



O₂ Child Protection
Bullying on mobile phones



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Don't Suffer in Silence

A mobile phone can be a great communications and safety tool for everyone, including children. Unfortunately, some bullies are now using mobile phones to send threatening and unpleasant text messages, and picture messages, either directly to their victims or to spread malicious rumours. This is not harmless. All bullying is bad. Bullying is never your choice and is not your fault.

Mobile phones are a popular choice for bullies. They provide bullies with the means of taunting their target at any time with little fear of being caught. They believe text messages provide complete anonymity. Many pay-as-you-go mobile phones can be bought easily without proof of identity. In some cases no record is kept of the new owner. The owners of these types of mobile phone can be difficult to trace, but the calls can be traced.

What can you do?

Don't respond, but don't ignore it

- Don't reply to text messages or picture messages that you don't want to receive.
- Be careful who you give phone numbers to and don't leave your mobile where someone can see the number if you are not there.
- Keep a note of the times and dates of abusive messages and always tell a parent, teacher or the Gardai.
- Don't send a message to someone when you are angry or upset – always wait until you have calmed down and had time to think.
- Turn your phone off sometimes; it doesn't have to be switched on all the time.
- Don't leave your name on your voicemail as this confirms to the bullies whose phone they are calling when you have it switched off.
- It may be a nuisance but if the bullying gets out of control, get a new phone number (your operator will be able to offer more advice on this, and may provide a new number for free) and give the number only to close family. Give the number to only one person at a time and keep a careful log of who you've given it to and when.

Who to contact

For help, contact your mobile operator's customer service departments.

O ₂ – Prepay	1747
O ₂ – Pay Monthly	1900

Don't forget: the law is on your side

Bullying by mobile phone is very similar to stalking and can be a criminal offence. The relevant legal provisions are section 10 of the Non-Fatal Offences against the Person Act, 1997 and Section 13 of the Post Office Act, 1951 (as amended). The position in the law is that:

"a person who sends by means of a telecommunications system, any message or other matter which is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character, or sends by those means, for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience, or needless anxiety to another, a message which he knows to be false or persistently makes use of those means for that purpose, shall be guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding twelve months, or a fine or both"

Someone guilty of harassment is liable to a maximum penalty of seven years in prison or a fine, or both.