get past this, communication is key. If you are allowing your child to have a social media account, you should make them aware of:

* **The rules in your household on social networking sites**
* **The monitoring you will do on their internet usage**
* **The limits on time allowed on these sites that may occur if their usage interferes with family time or external social activities.**

Sadly, there are lots of children under 13 who have social media accounts without their parents’ knowledge or have unfiltered and unsupervised access to the Internet. Allowing a child free access to the Internet is the equivalent of letting the same child out of the house unsupervised and free to roam the streets wherever he/she wishes. Sure, 99% of places they will go to will be safe, but it’s that wrong turn that could lead them somewhere unsafe and that’s exactly what can happen on the Internet. A quick example of a situation that could easily unfold. Picture a little girl watching Barbie videos on YouTube. Once the video she likes ends, YouTube suggests some more videos and she clicks on these. All is fine until one of the suggestions is far from safe. You can guess the rest.

# If parents are going to let their young children use social media, they need to really think about the repercussions. At worst, parents could be accused of neglecting their children by allowing them to be put in such unsafe positions so it’s worth really thinking about how and when we introduce social media to our children despite the peer pressure out there. While 25 out of 31 of those 10 year olds were Facebooking, there were 6 that weren’t. There’s a lesson in that somewhere.

# Cyberbullying and School Policies

At the IPPN conference this year, the Minister for Education announced that he will be publishing guidelines and laws about bullying in schools. In particular, cyber-bullying is to be dealt with for the first time at government level. Bullying is still a societal problem, happening in every corner of the country, but now much of it has moved online.

A poster that was created after a death caused in part by cyber-bullying

The anonymity of the Internet can make it even more difficult to ascertain the identity of cyber-bullies and I believe that some cyber-bullies are unlikely to be bullies in the real world, thinking the Internet is a safety buffer. To give an analogy: Let’s say you are walking down the street and a man walks past you at speed and brushes against you, oblivious to you. Is it likely that you will shout out after him or run over and point out what he had done – how he nearly knocked the coffee cup out of your hand? You may feel angry but it’s unlikely you’ll do this. Let’s move the situation to a car. You’re driving a car and the same man overtakes you at speed. Is it likely that you’ll shout abuse or curse at him? If we are completely honest, we do. I think cyber-bullying is a little bit like this.

Cyber-bullying has allowed pupils take the bullying out of the school and into the home. All experts agree that parents now have to accept that this becomes their responsibility but whether schools like it or not, whilst we all have excellent anti-bullying policies, we cannot ignore the online nature of bullying even if it doesn’t happen on our grounds. I’m not envisaging that the school becomes responsible for cyber-bullying that occurs outside of school but schools need to be aware that cyber-bullying can happen on the school grounds and, like most other policies, we need to work with parents and families to ensure that the problem is dealt with together.

For me, as schools already have anti-bullying policies, we really need only to update them to include cyber-bullying. We may also need to update our definition of bullying and I would certainly welcome one from the government as the current definition is over 20 years old.

What should an anti-bullying policy have when referring to online bullying?

I think the bad news is that due to the ever-evolving nature of the Internet, a policy like this is going to have to change regularly. Right now, we have social networks like Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and others but what will come down the line later? For example, Facebook doesn’t allow children under the age of 13 have accounts yet we know that a lot of primary school children have them. I also know that Facebook are considering changing this at some point so how will we deal with this?

Another thing to take into account is access. Right now most primary schools don’t allow children to use mobile phones during school time. This is likely to change given the BYOD agenda and the fact that mobile devices are becoming wonderful learning tools. How do we, as schools, develop policies around bullying on these devices? One second-level body has banned students from taking photographs for non-school related projects an almost impossible thing to police. However, what policy is going to work here? There’s also the consideration of access – how can we control whether a child accesses their social media account from their phone in school to post something online.

**Relevance to curriculum aims: 3/5**

I would think that these books to an excellent job of totally covering the area of bullying, friends, self-esteem, friendship, decision making and feelings that are seen in the 3 strands of the SPHE curriculum. However, I really think the Early Years level may be more suited for an excellent Senior Infants but more so for an excellent 1st Class. The idea of a Junior Infant scanning the web to target victims wouldn’t really happen. The focus in these classes would usually be based around the individual child ganing social skills before branching out to the wider world. I found this with all the books, the lower books recommended for 1st and 2nd class would be great with higher end of 2nd Class, 3rd class and so on.  
Take the time to look through the books and activties online first to make sure they suit your own class.  
**Teacher useability: 5/5**

