THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Safeguarding: Cyberstalking

Key definitions:

Cyberstalking: The use of the internet, email, social media, or other electronic communication to harass, threaten, or intimidate an individual or group. It often involves repeated and persistent behaviour intended to cause fear or distress.

Online Harassment: Any unwanted, aggressive behaviour conducted through digital platforms, including sending abusive messages, posting harmful content, or spreading false information.

Doxxing: The act of publicly revealing private or identifying information about an individual without their consent, often with malicious intent.

Cyberbullying: A form of bullying that takes place over digital devices and platforms, involving repeated hostile behaviour intended to harm or humiliate.

Impersonation: Creating fake profiles or accounts to pose as someone else online, often to damage their reputation or gain access to personal information.

Trolling: Deliberately posting inflammatory or offensive content online to provoke emotional responses or disrupt conversations.

Catfishing: Using a fake identity online to deceive others, often for personal or financial gain, or to manipulate relationships.

Surveillance/Monitoring: Tracking someone's online activity without consent, which can include monitoring social media posts, emails, or location data.

Key Statistics

- 1 in 10 young people in the UK have been stalked online, and 1 in 5 have experienced stalking or harassment overall (Suzy Lamplugh Trust).
- Cyberstalking prevalence among 16–24-year-olds is around 2.4%, higher than the general population average (CSEW data).

- In 2024, UK police recorded 8,365 cyberstalking offences, with perpetrators as young as 10 years old and many victims under 14.
- For over 40% of victims, cyberstalking lasted more than two years, showing its persistence and long-term impact.

Key signs to look out for

- Anxiety around devices or notifications.
- Avoids social media or online activity.
- Changes in routine or avoids school/social events.
- Secretive about online use or hides screens.
- Persistent unwanted contact from unknown individuals.
- Expresses fear or feeling watched.
- Stress-related symptoms like poor sleep or declining grades.

What might this look like in church life?

- Excessive messaging by a peer or adult.
- Monitoring attendance or location: someone tracking when the young person attends services, youth groups, or church events and commenting on it online.
- Unwanted contact: persistent friend requests and/or messages.
- Overly personal questions or comments: messages that go beyond spiritual guidance into personal life, appearance, or relationships.
- Isolation attempts: encouraging the young person to leave group chats and communicate privately, or discouraging them from attending group activities.

How to respond if a young person discloses cyberstalking

- Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse | The Church of England
- Reporting Safeguarding Concerns and Allegations | The Church of England

Always follow your diocese's safeguarding procedures and the Church of England safeguarding e-manual. When in doubt, seek advice from the DSO rather than trying to resolve the situation alone.

Key messages for children and young people

- It's not your fault – if someone is making you feel scared or uncomfortable online, you are not to blame.
- Tell someone you trust – speak to a parent, carer, teacher, or youth leader straight away.
- Do not respond to the stalker – engaging can make things worse; block and report instead.
- Keep evidence – save messages, screenshots, and any details that can help adults or authorities.
- Use privacy settings – make social media accounts private and avoid sharing personal information.
- You have the right to feel safe online – stalking is a crime, and help is available.

Further information & up-to-date guidance

Church of England resources:

- Safeguarding e-manual
- National safeguarding training portal

UK Government / UKCIS guidance:

- UKCIS – Education for a Connected World & Online Safety Guidance
- Police UK – Protection from Online Stalking and Harassment
- CPS – Stalking or Harassment Guidance

NSPCC & specialist services:

- NSPCC – Keeping Children Safe Online
- Suzy Lamplugh Trust – Cyberstalking

- The Cyber Helpline – How to Report Cyberstalking
- CEOP Safety Centre
- Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) – Resources
- Childline – Bullying and Cyberbullying

