

Understanding the signs of cyberbullying and how to report when things go wrong

As our digital and physical lives become one, deciding between right and wrong, good and bad, and what's 'empowering' versus 'exploitation' has become increasingly complex. Despite this convergence, the detachment and anonymity of online spaces can often lead people to forget their ethics and values and behave in ways that would be considered unacceptable in face-to-face interactions.

Young people don't always share they are being bullied so it's important to be able to identify the signs.

Cyberbullying can be from schoolmates, those in your child's sports club/after school activity, or from workmates at their part-time job. It can also occur from those they don't know, and some cyberbullies hack accounts or set up fake ones to humiliate or impersonate their victims.

The 24/7 nature of social media means that cyberbullying can occur in your home without you even being aware. While it can be tempting to take away your child's device this could make them feel "punished" and increase feelings of anxiety and isolation.

This guide provides practical tips on how to:

- Start the conversation
- Recognise the signs of cyberbullying
- Respond appropriately to the situation
- Report cyberbullying



How to start the conversation

Bullying – in person or online – is never OK. One of the ways to introduce this concept to our child is to ask them questions such as:

- "Have you/your friends ever had someone say something hurtful on one of your posts? How did it make you feel? Let's work together to figure out ways we can take back our power."
- "What are some of the ways we can support a friend being cyberbullied?"

For example, don't forward or share it; say something kind or positive to the person being cyberbullied; if it's safe, take a stand against it and ask the bully to stop; let the bully know that what they're doing is not ok; talk to the person being cyberbullied privately and ask if they're ok and if they need help; talk to a trusted adult for support.

How to start the conversation (continued)

- "Did you know that if someone can guess your password they can hack your account, see all your private information and share it, or pretend to be you? Let's set your account to private and create a strong password."
- Build a trusting relationship whereby they can come to you about anything, including cyberbullying. Let them know they won't be in trouble and you won't take away their phone. Reassure, listen, and agree on solutions to move forward.



What is cyberbullying and what are the signs to look for?

The Office of the eSafety Commissioner defines cyberbullying as "the use of technology to bully a person or group with the intent to hurt them socially, psychologically or even physically."

It can include hurtful or abusive comments, threats of harm (including acronyms such as KYS - kill yourself), spreading of rumours, sharing images and personal information without consent, or being ignored or excluded. Sometimes bullies say hurtful things just to get a reaction, but the impact on the victim can be very real.

Kids Helpline advise that the signs of cyberbullying can include:

- Socialising less with friends and family
- Reducing time online or being jumpy when getting texts or emails
- Avoiding school and dropping out of sports and other activities
- Losing self-esteem or confidence
- Feeling anxious, sad, embarrassed, angry or physically sick
- Changing moods, behaviour, self-harm and suicidal thoughts



What to do if your child is being cyberbullied

- Listen, stop and stay calm
- Avoid reacting in the moment; don't retaliate or respond to the bullying and encourage your child to do the same
- Talk to your child about the situation. Is it a few comments to talk through or is there any more serious activity?
- Don't downplay; your child needs to know they can come to you about cyberbullying
- Reassure they are not in trouble and you won't take away their phone
- Discuss and agree on solutions together. These could include:
 - blocking or unfriending/unfollowing a user
 - using humour to deflect
 - if people you know have commented or are tagged in a hurtful comment, ask one of them by name for support
 - making a report to the school, app or game, or eSafety Commissioner
- Know how to block or unfriend/unfollow (see our guide on "Safeguarding privacy on popular apps and games")
- Keep evidence of abuse such as a log of dates and times, print outs of messages or images, and screenshots
- Note that if the image is sexualised content of anyone under 18 years, storing or possessing may be illegal and relevant laws apply. Further details are available at (<https://www.esafety.gov.au/report/cyberbullying/collecting-evidence>)



- Report abuse
- Encourage help-seeking behaviour and let your child know that it's OK to talk to other trusted adults. Access Kids Helpline for free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling

Be aware that young people often share passwords or have passwords that are easy to hack. This makes it very easy for cyberbullies to access private information and images or pretend to be your child and send out hurtful content from their account.

See our guide on [How to safeguard your child's privacy on popular apps and games](#).





How to report cyberbullying




Most apps and games have community guidelines that set out appropriate behaviour, as well as reporting or complaints tools.

Step 1: Submit your evidence to the site and allow 48 hours for response

Step 2: If they don't respond or remove the offending content or user, submit a report to the Office of the eSafety Commissioner.

The eSafety Commissioner has legislative power to resolve cyberbullying that is likely to "seriously threaten, seriously intimidate, seriously harass or seriously humiliate an Australian child under the age of 18."

Reports to the eSafety Commissioner can be done online by a child or parent or guardian.

 Cyberbullying ⓘ	 Image-based abuse ⓘ	 Illegal and harmful content ⓘ
<p>If you are under 18 you can make a complaint about cyberbullying or online bullying.</p> <p>REPORT NOW →</p> <p>FAQ ></p> <p>Collecting Evidence ></p>	<p>If an intimate image has been shared, or threatened to share it without your consent, you can make a report.</p> <p>REPORT NOW →</p> <p>FAQ ></p> <p>How we handle reports ></p>	<p>The Cyber Report team investigates complaints and assists in getting content removed.</p> <p>REPORT NOW →</p> <p>What we can investigate ></p> <p>What we can't investigate ></p>



How to report inappropriate content

The eSafety Commissioner is Australia's national independent regulator for online safety. The Office of the eSafety Commissioner has developed an **eSafety Guide** with reporting links and information for a range of social media services, games, apps and sites. Reporting of inappropriate images, content, and cyberbullying can also be made directly to <https://www.esafety.gov.au/report>

What to do if you need more help



If your child ever sees or receives anything online that makes them uncomfortable, they should feel supported in discussing it with you or their friends or teachers. Alternatively, they can call Kids Helpline, Australia's only free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for 5 to 25 year olds. [1800 55 1800 kidshelpline.com.au](https://www.kidshelpline.com.au)

About Optus Digital Thumbprint

Optus Digital Thumbprint is a free and award-winning educational program that supports young people and families to be safe, responsible and positive online.

Since 2013, we've delivered workshops and developed digital tools that have educated more than 320,000 primary and secondary school students across Australia.