Very easy to use, the book has an easy to read introduction to bullying, moving onto cyber bullying. It explains reasons and effects of bullying, giving the teacher a starting point. Each topic is divided into a lesson plan with activities based on this. Activities have a diverse range, integrating literacy with poetry, songs and diary entries. Up to date chat room, texting and blogging genres are used, making great use of the writing genre for the older children. The activities are highly interesting and relevant to the children they are aimed at. I think the teacher will enjoy the content as well. In fact, if there was a complaint for the teacher, it might be that there is too much to cover. I’d suggest selecting an area that your own class need to cover for the year, for example, being a bystander and what to do. There’s more than enough work here to keep you going in the area of bullying, especially in the area of the web, mobile and other technology.  
**Value for money:5/5**

At €22.95, it’s great value as each book will last you from 2-4 years with a class, brilliant for multi-grade as there is plenty new material for each year.

**Extras: 5/5**

The extras are relevant and support extension work. I was really impressed with all of the extras in the book. Examples of the extras are sample teacher bullying incident reports and pupil bullying incident reports, anti-bullying pledges, merit certificates and bookmarks, sample pupil internet safety checklist and parent internet cyber safety checklist and a list of useful websites and books the teacher can use as a resource. You can also purchase the posters, A2 as a set of 6. These posters are bright, child-friendly and help reinforce the anti-cyberbullying message.

Every classroom needs these resources or should be at least exposed to a discussion of cyber bullying. The NCTE have done a huge amount of work in the area of cyberbullying with new publications in process. The Prim-Ed books will complement the Surfwise and Webwise internet resources that the NCTE developed. Cyberbullying is an awful and very damaging reality that we, as educators must address. These books will help you come to terms with what children will be dealing with.

I would have nearly awarded this “Top of the Class” anseo.net award but the placing of ages and levels was somewhat out for me, in all the books. If a school is buying a set, the teacher will be able to pick their own content but if you are buying an individual book, take care!

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# Time to act on bullying before tragedy hits primary schools, says expert

Marion Flanagan has said that there needs to be an approach involving parents, schools and the children themselves to tackle bullying.

**Aug 26th 2013, 8:11 AM 5,714 Views**[**45 Comments**](http://www.thejournal.ie/schools-cyber-bullying-ireland-1053681-Aug2013/#comments)

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*Image:*[*Boy sad in bedroom*](http://www.shutterstock.com/)*via Shutterstock*

IT IS NOT enough to say that cyber bullying is not taking place in Irish schools – and parents, teachers and pupils all need to be involved in tackling it.

That’s the view of Marion Flanagan, M Ed Aggression Studies, TCD and AntiBullying Tutor, who has warned that we need to act before tragedies hit primary schools just as they have hit secondary schools.

**Proactive**

Flanagan said that primary schools need to take a far more proactive role in combating  
cyber bullying.

She said that children as young as first class are regularly bullied and taunted via  
text, on Facebook and Moshi Monsters. She said that the pupils meting out the online abuse “often don’t realise the impact they are having or that all of their online activity leaves a fully traceable, digital fingerprint which is with them for the rest of their lives”.

“It’s not good enough anymore to say cyber bullying doesn’t happen in primary school and, therefore, schools don’t have a responsibility to tackle it,” said Flanagan. “Cyber bullying is just an extension of what can happen in the classroom or in the playground.”

Flanagan said that the impact is also potentially a lot more harmful as it can be read  
over and over again by the victim.

**Approach**

According to Flanagan, the best way to tackle cyber bullying is via a three-pronged approach, involving parents, schools and children themselves.

She said that some schools are terrific and proactive, but others “simply stick their heads in the sand”.

It’s time for us to act collectively before the tragedies which have struck several second level schools are seen at primary level.

She made her comments as the start of a new school year beckons. Flanagan recommended that every primary school in the country invests in the resource, ‘Bullying in a Cyber World’, a new [Prim-Ed Publishing publication](http://www.prim-ed.com/) for Irish primary schools.

As part of the initiative, pupils are urged to sign an anti-bullying pledge and learn how to cope with and report such unacceptable behaviour at school, online and in the wider community.

Prim-Ed’s MD Seamus McGuinness explained that the series “helps children develop a tolerance and appreciation and acceptance of similarities and differences in others”.

**Read:**[**Cyber-bullying should be a crime says rapporteur on child protection>**](http://www.thejournal.ie/cyberbullying-should-be-a-crime-says-geoffrey-shannon-988735-Jul2013/)

**Read:**[**63 per cent of people think schools should ban smartphones and social networks>**](http://www.thejournal.ie/cyberbullying-schools-survey-817050-Mar2013/)