WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING ONLINE ABUSE

This guide is designed to help you with quick, simple actions you can take if you are currently experiencing online abuse. Online abuse is serious and however you are feeling about it is valid, whether that is angry, anxious, worried, scared or any combination of these. These emotions can be overwhelming and can sometimes make it difficult to know what to do in the moment - we at Glitch hope that this guide will provide you with some direction if you are currently experiencing online abuse.

1,800,000

people in the UK suffered threatening behaviour online in the past year.

Data from YouGov survey in Spring 2021 of 4,000 people.

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PUT YOURSELF FIRST

Online abuse is traumatising, difficult and often poorly understood by law enforcement. Current reporting methods to both law enforcement and tech companies require you to prove that you are experiencing online abuse and that the experience is serious and harmful. It can be a difficult, frustrating and emotional experience.
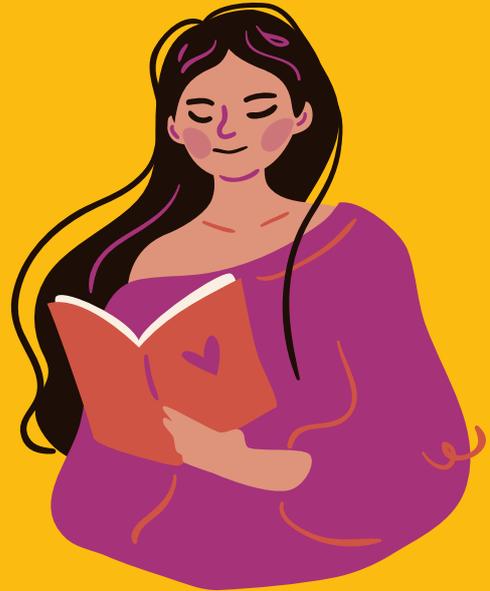
If you are finding documenting online abuse, reporting it or following any other recommendations difficult:

- Ask friends and family for support when documenting and reporting abuse

- Reach out to your community, reach out to professional support

- Take a break whenever you need it and make a note of the things that make you feel good so you can easily reference them when required.

DOCUMENT

Documenting online abuse helps you to provide evidence to social media companies, authorities and other organisations that provide support. It helps you to understand how online abuse is impacting you and whether there are any patterns in the abuse you are experiencing. It empowers you to take action if you decide to.

We have an in-depth guide on how to do this here and a template for you to use here. When documenting the abuse it's important to capture if you know the perpetrator, and how it has made you feel. As documenting online abuse involves reading the abuse again to take screenshots, it can be difficult - think about asking a trusted friend or family member to help you with gathering evidence.

If you are experiencing a huge number of abusive comments or messages, it is still important to document it as much as you can to demonstrate the serious impact that it is having. In this case, ensure you are recording how the huge amount of abuse is making you feel and make a folder with screenshots of as much of it as you can.

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BLOCK & REPORT

To prevent further harm, block the perpetrators of the abuse and report them to the social media platform or email host. Blocking users will stop abusers from seeing your posts.
Most social media platforms have an easy-to-use block function.
All platforms have report functions too. Encourage others to help you report the abuse - the more reports a post receives, the more likely the user or post will be removed.

They can be found here:

Twitter
Facebook
Snapchat
WhatsApp
YouTube
Instagram

SAFETY CHECK-IN

Unfortunately, online abuse can be linked to offline abuse and therefore it's important to check-in and think about your safety and if you need to take steps to be safer.

- Has the person made threats to you? Do they include details? If someone is naming you personally, or giving specific dates or times to when they might take action, this could mean they are more likely to take this action. If this is happening, consider talking to the Police, your family and friends, your employers and other people in your life that you feel need to know what is going on.

- Do they discuss personal details of your life? This could mean they are more likely to take action. Stalking behaviour is something that the police can take action on.

- Is the same person harassing you repeatedly? If you know this person you may be able to look at a restraining order, or reporting for stalking.

- Is the abuse escalating? If the abuse you are experiencing begins to escalate then it's important to take action before it gets too much worse. Ensure you are talking to your friends and family and that you are documenting and reporting incidents of online abuse.

In all cases, make sure you aren't sharing your location on social media or any other online platform. Where possible, never tag your location in a post whilst you are still there and never take photos that reveal where your home is/the home of family members etc.

Consider taking action on this:

- Use a VPN
- Use a Private Account
- Restrict access to your account

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CALL ON YOUR COMMUNITY

Online abuse can be a very isolating experience. Talk to both your online and offline communities about what is going on, and ask for their help (whatever you might need). This could be:

- Helping to block and report abusers and documenting the abuse.
- Someone to talk to or go for a walk with.
- Talk about your boundaries in online spaces - what is it OK for them to share? What isn't it OK for them to share?
- Talk to someone about what comforts you best when you are feeling down or low and make plans to do those things.
- Can they help share your posts online in a positive way to change the negative discourse online?
- Do you need help with life admin? Cooking/cleaning/childcare - this can help you to focus on looking after yourself and your wellbeing.

TAKE A STEP AWAY

When things feel overwhelming in online spaces it's OK to step away and take a break from your social media or internet platforms. The instant and fast nature of social media can make it feel difficult to step away, but when things are difficult it is important to step back.

Think about drafting posts to send automatically using a social media scheduling platform if you need to stay visible online. This means your social media pages will stay active without you needing to be actively using them.

You can deactivate most social media accounts through their settings pages

You can also download a digital wellbeing app to limit the time you spend on the apps where you are receiving abuse. These apps stop you opening other apps after a certain amount of time spent on it per day, or after a certain time in the day.

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WHERE CAN I REPORT ONLINE ABUSE?

There are plenty of places to report online abuse - think about what you are most comfortable with.

If you feel your physical safety is at risk please report the abuse to the police, explaining why you fear for your safety.

WHO SHOULD I TALK TO?

Other places to go:

- Friends and family
- Your employer/manager
- Your school, parent or guardian
- Stop Hate UK
- Support networks e.g. LGBT+ networks, networks for Black women, networks within your religious community
- The Samaritans helpline is available to everyone, call 116 123 if you need to talk to someone.