The below is from the website

Dealing with online harassment & bullying

There are many forms of online harassment, and many names used to describe these types of harassment, including cyber bullying, trolling, flaming, doxing, outing and fraping. Regardless of the approach, the perpetrators use personal information, abusive messaging or bullying behaviour to cause you emotional distress. Social media is typically the platform of choice for perpetrators and they tend to hide behind fake profiles - or hacked profiles - to target victims.

Online harassment & bullying - Do this first!

There are some important steps to take right at the beginning of the harassment:

1. **Document everything** - Keep a copy of all instances of online harassment - either take a screenshot or print the pages. Try to get the messages as well as the profile pages the abuse is coming from. This will be useful evidence for the police or social media platforms if the harassment escalates. It also ensures you have a copy if the perpetrator deletes their posts and profile.

2. **Report it to the police** - The police take online harassment reports seriously and they have lots of experience investigating them. Report the abuse early to the police either directly or through a report service such as www.report-it.org.uk. If you feel there is any immediate threat to your personal safety dial 999.

3. **Focus on your online security** - As the perpetrator collects more and more information about you it is common that they may try and gain access to your accounts such as social media and email. Having strong passwords and turning on two-factor authentication is key, but there is lots of good advice at Get Safe Online. It is also worth reviewing what personal information exists about you online and trying to remove as much as possible. For example Google yourself and see if you can find your address, phone number or places where you regularly spend time.

4. **Remember it is not your fault** - Perpetrators of online abuse can be people you know or complete strangers. Due to emotional and mental health issues these individuals spent time trying to wind people up and cause distress. It is not your fault. Speak to someone close to you about the abuse and contact a specialist victim support charity if you want expert emotional support.

Approaches to dealing with online harassment

While there are some loose guidelines for dealing with perpetrators of online abuse each case is different. Try the following steps and monitor progress over time.

1. **Try not to engage** - Like most bullies, perpetrators of online abuse are in it to get a reaction and see evidence they are causing harm. Don't play into their hands and get into a fight online. Simply ignore the comments and there is a chance the individual will move on to another target.

2. **Avoid deleting content, unless it includes personal or sensitive information** - Deleting comments shows that they have been read and often prompts the abuser to post more frequent and more harmful abuse. People who read the comments - from your family to complete strangers - will spot the comments for what they are and ignore them. However, if the comments include personal information (such as contact details) or sensitive images that you don't want online then delete immediately.

3. **Report the abuse to the social media or communication platform** - Almost all social media and communication platforms now have a way you can report online abuse. Each platform takes different courses of action, but all will take the abuse seriously and help you resolve. If you do not get a good response from the platform report it to Report Harmful Content who will support.

4. **Block the offending accounts** - If the perpetrator is persistent then block the social media, email and instant messaging accounts used. There is a chance that the perpetrator will create new profiles and continue the abuse, but simply report and block again.

5. **If you feel the need to respond, stick to the facts** - Don't get emotional and get into an online argument. State your case in facts and move on.

If you are being bullied

- **Know it is not your fault** - Nobody deserves to be bullied. Somebody being repeatedly cruel to you is a result of the bullies own personal ssues. Know that it is not your fault.

- **Reach out for help** - Especially if the behaviour's really getting to you. You deserve backup. See if there's someone who can listen, help you process what's going on and work through it – a friend, relative or maybe an adult you trust.

- **Don't respond or retaliate** - Sometimes a reaction is exactly what aggressors are looking for because they think it gives them power over you, and you don't want to empower a bully. As for retaliating, getting back at a bully turns you into one – and can turn one mean act into a chain reaction. If you can, remove yourself from the situation. If you can't, sometimes humour disarms or distracts a person from bullying.

- **Tell the person to stop** - This is completely up to you – don't do it if you don't feel totally comfortable doing it, because you need to make your position completely clear that you will not stand for this treatment any more. You may need to practice beforehand with someone you trust, like a parent or good friend.

- **Use the tools you have available** - Most social media apps and services allow you to block the person. Whether the harassment is in an app, texting, comments or tagged photos, do yourself a favour and block the person. You can also report the problem to the service. That probably won't end it, but you don't need the harassment in your face, and you'll be less tempted to respond.

Bullying: Advice for parents & carers

Each case of cyber bullying is different and all should be taken seriously. The following advice may help:

- **Let them talk** - Give them the space to share what they want to in their way and listen. Try to avoid the temptation to interrupt because you know what's going on, prompt if necessary but let them do most of the talking. If there's one sure way to put a child off seeking help, it's making them feel embarrassed or ashamed about why they're asking for help. Times change and some of the things young people do today may make us cringe sometimes, but the inherent behaviour is the same as it was when we were their age.

- **Don't deny access to technology** - When we speak to young people about barriers to getting help they often share that they are worried that their device may be taken away from them. Reassure them that this won't happen if they speak up about something that has been worrying them online.

- **Talk to their school** - Schools play a vital role in the resolution of abusive online behaviours. They have a plethora of effective tools such as **the Enable anti-bullying toolkit**. They have anti-bullying and behavioural policies in place in order to provide a duty of care to all who attend. As such, they will want to know about any incidences that could potentially affect a child's wellbeing. Take the evidence of bullying and any additional details about the context of the situation and length of time it has been going on for. It is helpful to discuss this with your child and you may want to speak to the school together.

- **Contact the police if you fear for their safety** - If you think that your child is in immediate danger don't hesitate to call the police. Equally, if there is a direct threat of violence or harm within any conversation then you may also wish to contact your local police for support.

Tap into expert bullying support

There are a number of UK organisations who specialise in supporting bullying victims. Consider working with one of the following organisations to get the help and support you need.

- Bullying UK
- Childline
- Anti-bullying Alliance
- The Cyber Smile Foundation

If you would like more support with regard to online safety please do contact the above or report any incidents to the Designated Safeguarding Lead Mrs German mgerman@bwsgirls.org