

# Cyberbullying

## What to say when things go wrong online



Bullying can have long-lasting effects on mental and physical health. The 24/7 nature of online life means that cyberbullying can occur in your home without you even being aware.

According to research conducted by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, one in five young Australians report being threatened, excluded or abused online.<sup>1</sup>

Yet young people don't always share when they are experiencing cyberbullying so it's important to have open and engaging conversations about it.



### This guide will help you talk to your child about:

- ✓ Recognising the types of cyberbullying
- ✓ Why it's important to do something about cyberbullying
- ✓ Responding appropriately to the situation
- ✓ Reporting cyberbullying
- ✓ Finding more help if you need it

<sup>1</sup> [Cyberbullying factsheet | eSafety Commissioner](#)



Cyberbullying of children is when someone uses online content or communication to seriously humiliate, seriously harass, seriously intimidate or seriously threaten a child or young person under the age of 18.

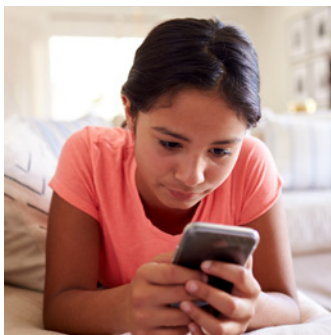
## Did you know...

50%

**Only half** of Australian parents know when their child is treated in a nasty way online...

66%

... and **two thirds** don't know that their child is engaging in bullying behaviour.<sup>2</sup>



## Your child jumps when they hear a notification and they appear anxious after checking their phone

Your instincts tell you that something is not quite right, but your child shrugs their shoulders when you ask if everything is ok.

Young people often avoid telling adults about cyberbullying for fear of overreactions.<sup>3</sup> Building a trusting relationship where your child can come to you about anything, including cyberbullying, is the most proactive way you can help. Let them know they won't be in trouble and you won't take away their phone.



Young people might feel safer to open up if they don't feel interrogated. Think of an appropriate time to bring up your concern and consider sharing examples of bullying behaviour that helps your child explain what's going on.

### Conversation starter

I noticed that a notification you received earlier changed your mood. If someone is mean to you, that is not OK and we can do something about it.

Why do you think it's important to take action when someone is mean to you? What could happen if we didn't do anything about it? Let's make a plan for how you want to handle this.

<sup>2</sup> Parental awareness | eSafety Commissioner

<sup>3</sup> Adolescents' Experiences of Cyberbullying: Gender, Age and Reasons for Not Reporting to Adults: Social Sciences & Humanities Journal Article | IGI Global ([igi-global.com](http://igi-global.com))

## What are the signs to look out for?

According to the eSafety Commissioner, indicators your child might be experiencing cyberbullying are:

- being upset after using the internet or their mobile phone
- changes in personality, such as becoming more withdrawn, anxious, sad or angry
- appearing lonely or distressed
- unexpected changes in friendship groups
- a decline in their school work
- changes in their sleep patterns
- avoidance of school or clubs
- a decline in their physical health
- becoming secretive about their online activities and mobile phone use



## Your child shows you mean comments that their friend received

The hurtful remarks are posted by a classmate and your child tells you that it's not the first time their friend has been targeted online.

Cyberbullying can be particularly isolating. A nasty message or pic can be sent to a target at any time and can have an immediate impact. Remember that cyberbullying can occur in many different places, such as text, messenger apps, gaming, and social media.

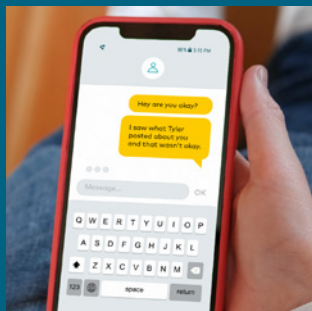


One of the most effective actions you can take when your child witnesses cyberbullying is to encourage upstanding behaviour.

### Conversation starter

Can you think of a time you saw something mean and said something? By saying 'This is not OK' you are showing support to the victim and you are helping to create a positive online community.

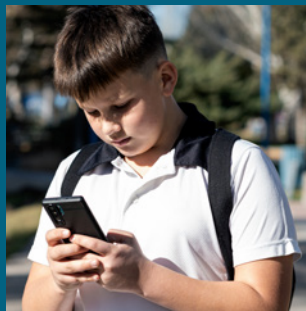
# What else can you do to help your child stand up to cyberbullying?



## Advocate supportive behaviour

Let your child know that reaching out to the victim directly is doing something helpful. It can be as

simple as sending a message 'Are you OK?' or choosing kind language to show care, such as 'That wasn't cool what they said' or 'I'm here if you want to chat.'



## Empower their instincts

Build your child's confidence in their ability to detect cyberbullying and call out unacceptable online behaviour. If they see something they are

not OK with, help them understand their power in speaking up. They may choose to respond publicly to model positive online behaviour but if you or they are worried about online reactions to a public message, remind them that they can still have an influence if they send a private message to person being mean.



## Encourage help seeking

Advise your child that victims of cyberbullying should tell an adult they trust about what they are experiencing so they get the help they need.

