

Cyberbullying

What parents should know



- **Start early.** Experts recommend discussing good online behaviour from when children are 6 or 7 years old.
- **Establish rules** around where, when and how your child can use the internet and mobile phone. Online communications should be as respectful and courteous as face-to-face conversations. Cyberbullying is as harmful as offline abuse.
- **Keep technology out in the open if possible.** The safest place to have internet access is in an open family area, not in the child's bedroom. Kids who are online or receiving text messages late at night are definitely not getting enough sleep to cope academically or socially.
- **Consider a technology curfew.** Recharge phones and laptops in the kitchen overnight. If there are computers in the bedroom, make sure they're turned off at an agreed time.
- **Educate your child** about the permanent nature of things posted online. Offensive comments and photos they put on the internet can be viewed years later by teachers, prospective employers, friends and family.
- **Familiarise yourself** with social media your child uses. If possible, have them accept you as a Facebook etc online friend, so you can read what they – and their friends – are publishing. If they're worried about their privacy, remind them the World Wide Web isn't private.
- **Take cyberbullying seriously.** Really listen to your child and discuss the situation with them. Find out the entire sequence of events so you can understand both sides of the story – whether your child was the victim or the bully.
- **Remember nice kids also cyberbully.** The combination of being anonymous online, how quickly messages can be sent (faster than kids think through consequences) and how easy it is to forward an unkind message from one person to the other all make online bullying an easy pitfall for any child.
- **Don't overreact.** Kids also fear parents will make the situation worse – and we often do, unintentionally. Your child also needs to learn resilience and that hurt feelings are an unavoidable part of life. Bullying is not.
- **Stop – take a breath** and consider if the offending comment was intentional or just poor communication. Misunderstandings happen easily online.
- **Report any abuse** to your child's mobile phone provider, or the website if you think it's warranted.
- **Get your child to take a break from the interactions and gain a little perspective.** Online bullying can seem relentless because it can be reread 24/7, comments can fly thick and fast and it can genuinely seem like the world is against them. This is why a technology curfew can also give you or their friends a chance to counteract the abuse with some positive comments.
- **Make it safe for your child to tell** you or another adult about being bullied – they won't if they believe you'll respond by restricting their access to the computer or mobile phone.
- **Tell your school principal** if you feel the behaviour is intentional and you fear it's likely to continue. (Friends break up and make up regularly, bullying has the specific intention of harming or harassing someone.)
- **Keep the evidence.** You don't want your child rereading it, but you may want to print it out, screen save it or send it to your own email account before deleting abusive messages. *(Police advise however that if it's something they are going to be asked to investigate, the original message is the best evidence.)
Print out the [Tips for kids](#) or [Tips for teens](#) for your child.