

Equality Matters

Online Bullying & Internet Safety

October 2019

In a new BBC Three documentary, the singer, Jesy Nelson from Little Mix reveals how online bullying affected her mental health and led her to try to take her own life.

“Little Mix's Jesy Nelson: Online trolls made me want to die.”

Jesy Nelson from Little Mix has revealed that online bullying following her appearance on X Factor drove her to try to kill herself. In a new BBC Three documentary, Jesy Nelson: 'Odd One Out', the singer, 28, said that comments about her appearance made her so unhappy she “just wanted to die”. In a candid and tearful moment, Jesy recalls how she took an overdose after taunts about her looks became too much to bear. In the documentary, the singer also explores how the trolling affected her mum, her sister, her bandmates and her relationships – and meets ordinary people who tell Jesy their stories of being bullied online.



When Little Mix were announced as that year’s winners, Jesy says they were all “on cloud nine”. But just hours after winning the show, her excitement was tainted by trolling. “I had about 101 Facebook messages in my inbox, and the first one that came up was from some random man, saying: ‘You are the ugliest thing I’ve seen in my life, you do not deserve to be in this girl band. You deserve to die.’” It was a devastating blow to Jesy who, up until the barrage of insults and hate started during her time on X Factor, hadn’t had any problems with her body image. “It became the worst time of my life,” she says. “I wasn’t just known as one of the singers in Little Mix, I was known as ‘the fat, ugly one’.”

The bullying left Jesy unable to enjoy her early years in Little Mix, despite the fact that performing, she says, was something she always wanted to do. After seeing yet more unpleasant comments on Twitter after the 2013 X Factor performance, Jesy says she couldn’t take the pain. “I was sat in bed crying, thinking, ‘This is never going to go, I’m going to feel sad for the rest of my life, so what is the point in being here?’” she remembers, wiping away tears. “The only way I can describe the pain is like constantly being heartbroken. I remember going to the kitchen and I just took as many tablets as I could. Then my ex, who was with me at the time, he woke up and was like, ‘why are you crying?’ I kept saying, ‘I just want to die’. Jesy was taken to hospital, and wasn’t left with any complications following her attempt to take her own life.

Jesy has now stopped using Twitter, and says she's "a lot mentally stronger and happier".

She says her motivations for making the programme were to try to help others. “I’m a completely different person now, I’m a lot happier and mentally stronger,” she says. “I really wanted to make this because, as much as it was a horrible experience for me, I want to make something good come out of it. I’ve got this huge platform – why would I not use that to raise awareness of how social media is affecting people?”

Jesy’s story really raises the question about how safe social media sites are and the laws around online bullying.

In January, Katie Price won her fight to make online trolling an illegal crime. Harvey price is partially blind and autistic and with this faces many day to day challenges. When Katie realised that online abuse towards Harvey was only increasing, she became angered that there was no law covering this kind of abuse. Katie began the fight for Harvey’s law in March 2017 where petitions soon hit the thousands and backing from MP’s grew.



As the online world for children and young adults grows, it brings huge benefits for school work, sourcing information and listening to music but at the same time the risks have also risen.

The NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) started a campaign last year for social media platforms to have a legally enforceable duty of care to protect children—while also supporting parents to help their children stay safe online. This would require social media providers to adopt minimum safeguarding standards for children and young people, so that the sites, games and apps they use are free from harm. The charity also seeks effective reporting and complaints handling by social networks, and proactive steps to prevent exposure to illegal behaviour, including grooming.

Andy Burrows, who leads the campaign says that the UK is already going faster and further than any other country in this respect – and this bodes well for children worldwide. “If the duty-of-care model makes it on to the statute book, other countries will follow”, he says.

At the same time, the NSPCC is empowering parents to help their children stay safe online. The charity has been working with mobile network operator O2 to provide a wealth of useful information to help answer questions which can be found on their website.

Do you know how to stay safe online? Who is responsible for controlling online bullying?