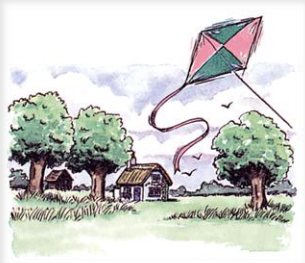


Handling Online Abuse and Intimidation



Miranda Smythe
The Baikie-Wood Consultancy Ltd



Local
Government
Association

#DebateNotHate
Civility in Public Life

Programme overview

- The context
- Setting up social media and instant messaging
- Legislation and rights
- Harassment and threatening messages
- Defamation
- Trolls
- Being a responsible digital citizen.





[@Hacked_Beast \(@officer_jack\)](#) · Jul 13



Replying to [@HackneyAbbott](#)

this **fat** retarded black **bitch** thinks you should be forced to feed and house a bunch of violence foreign invaders. i strongly disagree.



[@Hacked_Beast \(@officer_jack\)](#) · Jul 13



[@HackneyAbbott](#) Piss off you disgusting useless **fat bitch**! You're a parasite alien looking to silence native people for your power.



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If I was a fetus and knew my mother was going to be **Nicola Sturgeon** I'd self-abort too.

Telegraph Politics [@TelePolitics](#)

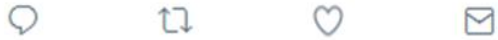
Nicola Sturgeon: I disclosed miscarriage to challenge assumptions about childless female leaders [telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/0...](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/0...)


  1  3 

 **unfollowed_tweet (@unfollowed_tweet)** · Jul 13
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Telegraph Politics [@TelePolitics](#)
Nicola Sturgeon: I disclosed miscarriage to challenge assumptions about childless female leaders [telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/0...](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/0...)



Here for a quick swim tonight and to make sure that there wasn't no English people trying to cross the channel



 [@HackneyAbbott](#) · Jul 13
Replying to [@HackneyAbbott](#)
this **fat** retarded black **bitch** thinks you should be forced to feed and house a bunch of violence foreign invaders. i strongly disagree.

 [@HackneyAbbott](#) · Jul 13
[@HackneyAbbott](#) Piss off you disgusting useless **fat bitch!** You're a parasite alien looking to silence native people for your power.

POLITE REMINDER:-

This is the first time I've been under this level of public scrutiny and I have to say I'm shocked!

If people have questions about my politics, discuss with me. If you don't agree with my reply then challenge me. I'm more than willing to engage in political conversation so let's have that debate. This is acceptable.

What is NOT ACCEPTABLE is flooding me with messages about what sexual acts I'm prepared to perform to get votes, what bra size I am, how many votes needed for me to strip and comments suggesting the reason I'm standing is to sleep with an Oxford grad 😏

I've been debating ignoring it but this behaviour is disgusting and needs calling out!!!

I highly doubt you'll be asking the male candidates their penis size in order to make a decision about their politics..... sexism is not okay.

#justsaying #callitout #everydaysexism #youngvoice #womeninpolitics

 [@NicolaSturgeon](#) · Jul 13
If I was a fetus and knew my mother was going to be **Nicola Sturgeon** I'd self-abort too.

Telegraph Politics [@TelePolitics](#)
Nicola Sturgeon: I disclosed miscarriage to challenge assumptions about childless female leaders [telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/0...](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/0...)



Why online abuse is such a challenge

- Persistent and unremitting
- Easier for people to be abusive
- Can permeate all areas of life
- Reaches a wide audience
- Can leave a permanent footprint
- Personal impact can be major.



Social media



Sharing



Learning



Interacting



Marketing

Social media and instant messaging



Online behaviour...



- Trolling and flame baiting
- Doxxing
- Swatting
- Creeping
- Message bombing.



Hey @o2 - please get your SMS working! I sent this girl 246 texts last night asking her out and none of her replies have come through yet...

Details

14 Dec



O2 in the UK ✓

@O2



Follow

@ [redacted] Hi James, that's a lot of texts! Maybe next time you should try sending 1 text to 246 different girls...

Lay out your rules of engagement

Rules of engagement

Welcome to my page, which aims to communicate my activities as a councillor.

If you wish to be a part of this online community, you must agree to abide by this code of digital engagement, which is designed to keep everyone safe.

RULE 1
Debate and disagreement are welcome on this page, but only if expressed with courtesy, respect and politeness.

RULE 2
Posts should not contain abuse, harassment, intimidation or threats of any form.

RULE 3
Posts should not contain any form of discrimination - including racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia or religious intolerance.

RULE 4
Posts should not spread false or unverified information.

RULE 5
For transparency reasons, users should not post anonymously.

