Cyberbullying:
What is it and what to do when things go wrong

If you're posting or gaming you've probably seen some people saying some hurtful things to each other. Sometimes it can get pretty intense with mean comments and messages, and sharing of personal information or images. Sometimes it's spreading rumours or leaving people out on purpose so they'll feel bad. This is cyberbullying and it's never OK.

Whether it's from schoolmates, friends or strangers, cyberbullying is a problem that can affect us all. Some cyberbullies also hack accounts or set up fake ones to humiliate or impersonate their victims. Sometimes bullies say hurtful things or exclude just to get a reaction, but the impact on the victim can be very real.

If this has ever happened to you, you might have found it hard to talk to other people about what has happened. You might have had trouble sleeping or concentrating at school, felt alone, sad or angry, lost your appetite or even felt hopeless and afraid.

It's really important to tell someone if you're being cyberbullied, like a friend or trusted adult such as a teacher, parent or someone from Kids Helpline. Asking for help is totally OK. There are also ways to get the hurtful content removed.

This guide will show you how to:

- Recognise the signs of cyberbullying
- Respond appropriately to the situation
- Report cyberbullying
- Find more help when you need it

Why is this important

Bullying – in person or online – is never OK. It is hurtful and can have lasting effects on you, your mates, or someone you don't know. By understanding what cyberbullying is, recognising the signs, and knowing what to do when it happens, you'll be in a better place to take back power.

So let's start with what cyberbullying is. According to the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, cyberbullying is "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, spreading of rumours, sharing images and personal information without consent, or being ignored or excluded.

It's also important to protect yourself and your reputation against cyberbullies hacking your account and pretending to be you. If some else can access your accounts they can:

- Change your posts or profiles
- Pretend to be you online
- See all your personal information and photos

Ask yourself...

- "Have I/my friends ever had someone say something hurtful on social media? How did it make you feel?"
- "What are some of the ways I could support a friend being cyberbullied?"
- "Are all my passwords strong and private? Who has access to my accounts? Who do I want to be able to access my accounts?"
- "Which adults do I trust? Who would I feel comfortable telling if I was being cyberbullied?"

What are the signs or cyberbullying?

Kids Helpline advise the signs of cyberbullying 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

If you or a friend are experiencing these signs, it's really important to tell someone.

## How should I respond to cyberbullying?

- Tell someone; a friend, a parent, a trusted adult or Kids Helpline
- Stay calm
- Avoid reacting in the moment – don't retaliate or respond to the bullying
- Don't forward or share the mean comments or messages
- Use humour to deflect the comments
- If it's safe, respond to the bully and let them know that what they're doing is not OK
- Take the time to do something nice for yourself
- Block, unfriend or unfollow the bully
- Keep evidence of the bullying 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 to the app or to the eSafety Commissioner

Be aware of any shared passwords or account passwords you have that are easy to hack. This makes it very easy for cyberbullies to access private information and images or pretend to be you to send out hurtful content from your account.

