



TV presenter and
co-founder of
theoutdoorguide.co.uk
Julia Bradbury

NATURAL HEALING

Television presenter and walking enthusiast Julia Bradbury talks about managing mental health and dealing with online bullies

WORDS: JOAN MCFADDEN

The racial abuse young England players Bukayo Saka, Jadon Sancho and Marcus Rashford faced on social media after the Euros this summer brought into the spotlight the issue of internet trolls. The dark side of social media, trolls thrive on anonymity, hiding behind it to insult, threaten and make poisonous comments to complete strangers.

When Jesy Nelson left pop group Little Mix at the end of last year she said the constant online abuse had left her suicidal, while influencer Mrs Hinch recently revealed that she faces daily abuse that also targets her young children. 'Be kind' regularly trends on social media, but with

no sign of trolling diminishing, what should we do to combat the problem?

A familiar face on TV, Julia Bradbury (50) is known for her passion for the outdoors and for maintaining good physical and mental health. Yet despite her positive messages, she too attracted vicious trolls earlier this year after posting online a photo of herself enjoying the sunshine.

"I exercise, eat very well and am never 'on a diet'," says Julia, admitting that she indulges in chocolate and treats sometimes because "life is for living".

"But what should you say to people who make snide comments about your collarbones or say 'you look ill' and 'you should get some chips down you, love'?"

She continues: "Online, it's like the Wild West: people can say what they like without

'Online, it's like the Wild West: people can say what they like without restriction'

restriction. There are vulnerable people out there and these comments can cut deep. I'm hoping things will have changed by the time my kids are older and there might be more regulation – for example, I don't think people should be anonymous."

Call out abuse

Slim, fit and bouncing with energy, she was utterly shocked at the vitriol directed at her, including "She looks like she's come out of a chemotherapy session".

"I feel sorry for people writing abusive messages to someone they've never met," says Julia. "It's so sad when people go down

that route and if I wasn't of a sturdy mindset it could be deeply upsetting.

"I worry how such abuse could affect others. I have friends whose daughters have anorexia and it's awful, and I have friends who were bulimic. Positive body image is important and I'm not going to stop for the haters. Skinny-shaming is just as bad as fat-shaming and both types of comments could lead people to trying to change how they look because they're being bullied.

"I know people who've suffered far worse abuse than me and we need to be proactive when it comes to promoting social media kindness," says Julia. "I use my

platform for that and to call people out when they are unnecessarily unkind." She continues: "My friend Jono Lancaster is very popular on social media and he suffers from a rare condition called Treacher Collins syndrome which affects facial features. He promotes kindness and positivity and it's staggering that people can say the cruellest things about him sometimes. What do people gain from this type of unkindness?"

Space to think

Much as she clearly adores her family, Julia faced similar challenges to everyone else during lockdown, juggling home schooling and family life on top of a busy career in the public eye. Keeping mentally and physically fit became even more important to her and walking was her saviour.

"Nature helped me through the toughest stage of the pandemic and it could help us all," says Julia. "I need to walk every day – it keeps me sane. Outdoor spaces are healing physically and mentally, and walking was my therapy. I went to school in Sheffield and my dad started taking me walking through the Peak District where he grew up.

"I always turn to nature if I have a problem. It gives the space I need to think."

Julia is also enthusiastic about yoga, especially because she can do it anywhere. "I love going to classes for that energy in the room and an instructor who you can ask questions of. But I can also do it in my bedroom and it's a great way of getting focused for the day."

Routes to happiness

Lockdown saw a huge spike in hits to her website, theoutdoorguide.co.uk, which she started with her older sister Gina 10 years ago. The site features hundreds of free-to-download walking routes all over the

country, and great pubs and places to stay close to routes and outdoor activities.

Julia and Gina believe passionately in enjoying a healthy life outdoors, and want to support as many people as possible to

access and share the benefits. The sisters have also established some initiatives to improve access to the great outdoors such as AccessTOG, which has road-tested many wheel-friendly walks for people with poor or no mobility. Meanwhile, The Outdoor

Guide Foundation is a charitable scheme that aims to donate at least 200,000 sets of waterproof suits and wellies to state primary schools over the next six years so that kids can have easy access to the right gear to enjoy the outdoors.

"Multiple studies show there's a direct link between our mental and physical health, and time spent in nature and green spaces. Scarily 40% of children never play outdoors – and the long-term impacts on their future health are worrying," says Julia. "We all need outdoor spaces and time outdoors every day to boost our immune systems, help with creativity, mitigate stress and keep us healthy. The more we all understand that, the more we will all learn to appreciate our woodlands, landscapes and parks, and care about protecting our beautiful planet."

Eye on the environment

Another topic that Julia is passionate about is climate change. This November, the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), will take place in Glasgow on reducing global emissions and ensuring our atmosphere doesn't get any warmer. "We can all do things on a personal level, but we've gone beyond individual change in the Western world. Huge global changes are required to mitigate big industry polluting our planet.

"I filmed on Orkney recently with Alex Beresford for a special ITV programme exploring how these small islands are making big strides towards a greener future by harnessing the power of their environment. Orcadians are using their

WALK ON THE WILD SIDE
Julia believes we all need time outside to keep us healthy

'Kindness is never wasted and always makes a difference – it has a ripple effect and it makes you feel good too'

extreme weather to power their lives and proving that the tech is there for us to make the changes we need.

"It was exciting to see a new hydrogen-fuelled ferry that could be a game-changer when it comes to revolutionising our shipping industry – one of the biggest polluters. I also got to make jam at a little factory fuelled by a 6kW wind turbine called Teresa. As bad as things are I think it's important to be hopeful about how things can be made better."

Julia currently has a book project, several TV series in development, the website and three kids to inspire and keep healthy. She recommends checking out the A Little Bit of Positive podcast with herself and author Giles Payley-Phillips. "We're all struggling after the pandemic and I know that #mentalhealth issues are on the increase, so I'd ask people to spread kindness, not poison. Kindness is never wasted and always makes a difference – it has a ripple effect and it makes you feel good too."

WALKS OF LIFE
Julia found that walking was key to her mental wellbeing during lockdown

Social Media Kindness Day

9 November

With social media increasingly playing a large part in our daily lives, many people, whether they are in the public eye or not, are being targeted by online messages of hate. Being the victim of abuse online

can cause enormous upset and can even lead to serious mental health issues.

Set up in memory of TV presenter Caroline Flack, Social Media Kindness Day

promotes being kind online on 9 November and

every other day. Its aim is to spread awareness that social media should be a place where people socialise, network and do business without fear of negative comments.

[socialmedia kindnessday.com](http://socialmediakindnessday.com)