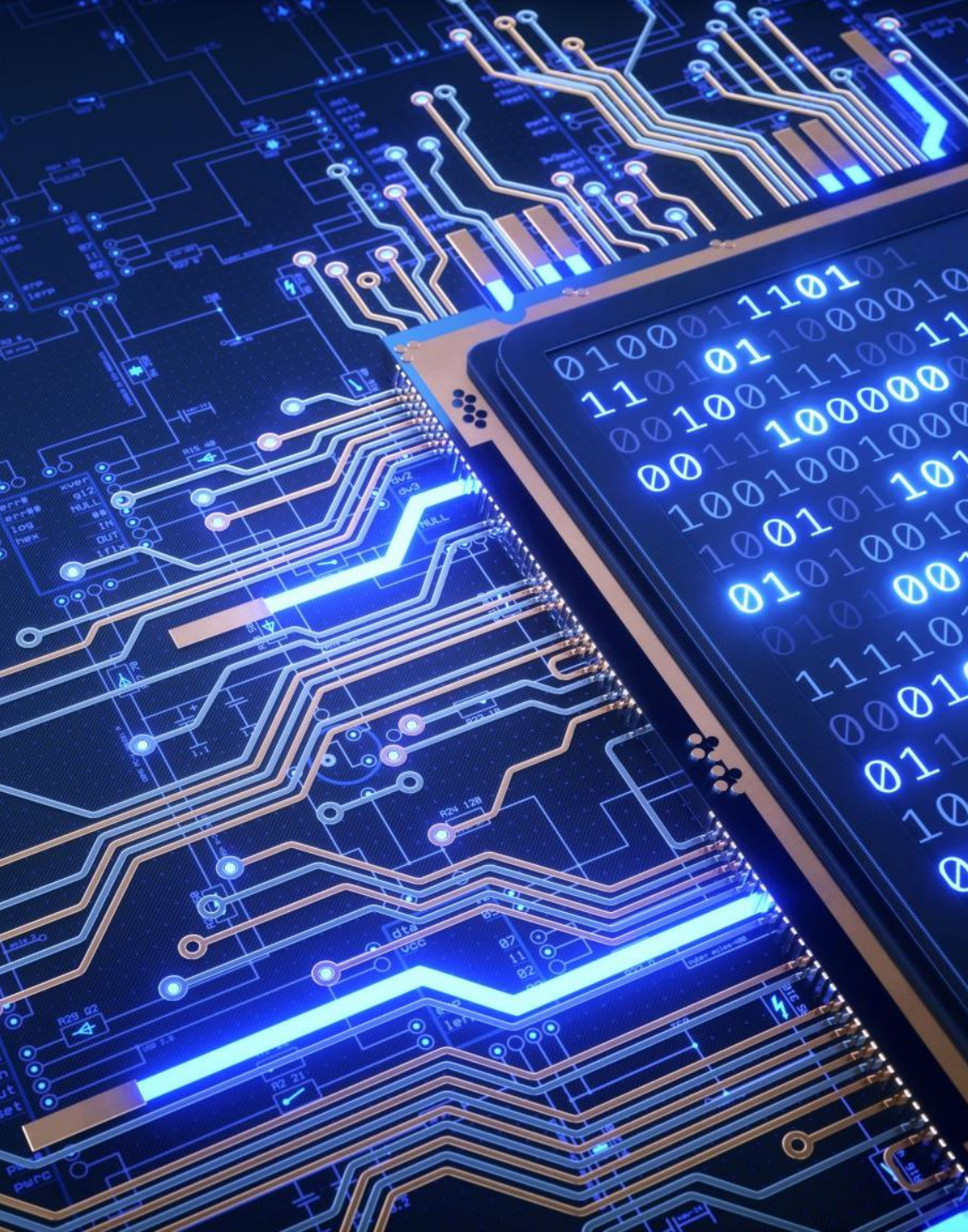
If any of these rules are broken, page admins reserve the right to delete posts, block users and report content to the police if necessary.

It may not be possible to respond to all queries on this page due to time constraints - if you have specific enquiries or casework, please send directly to my official email.

Local Government Association | CILIC/MLCA | nilga | COSLA

For more information on the LGA's work on handling abuse on social media and digital citizenship visit: www.local.gov.uk/civility-public-life

