

On April 27th 2016 our beautiful 17-year-old son took his own life. He decided to do this because he could not see any way to be happy. His confidence and self esteem had been eroded over a long period of time by the bullying behaviour he experienced in secondary education. It began with unkindness and social isolation and over the years with the advent of social media it became cruel and overwhelming. People who had never even met Felix were abusing him over social media and he found that he was unable to make and keep friends as it was difficult to befriend the most "hated" boy in the school. His schoolwork suffered and he found school a daily struggle. He changed schools for 6th form, something he would not contemplate before, as even though he was miserable he was also terrified of the unknown and was sure that because he felt he was so worthless, another school would make no difference. He did make friends at his new school and the teaching staff found him to be bright, kind and caring. He was however so badly damaged by the abuse, isolation and unkindness he had experienced that he was unable to see just how many people truly cared for him.

I write this letter not for sympathy, but because there are so many more children like Felix who are struggling and we need to wake up to the cruel world we are living in.

I am appealing to children to be kind ALWAYS and never stand by and leave bullying unreported. Be that one person prepared to stand up to unkindness. You will never regret being a good friend.

I have been told that "*everyone* says things they don't mean on social media" Unkindness is dismissed as 'banter' and because they cannot see the effect of their words they do not believe there is one. A quote I saw on Facebook recently resonated with me and I think is worth thinking about before posting anything on social media. *Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?* Our children need to understand that actions have consequences and that people are wounded, sometimes fatally by these so called 'keyboard warriors" Not all children participate in online abuse, but they may be guilty of enabling others to do it. They do this by not reporting it, by not supporting or befriending the child being abused, which just validates the bully's behaviour.

I appeal to teachers to look out for signs that children are struggling. Poor grades or poor behaviour may signal a child crying out for help. Listen to parents who may report problems and monitor their social interactions. Are they sitting alone at break time or lunchtime? Are they particularly quiet or are they perhaps too loud? I do not expect teachers to be psychologists but they have a unique overview of children's lives and they are able to recognize a difficulty early and