

## **NSPCC case studies**

### **Case study 1: Megan's story**

#### **Summary**

Cyberbullying and physical bullying at the hands of her peers led to Megan self-harming, suffering from anxiety and not eating properly. So when she moved secondary schools at the end of Year 9, aged 13, she thought it was a chance to start over again. She quickly made friends and was added to people's social media accounts.

But her whole world was turned upside down after a boy she had been messaging asked her to send a naked image of herself. Within 24 hours of sending the photo on Snapchat most of the school had seen it and she was being bullied as a result.

She credits Childline with saving her life on several occasions.

#### **Full case study**

I had a very happy childhood but when I went to secondary school things went downhill. A group of about five girls I was friends with in Year 8 when I was 12 years old, literally turned on me overnight. They sent horrible text messages then it escalated to online bullying via apps as such as Facebook. The whole school year seemed to get involved and then a boy started physically bullying me.

My sister and my mum knew about the bullying and that I was suffering from anxiety and not eating properly as a result. What they didn't know was that I was self-harming. To help me cope I often visited the Childline website and chatted to online counsellors.

After about a year of bullying my parents eventually found out about me self-harming and got me help.

It was while I was seeing a child psychiatrist and undergoing cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) that I told them I couldn't deal with the bullying anymore. So at the end of Year 9, aged 13, I moved schools.

My first day was nerve-racking but everyone was really nice and there was a frenzy of people adding me on social media so we could keep in contact over the summer.

I ended up adding a boy who was a year above me to my social media accounts. I had never spoken to him but we would smile at each other in the corridors. After the summer break, he started texting me and messaging me on Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. He was the first boy who had shown any interest in me before and I was flattered.

We were messaging constantly for about two weeks. Then one night he asked me if I would send him a picture of myself naked. I said no. For four days it was just constant pressure. He said he was going to tell everybody I was frigid if I didn't do it. I had only been at the school four weeks and I was desperate to be liked and to fit in so in the end I sent him a full image of me naked via Snapchat.

I could see he had opened it and there was no sign to say a screenshot had been taken of it, which was a relief. About an hour later a message appeared. When I opened it it was a photo of a girl in my year group with the words 'Haha I've got you'.

She kept calling me but I didn't answer. Then she messaged me saying if I didn't answer my phone she was going to show it to everyone. It turned out that she had taken a photo of the

image I had sent on her phone and had been using the boy's mobile phone and social media accounts to communicate with me. I panicked and turned my phone off thinking it would go away.

The next morning I had loads of text messages. I ignored them and went to school but as soon as I arrived people started crowding round me holding up their phones with the photo of me on the screen and print-outs of it. During lessons I had stuff thrown at my head with the words 'slut', 'whore', 'slag', 'prostitute', and 'stripper' written on them. It was my best friend who convinced me to tell my tutor what had happened. Unfortunately I was made to feel that I was the one in the wrong because I had sent the image. Mental health-wise I was back to square one – I started self-harming again, not eating properly and isolating myself.

Once again I turned to Childline to help me cope with my emotions. I truly believe if it wasn't for Childline I wouldn't be here today because there were a couple of times when I felt I was on the verge of taking my own life.

Life is good now. I got good GCSE and A level grades and I'm now at university studying for a degree in journalism.

Despite reporting the photo to Snapchat and the police it was never retrieved and I still worry it could resurface later. To help raise awareness of sexting – sharing sexual, naked or semi naked images or videos with others – I give talks about my ordeal at schools, charity and government events and police training sessions to help them understand how best to handle cases similar to mine. Even if I can help just one person through everything that I do then it's worth it.

## **Case study 2: Eleanor's story**

### **Summary**

Eleanor was 14 when her boyfriend asked her to send explicit photographs. She agreed to send him three nude pictures, having been lured into a false sense of security by Snapchat's disappearing photos function. After the relationship ended he turned everyone against her; Eleanor was ostracised at school and her mental health deteriorated. Her hair started falling out and she was diagnosed with stress, anxiety and school-phobia. The bullying was so bad her parents moved her to a private school and things turned around, until her ex-boyfriend shared the explicit photographs online. Eleanor spent two months desperately trying to ignore the problem and hoping it would go away while the photos were in full circulation. She eventually reported it to NCA-CEOP who contacted her school, who in turn contacted her parents and advised them to call the police. They reported it to the police, and arrests were made but no charges were brought. Eleanor has had a lot of counselling and is rebuilding her life.