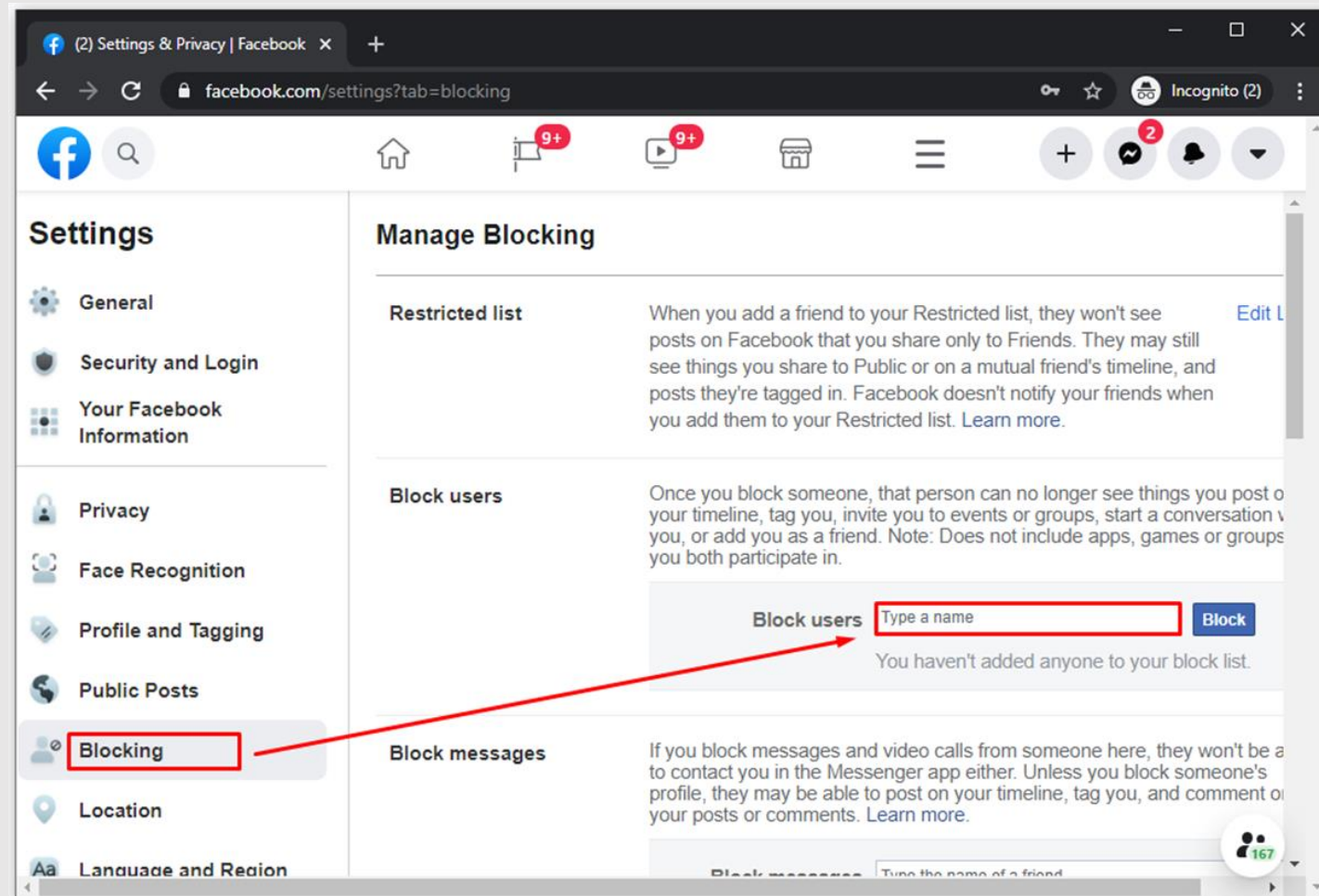
REF 43.4



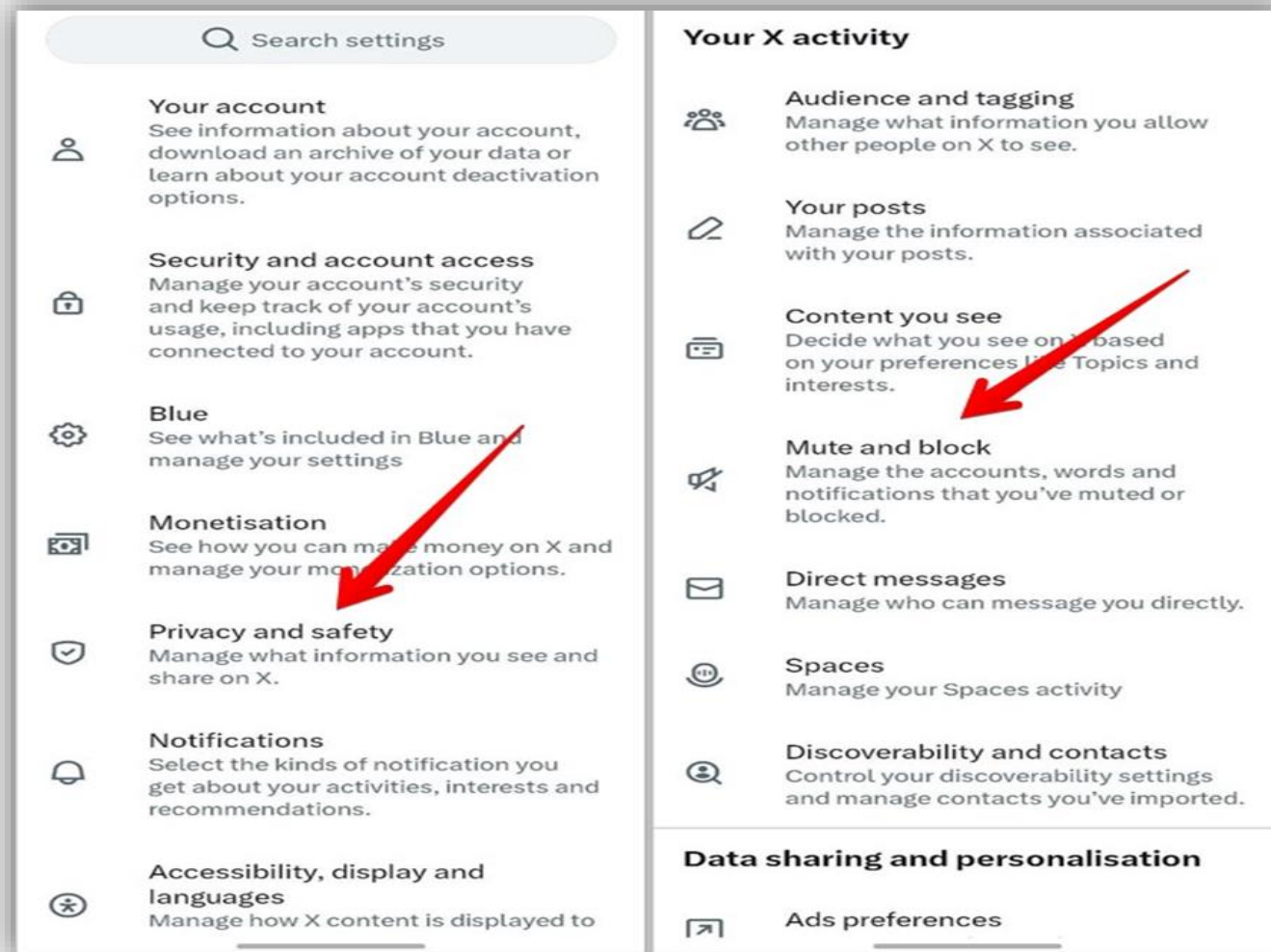
Facebook Self-moderating tools

- Hide
- Mute
- Delete
- Limit who can comment on a post
- Turn off comments
- Report
- Block.

Facebook – blocking feature



X: Privacy, Mute and Block



X Response to a report of abusive behaviour

You submitted a report for abusive behavior

[View Rule](#)



May I be the first to say, tough shit Sivier you snivelling little turd. And to all those mugs who donated towards the £233,830 fundraiser he siphoned from you gullible fools, tough shit to you all too. Have a really shitty day.

Hide



VIOLATION FOUND

We locked @ [redacted] account for breaking our abusive behavior rule. We found they broke our abusive behavior rule through different reports we received about their behavior.

They can't Tweet, Retweet, or Like content, and we'll ask them to remove the reported content if they want to regain full access to their account.

