

Formspring.me

Formspring.me is a social networking site that is based around users asking and answering questions. Users are able to subscribe or 'follow' the answers to questions published by other users in a similar way to users following Twitter posts.

The default settings for accounts on Formspring allow questions to be asked anonymously on a user's profile by fellow Formspring users choosing to conceal their identity and by those without an account. The site has grown in popularity, particularly amongst teenagers, however the ability to pose anonymous questions to users has resulted in incidents of cyberbullying and harassment.

Cyberbullying can be particularly upsetting because of its inescapable nature and the ease with which bullies can remain anonymous. However the bullying can be evidenced by saving texts or taking print outs of emails or web pages, which can be used to stop the bully. Further information and advice about cyberbullying is available from CEOP's Thinkuknow education initiative: http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/11_16/control/cyberbullying/

There are also support services available for children and young people affected by cyberbullying:

- **ChildLine** provides free, confidential advice to children and young people 24 hours a day. Children and young people can talk to a counsellor about how they are feeling by calling **0800 11 11** or by visiting www.childline.org.uk where they can have a private one-to-one chat with someone from the children's charity the NSPCC.
- **Beatbullying's CyberMentors** scheme www.cybermentors.org.uk is a confidential online service run by trained young people and adult counsellors. It enables young people to support and help each other through problems, particularly cyberbullying.

Some measures can be taken to help users protect themselves when using Formspring:

- Changing privacy settings preventing anonymous questions from being asked
- Choosing 'Protect My Account' so that only approved users can follow your answers and ask questions
- Blocking rude or abusive users preventing them from asking you any further questions
- Reporting incidents of cyberbullying to Formspring

Below are some simple step-by-step instructions on how to stay safe when using Formspring.

Privacy Settings on Formspring

Formspring users can customise their profile by visiting 'Settings'.

Once in the 'Settings' area users can access their privacy settings by selecting 'Privacy'.

Choose to not receive anonymous questions from both Formspring users hiding their identity and those without an account by selecting 'Don't allow any anonymous questions'.

Users should select the 'Protect My Account' box to ensure that they have full control over which users follow them. By choosing this option only pre-approved users will be able to ask questions and view answers.

Blocking Users

When viewing the questions that are waiting to be answered users can block contacts preventing them from asking any further questions by selecting 'Block'.

Users wishing to block a contact on Formspring will be asked to select a reason and then can proceed with blocking that contact.

Reporting Users

The sending of bullying questions and messages violate Formspring's Community Rules. These incidents can be reported to Formspring for investigation and they will take the appropriate action i.e. disabling the user's account and removing the offending content.

Abuse/Harassment on Formspring can be reported here:

http://formspringme.zendesk.com/anonymous_requests/new