

Understanding Bullying

Maya was a new girl in the class and at first everything seemed OK. Maya told her Mum that she liked her new school and had made friends with everyone in the class.

As the weeks went on Maya began to play more at playtime with a boy called Jake rather than the rest of her group. He sat opposite her and sometimes helped her with spelling words that she found difficult. One day Maya asked Jake if he would like to come to her home after school and play, as they both liked building with Lego and playing Minecraft on the tablet computer.

They soon became best friends, although Maya also had friends that were girls and Jake had friends that were boys so it didn't seem to be a problem...

Just after the winter school holidays, the class were doing an art project on snow and ice. Maya was good at painting and she had created a beautiful snowflake pattern. As Natalie went past, she accidentally brushed against Maya's water pot and it spilled all over Maya's painting. 'Sorry!' Natalie said and walked off. Maya was very upset and the painting was ruined.

Natalie sat next to Jake in class and Maya had always got on alright with her before, so she just thought the water pot was an accident and didn't think much about it until later.

Over the next few days Maya started to notice that some of her things had gone missing from her school bag and pencil case, and she kept on finding them in strange places. A lot of the things had been broken. Maya's Mum was annoyed when she asked for replacement colouring pencils and told Maya she needed to be more careful. She didn't understand that it wasn't Maya's fault.

The next time she logged onto Minecraft she saw she had a message. It said 'I hate you!' Maya was scared, was this from a real person? Minecraft was a videogame so she wasn't sure.

The next day she told Jake all about it. He explained that it was possible for someone to send messages on Minecraft but he never bothered. He just liked playing it with his friends. He told Maya to ignore it and not to worry.

The problem was the messages became more and more regular, and in the end, Maya stopped playing Minecraft altogether. She also noticed that Natalie was 'bumping' into her a lot and pushing past in the cloakroom so she fell onto the coat pegs, which hurt every time. Things were getting serious now and Maya was becoming unhappy at school. Maya decided to ask Natalie what she had done to upset her. Natalie ignored her and walked away, so she asked one of Natalie's friends instead.

"Nat hates you because you took Jake away," the girl said. Maya was shocked, she hadn't taken Jake away, she didn't even think Natalie liked Jake! Maya went to Natalie and tried to explain but Natalie ran away and wouldn't listen.

Maya asked Jake if he knew anything about it. 'Well I used to play Minecraft a lot with Natalie,' he said, 'but you were much better at it than her so I sort of forgot about her.'

Maya began to realise that Natalie might be jealous, so she said to Jake, 'Well I think I had better play a bit less with you then, because I don't want Natalie to keep hurting me. Do you think it's Natalie sending me those messages too?'

'I wouldn't be surprised. What was the the username of the person sending you the messages? And please don't stop playing with me, it's Natalie's problem not yours.'

Maya showed Jake the Minecraft messages the next time she logged into the game and he told her he recognised Natalie as the sender. 'You have to do something about this Maya' he said. 'Bullying on the internet community is a really bad thing to do and not enough people report it.'

'It's not bullying!' said Maya laughing, 'It's just Natalie being stupid.'

Jake explained that it was bullying because it was hurtful and deliberate and Natalie kept on doing it. Maya hadn't really thought about it that way before, but she did tell Jake that Natalie was making her really miserable and she didn't want to come to school. Jake said 'If you don't stop Natalie she might start bullying someone else, how would you feel if that happened?'

The next day Jake and Maya went to see their headteacher and explained everything that had been going on. The school used a problem-solving technique called Solve It Together so the headteacher arranged a time for Maya, Jake and Natalie to go through the steps in her office. She also explained to Natalie that even though she had strong feelings about Jake and Maya being friends, she was bullying and that wasn't acceptable. Natalie's parents were told too. Maya found out that it was Natalie that had been hiding and breaking her things, and Natalie had to use her savings to replace everything she had taken.

Later that term the headteacher asked a local police officer to come in and speak to the children about bullying on-line and the trouble that Internet 'trolls' can get in to if the target of the bullying wants something done about it.

Natalie stopped bullying Maya. They were never really friends but got on when they had to, which Maya thought was OK. Maya's Mum said, 'There are people who we get on better with than others, but we all have to try and get along together and be respectful when we can.' That's what Natalie was doing now so Maya didn't have a problem with that, and she still had her best friend Jake.

- How was Maya being bullied?
- How did Jake react when he found out?
- Whose side was Jake on?
- Jake didn't seem to be worried about helping Maya but what could have stopped him?
- How did Jake help in the end?

What would you do if you were a bystander (a person who is present at an event) in Maya's story?

Why might some bystanders choose to ignore the situation or even join in?

Maya was not only being bullied at school but also 'trolled' online. People often do this because they cannot see the affect its having on the person receiving the abuse.

There are some key messages from this story...**particularly thinking about what we send or post online with our phones, tablets or computers.**



Being safe with technology

- Don't reply to messages and posts that upset you, instead PAUSE and show an adult who you trust.
- Never reply to a message that comes from a person you don't know. PAUSE and tell a trusted adult.
- Never give a person on the internet your personal or private details (like a phone number, passwords, usernames, what school you go to, your email etc) PAUSE and tell a trusted adult.
- Be careful when sharing pictures of yourself online- think about who will see them and where they could be sent on to. If in doubt, PAUSE and don't post the picture.
- PAUSE and think- some people are 'fakes' on the internet and are not who they say they are, so if someone asks you to do something stop and think if it is a sensible thing to do and then check it out with a trusted adult.
- If you are worried about anything online tell an adult you trust.