Facebook and X: Profanity and X Muting Tools

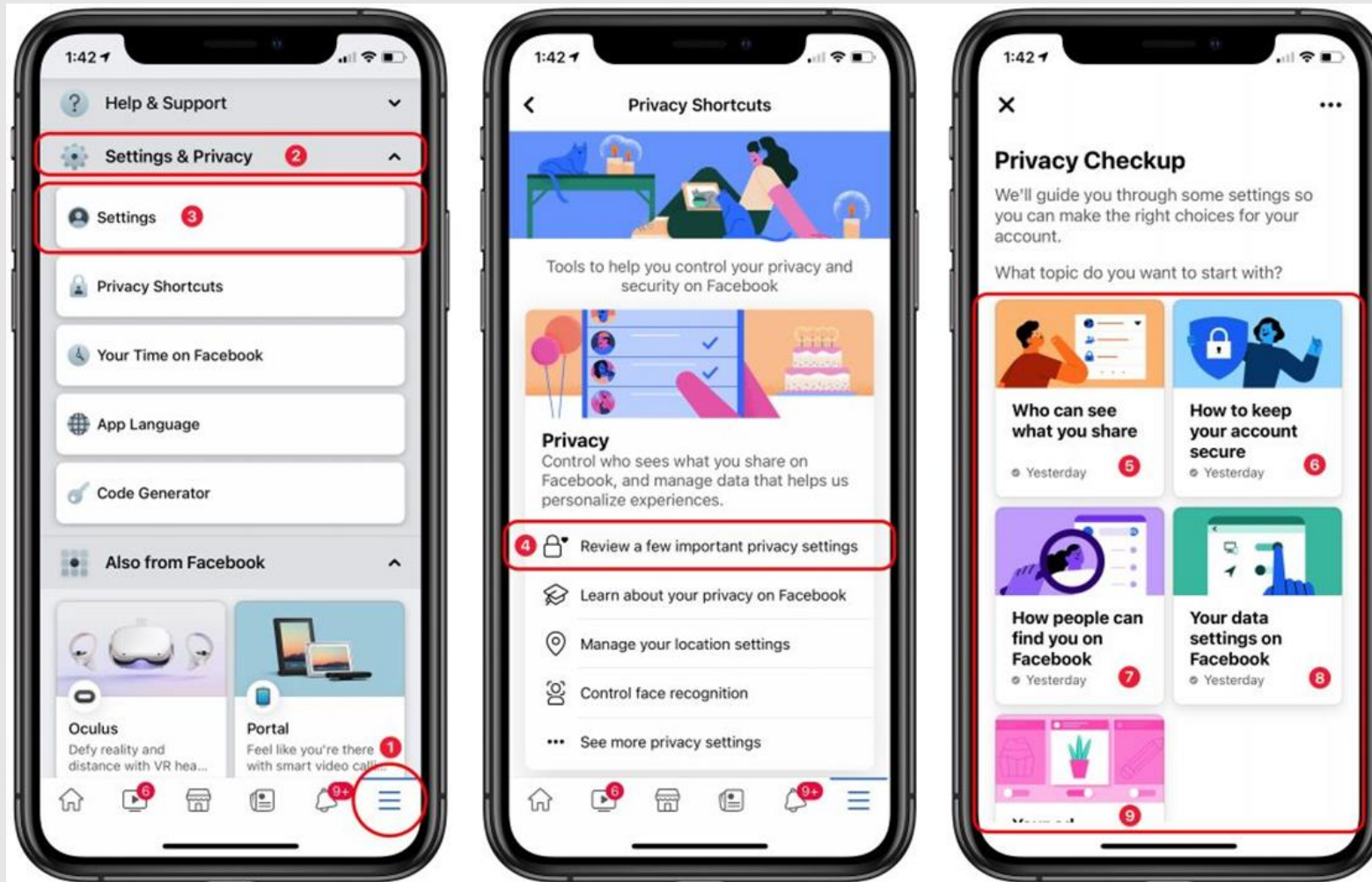
The screenshot shows the Facebook Page Settings interface. The 'Page Moderation' section is highlighted with a red oval. It contains a text input field with the words 'stupid, hate, worthless, fat, ugly, dumb' entered. Below the input field are 'Save Changes' and 'Cancel' buttons. A red arrow points to the 'Save Changes' button.

| Section | Setting | Value | Action |
|---------|---|---|--------------|
| General | Shortcuts | Page is pinned to shortcuts | Edit |
| | Page Visibility | Page published | Edit |
| | Visitor Posts | Anyone can publish to the Page Anyone can add photos and videos to the Page | Edit |
| | Reviews | Reviews are turned off | Edit |
| | News Feed Audience and Visibility for Posts | The ability to narrow the potential audience for News Feed and limit visibility on your posts is turned off | Edit |
| | Messages | People can contact my Page privately. | Edit |
| | Tagging Ability | Only people who help manage my Page can tag photos posted on it. | Edit |
| | Others Tagging this Page | People and other Pages can tag my Page. | Edit |
| | Page Location for Frames | Other people can use your Page's location for photo and video frames. | Edit |
| | Country Restrictions | Page is visible to everyone. | Edit |
| | Age Restrictions | Page is shown to everyone. | Edit |
| | Page Moderation | Block posts or comments containing the following words [?] stupid, hate, worthless, fat, ugly, dumb | |
| | | | Save Changes |
| | | | Cancel |

The screenshot shows the X (Twitter) Settings interface. The 'Add muted word' section is highlighted with a red oval. It contains a text input field with the words 'Bastard, liar, moron' entered. Below the input field is a 'Mute from' section with three options: 'Home timeline', 'Notifications', and 'Duration'. The 'Notifications' option is selected with a blue checkmark. A purple arrow points to the 'Add muted word' section.

| Section | Setting | Value | Action |
|----------|------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Settings | Add muted word | Bastard, liar, moron | |
| | Mute from | | |
| | Home timeline | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| | Notifications | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| | From anyone | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | From people you don't follow | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| | Duration | | |
| | Until you unmute the word | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| | 24 hours | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | 7 days | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 30 days | | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| | | | Save |

Facebook: Privacy Settings



The legal position



- Protection from Harassment Act, 1997
- Malicious Communications Act, 1998
- Communications Act, 2003
- Defamation Act, 2013
- S106 Representation of the People Act, 1983.

Case study

The chair of a District Council's Planning Committee uses their casting vote against a proposal to develop a plot of land into a commercial caravan site.

Soon after, the chair receives a series of emails from the applicant, which include allegations that the councillor had received a "back hander" from a competing developer.

The emails are hostile and become increasingly threatening in tone. One demand is for personal financial compensation for loss of income.

The person regularly posts negative comments on the councillor's Facebook page, repeating their claims.

They also set up a website dedicated to their cause, repeating their accusations. Whilst not being explicit, the website also hints towards historical "personal problems with the councillor's behaviour towards young people".

Protection from Harassment Act

- Email, messaging, social media, blogs and chat rooms
- Usually relates to more than one event
- Although a serious one-off could be classed as harassment
- Extends to cyberstalking
- Messages do not need to be violent in nature
- Although they must cause alarm or distress
- Maximum penalty is a prison sentence of up to six months, or a fine.



Online harassment and stalking

- If you believe you are in immediate danger, call 999
- For police advice, dial 101 or log the incident online
- Maintain a diary of events
- Keep original emails, texts or messages
- Take screen shots of posts
- Review your social media settings
- Report posts or messages to the site moderator
- If it's an independent website, complain to the site host
- Seek advice: Monitoring Officer/Legal Officer
- Also talk to the Cyber Helpline or National Stalking Helplines.

