Is your child a victim of cyberbullying? Here are signs to look out for

Cybersecurity Council highlights behavioural changes and device usage patterns

Gulf News · 16 Dec 2024 · 1 · BY ALI AL HAMMADI Reporter

The UAE Cybersecurity Council has identified five key signs that children may be victims of cyberbullying. These are sudden withdrawal, changes in device usage habits, low self-confidence, emotional fluctuations, and avoiding school or social activities.

On its account on X, the council stated that sudden withdrawal from previously enjoyable activities can manifest as isolation or disengagement from preferred online activities. In such cases, parents are advised to encourage open communication and reassure their children that they are there to listen and support.

Recognise signs early

The council also noted that changes in device usage habits could be observed through behaviours such as quickly closing screens or using devices privately. A noticeable decline in self-confidence and increased sensitivity are also signs of cyberbullying.

Emotional fluctuations may appear as mood swings or feelings of depression after using devices. Avoiding school and social activities may manifest as a hesitation to meet people.

The council emphasised the importance of recognising these signs early, as this enables parents to intervene and provide support. Suggested measures include fostering open conversations, encouraging children to block and report harmful content, and boosting their self-confidence.

What is cyberbullying?

Professor and lawyer Dr Fatima Al Neyadi said cyberbullying is a repetitive behaviour aimed at intimidating, upsetting, or defaming targeted individuals. Examples of such bullying include: Spreading lies or sharing embarrassing photos of someone on social media; sending harmful, offensive, or threatening messages, images, or videos through messaging platforms and impersonating someone and sending malicious messages on their behalf or through fake accounts.

She added that the police receive child abuse reports through various channels and handle them with strict confidentiality, ensuring that neither the child's name nor their family's identity is disclosed. The primary aim is to identify the perpetrator of abuse, extortion, or bullying against the child.

The Abu Dhabi Judicial Department, which runs the Abu Dhabi Centre for Community and Legal Awareness (Masouliya), has launched an awareness campaign addressing the risks of cyber extortion.

The campaign focuses on equipping individuals with precautions for safe internet usage to protect themselves from cyber extortion attempts.