Online Abuse, Cyber-bullying and Cyberstalking:

As technology gets more advanced and constantly becomes a bigger part of our lives, online abuse and cyber-bullying also become more and more prevalent. Cyber-bullying is commonly known to happen amongst the younger generations, however it doesn’t only take place between children; it happens amongst adults too. Cyber-bullying between adults may be referred to as cyberstalking.

Cyberstalking is, in a nutshell, online stalking and harassment. This is where various technologies (such as email, instant messaging, phone calls and social networks) are used to harass somebody. This harassment may include things such as false accusations, monitoring, threats, identity theft, and data destruction or manipulation. These activities are usually unwanted, repeated, and often obsessive and illegal. The perpetrators may be strangers, but they are often somebody that the victim knows; such as an ex, former friend, a colleague or even just an acquaintance.

Cyberstalking can result in serious personal issues. People who experience it are more likely to:

- Use alcohol and drugs
- Skip work
- Experience in-person bullying
- Have a lower self-esteem
- Have more health problems
- Experience negative feelings such as anger, depression, frustration and fear
- Isolate themselves from friends and activities

There are various ways to keep you safe from cyberstalking. There are also a number of steps that can be taken if cyberstalking is a problem.
Dealing with Cyberstalking:

If you find yourself in a situation where you are experiencing some form of cyberbullying, cyberstalking or online harassment, there are a number of steps which you can take to help remedy the problem.

Steps to take immediately:

- Don’t respond or forward cyberbullying messages
- Keep the evidence – record and save the date, time and description of the occurrence. It’s also useful to print or save emails, messages or screen-shots.
- Block the person who is doing the cyberbullying

Report Cyberbullying to Service Providers:

- Cyberbullying usually violates the terms of service of social media sites and service providers. Review these terms and conditions or rights and responsibility sections in order to establish their stand on appropriate/inappropriate content.
- Visit safety centres on social networks in order to change settings which control who can and can’t contact you and block the unwanted person.
- Report the cyberbullying to the service provider so that they can take action against users abusing the terms and conditions of the site.

Report Cyberbullying to Law Enforcement:

- When cyberbullying involves any of the following, it is considered a crime and should be reported to law enforcement:
  - Threats of violence
  - Child pornography
  - Unwanted sexually explicit messages, photographs or videos
  - Taking photographs or videos of someone in a place where they would expect privacy
  - Stalking and hate crime

Report Cyberbullying to Employers:

- Cyberbullying can be a very destructive and creates a disruptive environment at work. If this is happening someone who is able to help in preventing and responding to such incidents needs to be informed of such incidents.” This may be your employer, your supervisor or your manager.
Online Safety - Preventing Cyber Violence:

There are a number of steps which can be taken in order to protect yourself online and to prevent cyber violence;

- Maintain vigilance over access to web-enabled devices such as computers and cell phones.
- Make sure that you log out of any computer programmes or websites when you leave your computer unattended. It’s also advisable to use a screensaver with a password; this applies to cell phones too.
- It is important to practice good password management and security, such as never sharing your password with others and changing it frequently.
- Do an occasional online search for your name and your family members in order to see what is available about you online, making sure to check social networks too. Immediately delete anything private or inappropriate.
- Delete or make private any online calendars or itineraries where you have listed event that you plan on attending – these may indicate to any potential stalker where you plan on being and when.
- Use privacy settings on your online accounts and profiles to limit what you share with those outside of your trusted circle. These settings can also be used to block people who you don’t want to have access to your account.
- Use good, up-to-date security software to prevent someone from getting spyware onto your computer. vi
- Don’t give out information online simply because it has been requested. When a website requests personal information, give as little as possible, and if they insist on information that doesn’t seem justified, do not provide it.
- Don’t allow yourself to be drawn into conflict, such as defending yourself against personal attacks. Responding to a harasser may prompt them to continue and make things even worse, while ignoring them may result in them leaving you alone.
- Be cautious about the pictures and personal information that you post anywhere online. Remember that once something is online it is often impossible to completely remove it.
- Instant message providers have a safety feature in which you can block all messages that come from people that are not on your friends list, preventing people from outside your circle contacting you. vii This can be found in your privacy settings; or if you are unsure on how to do this, contact the service provider.
1 http://za.norton.com/cyberstalking/article
3 http://msmagazine.com/blog/2013/02/08/students-speak-out-5-ways-to-stop-online-harassment/
4 http://www.cyberarmy.in/2010/12/cyber-stalking-online-harassment-or.html
6 http://za.norton.com/cyberstalking/article
7 http://www.haltabuse.org
8 http://www.cyberarmy.in/2010/12/cyber-stalking-online-harassment-or.html