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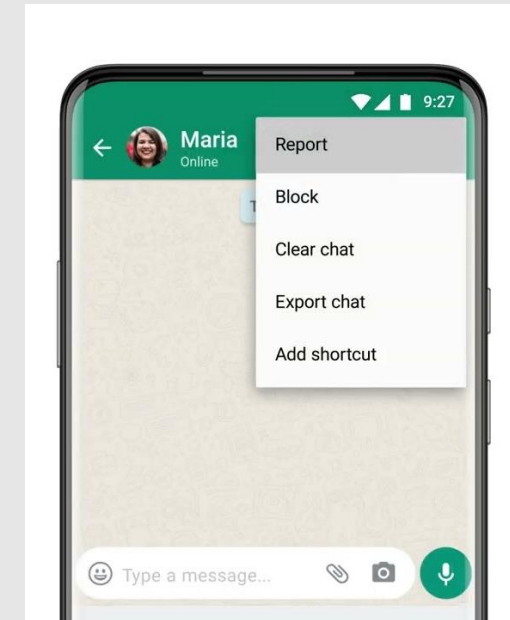
Threatening or abusive emails and IMs

- If it is an immediate and direct threat, call 999
- Do not forward the original – copy and paste it
- Can try a “happy to help, but you must cease and desist” email
- Complain to the email’s host provider, e.g. Gmail or Btinternet
- Create filters which send their email to Spam or Junk
- Or block the sender
- Seek appropriate advice: Monitoring/Chief Legal Officer
- For police advice dial 101.

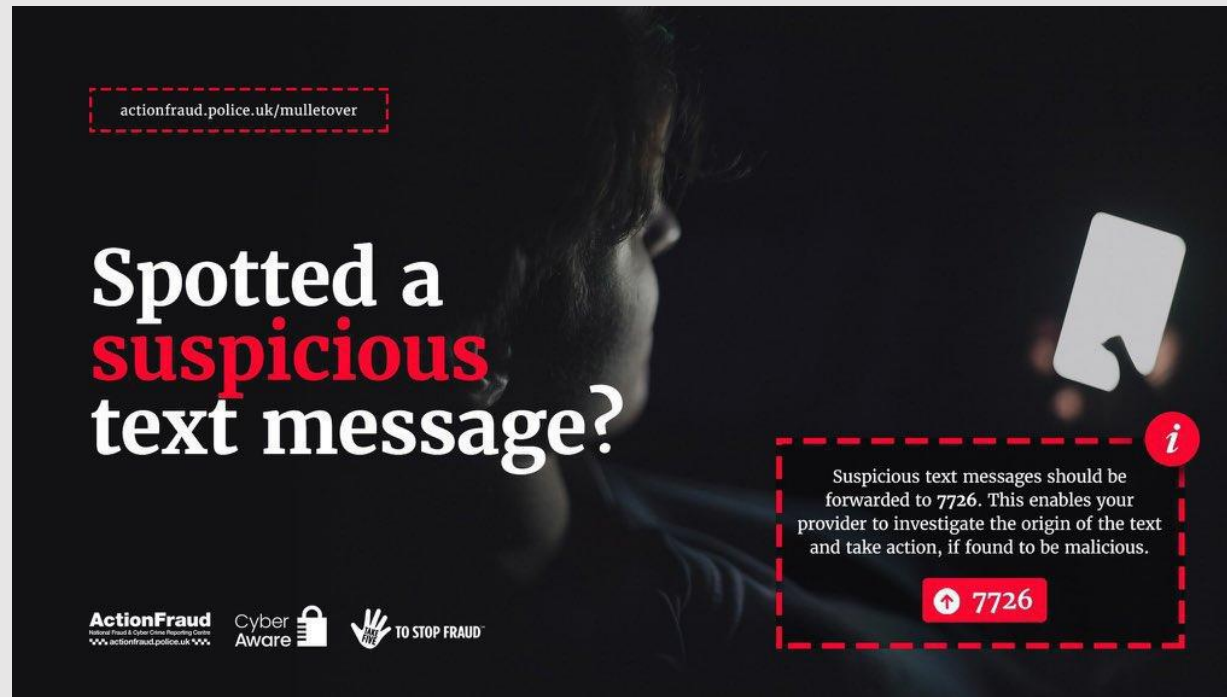


Reporting messages - WhatsApp

- Open the chat with the user you wish to report.
- Tap More options “...” > More > Report
- Check the box if you would like to also block the user and delete messages in the chat
- Tap Report
- You also have options to Block the user
- And to clear or export the chat.



To report a suspicious or malicious text



actionfraud.police.uk/mullover

Spotted a
suspicious
text message?

Suspicious text messages should be forwarded to 7726. This enables your provider to investigate the origin of the text and take action, if found to be malicious.

