

Sam's Story

1 Sam heard a message alert on her mobile telephone. Her friend had written *'Sam, I'm so sorry but I thought you should see this. I'm here if you need me.'*



Her heart started racing in panic...

She'd had a lot to cope with in life but each comment or stare still hurt. People seemed to forget she was still a person with feelings and emotions just like everybody else.

3 Her friend messaged again to say that other people were joining in with similar comments. She attached a screenshot of the dialogue.

"At least she can't see how bad she looks!! haha"



"I bet her Mum is ashamed to have given birth that THAT!!!!."

"Drop one on her, she'd not even see you coming. LOL"

2 Attached was a screenshot of an image posted in a social media group, made up of pupils in her year.



It was Sam's face (taken from her own profile picture) superimposed onto an image of a large dog holding a white stick.

The caption read...

"Freaks like this all need putting down. Who agrees???? #dogface"

4 Sam had been born with a facial disfigurement which affected her features and her vision. Sam felt crushed. She couldn't sleep at all that night.



She arranged to walk to school the next day with her good friend for some moral support.

Her friend noticed she'd been crying so Sam explained why...



5

Her friend offered to go with Sam to her Head of Year, to report what had happened.



Sam was reluctant, the messages were on a private group and out of school time.



What could be done?

6

The form tutor was brilliant and explained that this was hate-related, and she could report the matter to the Police if she wanted, as she was being targeted due to her disability.



Sam was offered help and support from school, and the pupil's posting the comments were reprimanded.

7

Sam felt more confident after this response and decided to write an article for the school newsletter about her disability.

She included lots of quotes that would make people think hard...

"It's not our disabilities, it's our abilities that count"

"The only disability in life is a bad attitude"

"A truly able mind does not speak ill of others"

"It isn't big to make others feel small"



Think about the following...

- What impact did the original post have in this example?
- What do you think may have been the instigator's intention in sending the post?
- Do you think the message(s) had less or more of an impact being posted in a closed group made up of 'peers'?
- How could counter messaging have helped in this situation?