See our guides on **How to create a strong password (and why this is important)** and **Safeguarding your privacy on apps and gaming platforms** for more information on this.
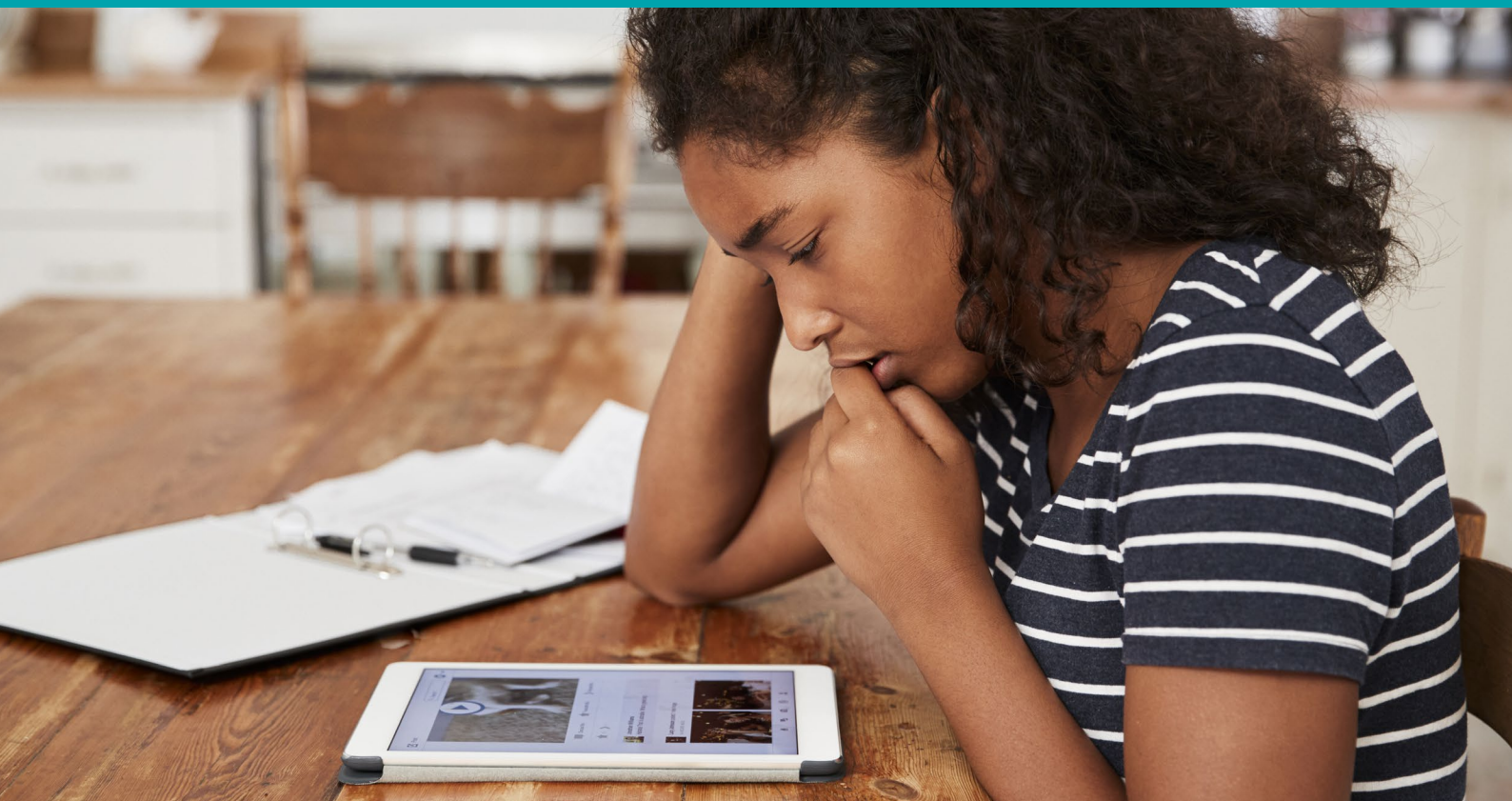
How to report cyberbullying

Most apps and games have community guidelines around what behaviour is and isn't OK, 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 you or parent or guardian.

Cyberbullying ⓘ

If you are under 18 you can make a complaint about cyberbullying or online bullying.

REPORT NOW →

FAQ ›

Collecting Evidence ›

Image-based abuse ⓘ

If an intimate image has been shared, or threatened to share it without your consent, you can make a report.

REPORT NOW →

FAQ ›

How we handle reports ›

Illegal and harmful content ⓘ

The Cyber Report team investigates complaints and assists in getting content removed.

REPORT NOW →

What we can investigate ›

What we can't investigate ›

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 you ever see or receive anything online that makes you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, you should discuss it with your friends or a trusted adult. You can also 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

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.