7726

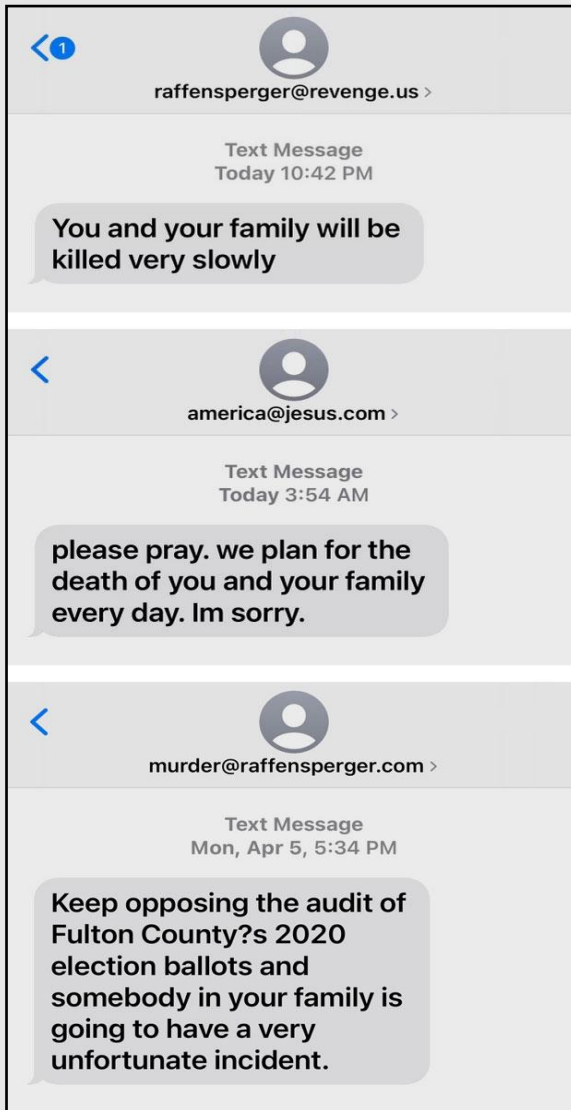
Action Fraud
www.actionfraud.police.uk

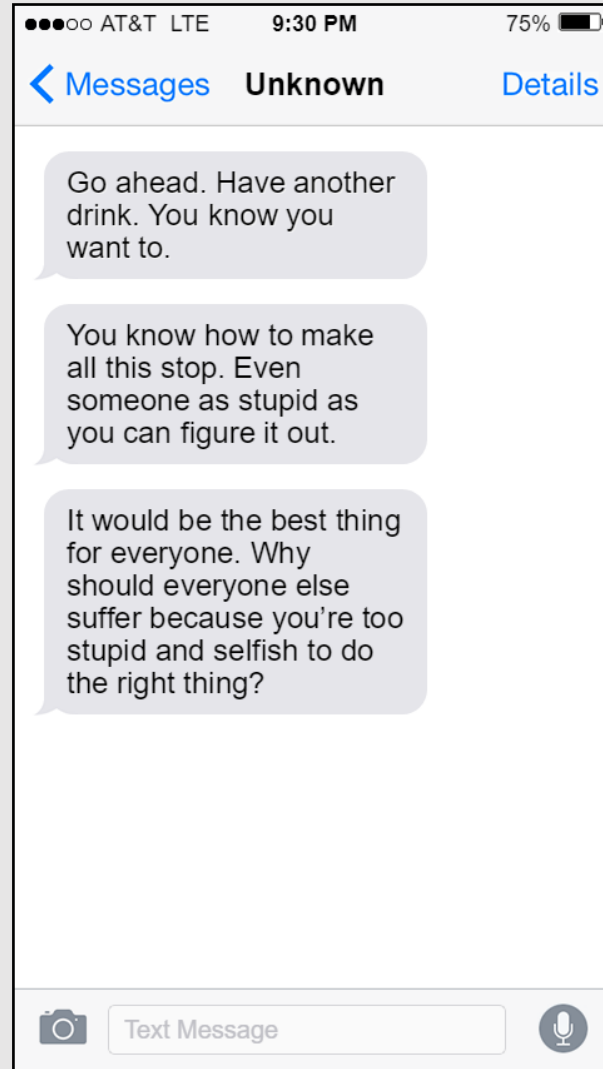
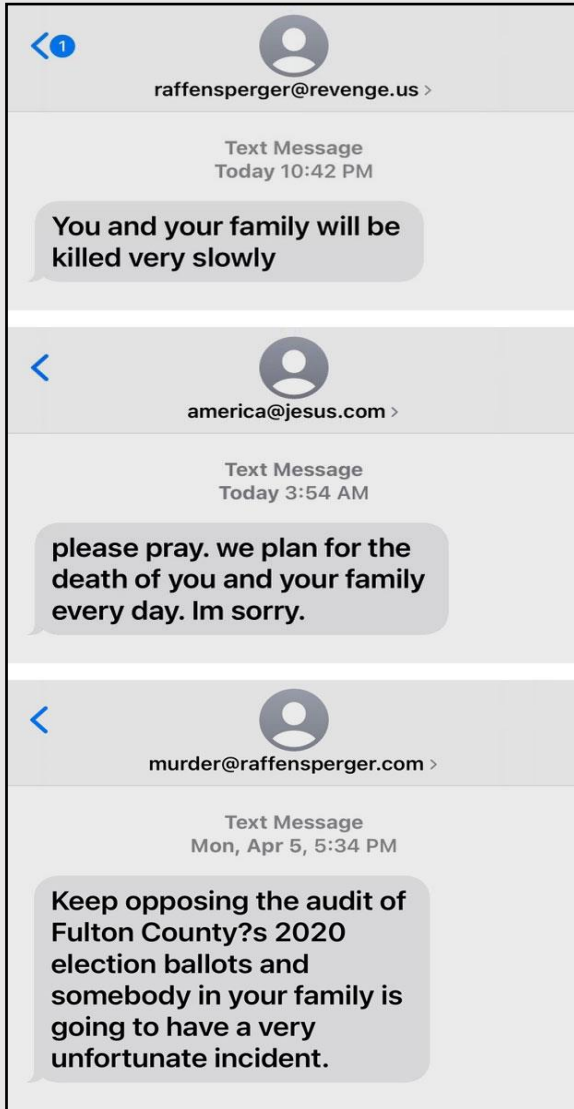
Cyber Aware

