

# Fact Sheet

## Cyberbullying



Internet access is a regular part of life for many children and young people around the world. It is the responsibility of adults to keep children safe, this includes helping them to develop cyber safety skills. Touchscreen technologies allow children to access the internet quickly and easily but often they do not understand the complexity of their actions online.

### What is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is the use of technology to bully a person or group with the intent to hurt them socially, psychologically or physically. Cyberbullying can include:

- hurtful messages, images and videos
- imitating, excluding or humiliating others online
- nasty online gossip and chat
- creating fake accounts in someone's name to trick or humiliate them
- abusive texts and emails.

Cyberbullying has many similarities with traditional bullying; however, technology allows bullies to reach a larger audience causing prolonged humiliation and distress, whilst remaining anonymous or distanced from the victim. Boundaries between a student's school and private life are disappearing through the use of communication technologies, meaning that conflicts occurring at school can be continued online outside of school hours.

### What are the effects of cyberbullying?

Being a victim of cyberbullying can lead to poor mental health, including low self-esteem, depression, anxiety as well as other problems like headaches and sleep disturbances.

#### **Signs to watch for:**

- being upset after using the internet or mobile phone
- changes in personality, becoming more withdrawn, anxious, sad or angry
- appearing lonely or distressed
- unexpected changes in friendship groups
- a decline in schoolwork

- changes in sleep patterns
- avoidance of school or clubs
- a decline in physical health
- becoming secretive about online activities and mobile phone use.

### Cyberbullying prevention tips

#### **Keep communication open**

There are several reasons that a child might not report cyberbullying to teachers or parents. These include the belief that adults cannot help in such situations, the fear it might make the situation worse or that they might have access to devices removed. Having regular, open, non-threatening discussions about cyberbullying may improve a child's confidence that seeking help from a trusted adult could be beneficial.

#### **Listen and learn**

Stay aware of your child's internet usage and what they are participating in online. Encourage your child to teach you about the games, apps and websites they enjoy. Be engaged, open and supportive when talking about your child's favourite apps, games and websites and reassure them they can always come to you if they feel unsafe online.

#### **Family rules**

Creating family rules by finding ways to monitor a child's use of online games, social media and other websites can help to prevent cyberbullying. This could include setting 'screen time' limits, not allowing devices to be taken into bedrooms and bathrooms and blocking inappropriate games and websites.

### ***I think my child is being cyberbullied***

- Remind your child that you care for them and will support them.
- Report the bullying behaviour to the platform that the cyberbullying is occurring on. Social media services should remove cyberbullying material that is reported to them.
- Advise your child that they should not retaliate against the bully, as the bully may use this against them. Instead, assist your child to block the bully and change their online privacy settings after the bully has been reported.
- It is important to collect evidence of the bullying; keep messages and print out screenshots of conversations.
- If the social media platform fails to remove the material within 48 hours of you reporting to them, you can make a complaint to the [Office of the eSafety Commissioner](#).

### ***I think my child is cyberbullying another child***

- Talk to your child about what has happened. Listen calmly to their side of the story. If your child fears they will be punished, they may avoid talking to you about the situation.
- While talking to your child try to build empathy. For example, discuss with them how it might feel to be teased and left out.
- Encourage them to acknowledge their behaviour and to take responsibility for it, as well as apologising to the child they have bullied.
- It could be helpful to talk to your child about coping strategies for dealing with people that they don't get along with.
- Explain that there will be consequences, which could include legal action, but it is important to praise any changes your child makes to improve the situation.
- You could talk to your child's school to support a resolution that will benefit your child and the victim.

### **Where to get help**

- In an emergency, call the Police on triple zero (000)
- Office of the eSafety Commissioner - <https://www.esafety.gov.au/>
- Parentline - <https://www.parentline.com.au/>
- Kids Helpline - <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>
- eHeadspace – <http://eheadspspace.org.au>
- Parentline – [www.parentline.com.au](http://www.parentline.com.au)

### **References and resources**

- Australian Government (eSafety Commissioner). Cyberbullying. Retrieved from: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/esafety-information/esafety-issues/cyberbullying>.
- Australian Government (eSafety Commissioner). Cyberbullying: A guide to online bullying for parents and carers. Retrieved from: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents/big-issues/cyberbullying>.
- Australian Government, (eSafety Commissioner). Good habits to start young: A guide for parents and carers. Retrieved from: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents/skills-advice/good-habits-start-young#my-child-might-be-bullying-others>.
- Australian Government, (eSafety Commissioner). Online Safety: A guide for parents and carers. Retrieved from: <https://esafety.gov.au/parents/online-safety-guide>.
- Butler, D., Kiff, K., & Campbell, M. (2011) School policy responses to cyberbullying: An Australian legal perspective. International Journal of Law & Education, 16(2), 7-28.
- Edwards, S. (2017). What to teach your pre-schooler about internet safety. Retrieved from: <https://theconversation.com/what-to-teach-your-preschooler-about-internet-safety-87618>.
- Everingham, R. (2012). Cyberbullying & Schools: Reducing the risk of litigation. Retrieved from: <https://www.cbp.com.au/insights/insights/2012/september/cyberbullying-and-schools-reducing-the-risk-of-l>.
- Fuller, G. (2014). Cyber-safety: what are we actually talking about. Retrieved from: <https://theconversation.com/cyber-safety-what-are-we-actually-talking-about-23505>.
- Kids Helpline. (2019). Cyberbullying. Retrieved from: <https://kidshelpline.com.au/parents/issues/cyberbullying>.
- Kyriacou, C. (2014). It's the permanence of online abuse that makes cyberbullying so damaging for children. Retrieved from: <https://theconversation.com/its-the-permanence-of-online-abuse-that-makes-cyberbullying-so-damaging-for-children-29874>.
- von Marées, N. & Petermann, F. (2012). Cyberbullying: An increasing challenge for schools. School of Psychology International, 33(5), 467-476.