

If you feel that you are being harassed by someone in person or on social media this note sets out some steps you can take to protect yourself and limit the damage to you, your family and/or your Club.

Face to face social interaction which is not invited or wanted and antisocial behaviour towards you can very often develop online also. This note focusses on what you should do in those circumstances but the principles relating to harassment apply whether the behaviour is in person or online.

Nobody is immune to antisocial behaviour in person or over the Internet or via a mobile device. Individuals, clubs and organisations may be susceptible to cyberbullying which targets an individual or an organisation with attacks or abuse, using technology, which is intended to cause harm to stress or personal loss to the victim.

If someone has posted false or malicious things about you on the Internet or on a social networking site, it may be regarded as harassment. **Harassment, on or offline, is a crime.** For harassment to occur there must be a clear course of conduct. Whilst legislation is changing all the time to tackle the problem you may be able to rely upon existing legislation such as:

- The Protection from Harassment Act 1977
- The Malicious Communications Act 1988
- The Communications Act 2003
- Obscene Publications Act 1959

If your concerns are online then report your concerns to the social network that was used. They should have processes in place for such situations and may be able to simply remove the content or even close down the account. If this is unsuccessful then take legal advice from an expert in this area or report the matter to the police if you think that a crime may have been committed against you. Reporting harassment to the police is nearly always worth a try especially if there are sexual or racial slurs made against you. The police will give you a crime reference number. Depending on your case the police might agree to pay a visit to your harasser's home to speak to them and then consider whether to issue a harassment warning. **Report your concerns early.**

If a criminal offence has not occurred or the police do not press charges you should then consider acting directly against your harasser. You could send a solicitor's letter to stop the harassment against you but if you do make sure you instruct a solicitor who understands how the internet and social media works. Typically, such a letter is aimed to stop harassment and may demand the harasser cease-and-desist their activities, remove and delete offensive posts and provide your solicitor with an undertaking to stop. If this is unsuccessful you could even consider taking your harasser to court although this could be expensive.

In all these situations it is important that you collect evidence as the offensive posts or activities may be subsequently removed. Very often the statements made against you may be defamatory also or they constitute a malicious falsehood against you. In both situations you may be able to threaten and take legal action.

There are however practical steps that you can take to protect yourself. Unplug from technology. Take a break from your smart phone, computer, tablet. Leave the social media site. Do not respond to messages or posts as very often this is exactly what your harasser wants. Block their email address, cell phone number and delete them from social media contacts. Report their activities to the internet service provider or to the social media website that they used to target you. The chat forum may have a regulator in which case contact the regulator direct. Do not seek revenge as you could inadvertently escalate the problem or you could even become a cyber bully yourself. That would only make the problem worse and could result in serious legal consequences for you.

It is important that you take steps to protect yourself if you can. Whilst third parties and regulators will often try and support you they may be powerless to protect you or their involvement could make the situation worse.

Whilst nobody can condone abusive behaviour online or it is sometimes the case that the perpetrator has the misguided belief that they are expressing a right to free speech and are not aware that what they are actually doing is committing a crime or exposing themselves to potential legal action. Put them right.

Unwanted abuse in person and on social media can be very distressing and can affect your mental health. If you are worried about the impact on your health you should also seek medical advice immediately.