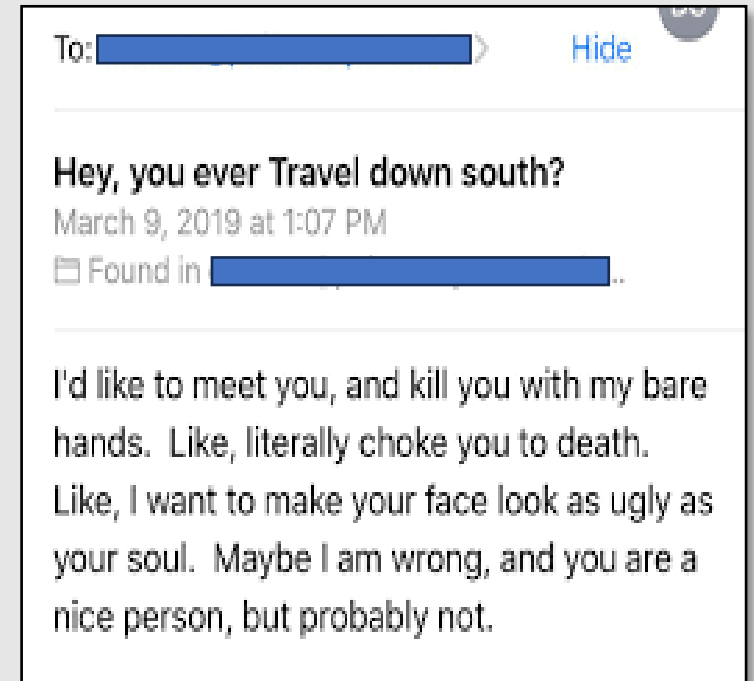
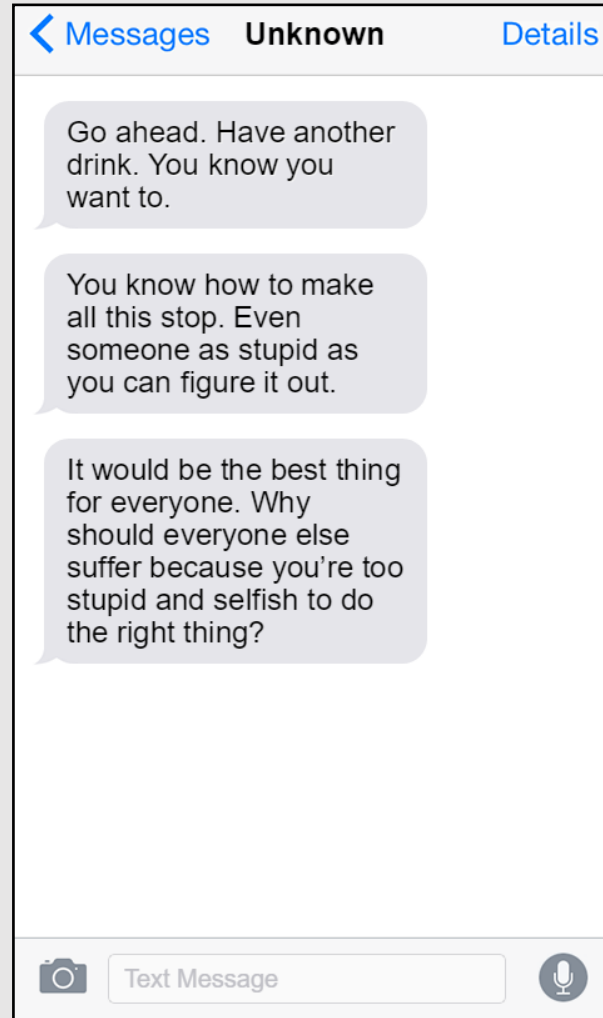
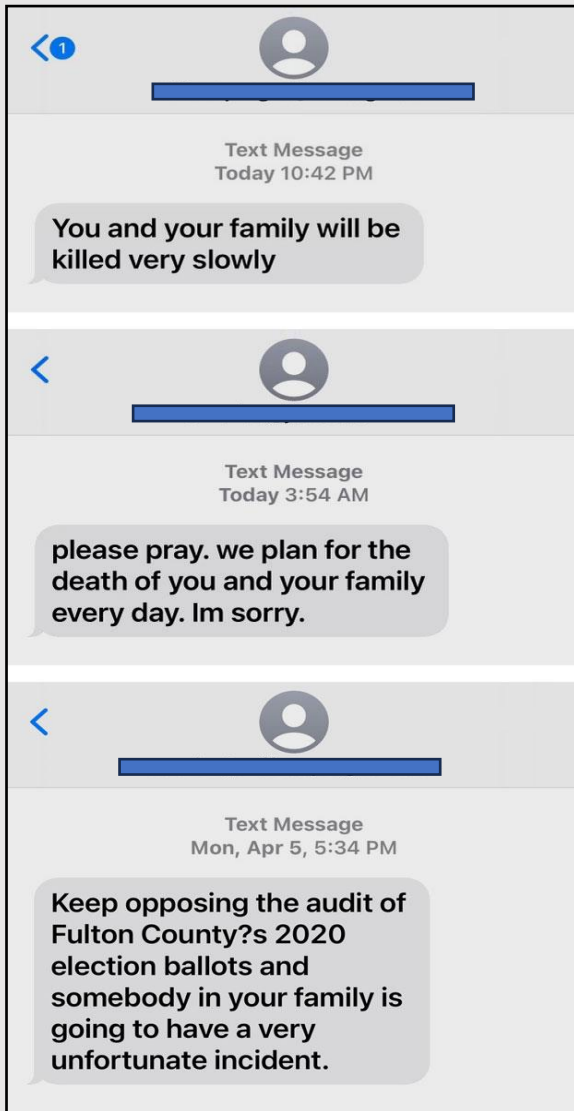
TO STOP FRAUD

The poster features a dark background with a person's profile on the left and a glowing smartphone on the right. A red dashed box highlights the key information about forwarding suspicious texts to 7726. Logos for Action Fraud, Cyber Aware, and 'TO STOP FRAUD' are at the bottom.

Forward the text message to 7726



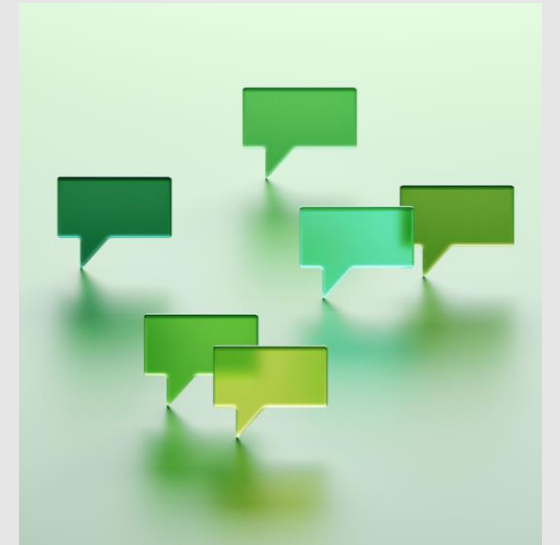


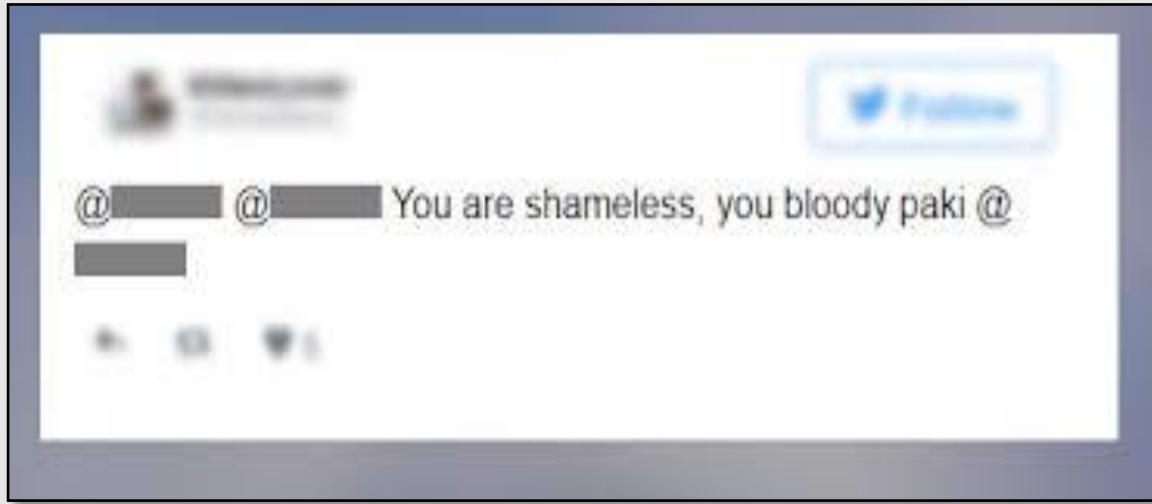


The Malicious Communications Act 1988

Communications Act 2003

- Messages sent via a public communication network which are deemed indecent, grossly offensive, threatening or menacing
- The person sending the message would have been aware of the impact of their message
- Intent to cause annoyance, inconvenience or anxiety with a message that is false
- Report to your local Police – or use online form
- Maximum penalty is a prison sentence of up to six months, or a fine.





Hate crime

- When a person demonstrates hostility based on a person's actual or perceived:
 - Race
 - Religion
 - Disability
 - Sexual orientation
 - Transgender identity
- Can relate to words, pictures, videos and music
- Hate crimes should be reported through the Government's portal.





Defamation

Defamation





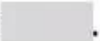
Laurence Fox  
@LozzaFox



Pretty rich coming from a paedophile.



Simon Blake  @Simonablake · 18m

What a mess. What a racist .

17:29 · 04/10/2020 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)



Katie Hopkins 
@KTHopkins



@MsJackMonroe scrawled on any
memorials recently? Vandalised the
memory of those who fought for
your freedom. Grandma got any
more medals ?

Defamation Act 2013

Seeks to create a balance between the freedom of expression and a person or organisation's right to a good reputation



For a post to be defamatory

1. It must be proven to be a false statement
2. It must be published to a third party
3. There must be no defamation privilege in place
4. It must cause **serious harm** to the claimant.



If you believe you may have been defamed...

- Act quickly: immediately take a screenshot
- Avoid an immediate “knee jerk” reaction, whilst you consider your options
- Contact the poster and ask them to remove their post
- Request a retraction, a correction, an apology – or to pay damages
- Report the post to the site moderator
- If it’s a website, contact the web host
- Ask your Monitoring or Chief Legal Officer for advice on how to manage your response
- Consult a legal specialist.



S106 - Representation of the People Act, 1983

- Makes it illegal for any person to publish a false statement in relationship to a candidate's personal character or conduct, unless the person making the statement can show that they had reasonable grounds for believing that statement to be true.
- This also extends to publishing a false statement of a candidate's withdrawal from an election.



How to take a screenshot

How to take a screenshot

Windows



How to take a screenshot

Windows



Apple



On a mobile or tablet...

Android



Apple





Trolling

Leaving an insulting or offensive message with the intent to upset someone, gain attention or cause trouble

Why do people troll?

- Who knows!
- Boredom, revenge, grudges, obsessions...
- Peer behaviour
- Distance lends safety and excitement
- Some research suggest trolls score high on cognitive empathy
- But low on affective empathy.



Dealing with trolls

- Pick your battles
- Dismantle incorrect statements with facts
- Use humour wisely.





James Blunt

@JamesBlunt



Jesus only needed twelve. RT

 @JamesBlunt why you only got 200k followers?


Responder Retwittear Favorito Más



James Blunt

@JamesBlunt



NO NEED. I HAVE A NEW ALBUM COMING SOON. @  Can we all take a moment and remember just how terrible James Blunt was

1:55 pm · 18 Feb 2013

3,054 Retweets 1,243 Likes



183 3.1K 1.2K



James Blunt

@JamesBlunt

Seguir

Jesus only needed twelve. RT

[redacted] @JamesBlunt why you only got 200k followers?

Responder Retwittear Favorito Más



James Blunt

@JamesBlunt

Follow

NO NEED. I HAVE A NEW ALBUM COMING SOON. @ [redacted] Can we all take a moment and remember just how terrible James Blunt was

1:55 pm · 18 Feb 2013

3,054 Retweets 1,243 Likes



193 3.1K 1.2K



Said the millionaire on her gold iphone in her mansion.



J.K. Rowling

@jk_rowling

Follow

@ [redacted] I'd type a longer retort, but these diamond buttons really hurt my fingers.

Other strategies...

- Screenshot a post if you are planning to take formal action
- Use your tools: mute - block – delete – hide - report
- If you believe an offence has been committed, take appropriate action
- If you're worn down by it all, consider having a break
- Whatever you do...





WARNING

DO NOT FEED
THE TROLLS

Online Safety Act 2023





- Regulatory framework to make the internet safer for all
- Platforms will need to remove all illegal content
- Creates False Communications Offence (intending to cause harm by sending something knowingly false)
- The Threatening Communications Offence (communications which convey threat of serious harm, e.g. grievous bodily harm or rape)
- Flashing offence, aimed at stopping epilepsy trolling
- Criminalises assisting or encouraging self-harm online.








Social media etiquette





- Set a good example to others
- If you are posting as a Councillor, you are covered by the Code
- Avoid 'knee jerk' reactions to comments
- Never post when you are tired, distracted, drunk, drugged or enraged
- Remember to check facts before you post
- Check what you're posting isn't confidential
- Gain permission before uploading other peoples' photographs
- Think before you share a post...

 **Donald J. Trump** 
@realDonaldTrump  

 My parents who passed away always said you were big inspiration. Can you pls RT for their memory?
pic.twitter.com/o2BOGnYhaN

 Reply  Retweet  Favorite  More



RETWEETS 449 FAVORITES 123 

AP The Associated Press  
@AP

Breaking: Two Explosions in the White House and Barack Obama is injured

 Reply  Retweet  Favorite  Euffer  More

3,242 RETWEETS 153 FAVORITES 

12:07 PM - 23 Apr 13

Useful Resources

LGA Guide to handling online abuse:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/practical-advice-handling-online-abuse>

To make a complaint to Ofcom under the Online Safety Act:

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/complaints/online-services-sites-apps>

Government guide for politicians using Twitter:

<https://www.parliament.uk/contentassets/358409c9ef7d47f89412becd40f7d8e2/digi096cipr.pdf>

The Cyber Helpline (Stalking)

<https://www.thecyberhelpline.com/guides/cyber-stalking>

Police online incident report form:

<https://www.thecyberhelpline.com/guides/cyber-stalking>

To report hate crime:

<https://www.police.uk/ro/report/hate-crime/hc-av1/report-hate-crime/>

To check who hosts a website:

<https://lookup.icann.org/en/lookup>

Programme review

- Settings and boundaries
- Legislation and rights
- Harassment and threats
- Defamation
- Trolls
- Being a responsible digital citizen.