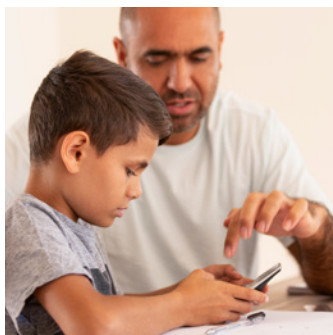
Acknowledge that cyberbullying can have long lasting effects on everyone and it is important to not experience it alone. A witness to cyberbullying or a close friend of the victim might also need to talk to someone out it.



## Escalate to authorities

Cyberbullying can have serious consequences if it's not stopped and the authorities can help. Together with your child, assess the situation to respond

appropriately and choose what action to take. It could be reporting the cyberbullying to the social media or messaging app or gaming site, eSafety Commissioner or the police.



## The school has informed you that your child has set up a fake profile using their friend's name

When you ask your child about it, they tell you that they were hoping to get 'cred' by posting funny pics of their mates in their friendship group.

Young people sometime choose to bully others without fully recognising the impact it may have. Their actions could be motivated by advancing their social status, but they might not have the intentions to hurt anyone.



It's important to help build your child's empathy for others. Explain that they gain stronger friendships if they show understanding and tolerance for others.

### Conversation starter

How might a person feel if they see mean messages or pics about themselves online? Sometimes we might say something and not even know how much it hurts their feelings. What can we do to make sure our actions don't hurt others?

## What are the types of cyberbullying?

Educating your child about the different types<sup>4</sup> of cyberbullying can help them stop bullying others, identify when they are being bullied and call out bullying behaviour.



### Harassment

Ongoing and on purpose abuse towards someone online



### Trolling

Provoking an emotional reaction by making offensive comments on posts



### Masquerading

Creating fake accounts in someone's name to mock others



### Image-based abuse

Sharing intimate images of someone without their permission



### Exclusion

Purposely leaving someone out of an online game or group chat



### Online hate

Making fun of someone's personal attributes, like their race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or how they look



### Doxing

Sharing someone's personal information without their permission to embarrass them or put them at risk

<sup>4</sup> [Bullying online | eSafety Commissioner](#)

# If you suspect that your child might be cyberbullying, help them to take action:

## 1

### Stop

Ask your child to pause for a moment to think about how their words might have been received from the other person's point of view.

## 2

### Delete the content

Get your child to do what is in their power to remove the content. This could be deleting a post, a comment, a group chat, asking other people to delete the content or reporting it to the app.

## 3

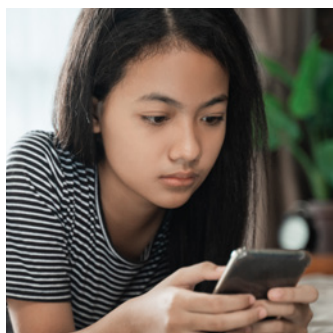
### Apologise

Help your child understand the worth of a sincere apology. By taking responsibility of their actions, they can contribute to a positive online community.

## 4

### Talk about what happened

Prepare your child to be open to having an honest conversation with the person that was hurt. Tell them that they have an opportunity to learn from their behaviour.



## A friend hacks into your child's account to get a private pic and makes the image public to intentionally embarrass them

Cyberbullies might pose as a trusted friend to purposely hurt their victims.

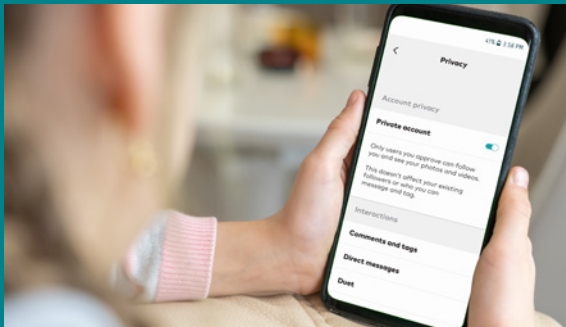
This can be truly devastating for a young person, especially if they have trusted them with personal information or granted them access to their online accounts.



Role model a calm response to such an incident and resist the urge to react. Listen to their feelings, reassure them that they are loved and agree on solutions to take back power.

### Conversation starter

Sometimes people feel the need to hurt others to make themselves feel better. Those hurt never deserve this treatment. What are some way we can show cyberbullies that it is not OK to treat people that way?

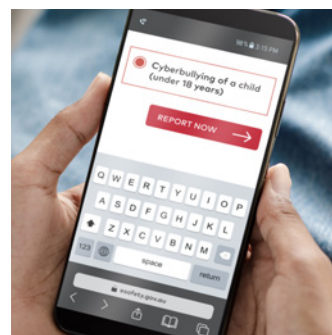
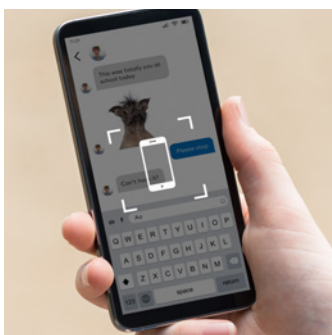


## To protect your child further, remind them to:

- ✓ Create strong passphrases and set up MFA (where available)
- ✓ Avoid sharing passwords or passphrases amongst their classmates
- ✓ Check their privacy settings and think about who can see their content
- ✓ Be cautious of anyone trying to connect with them that they don't know in real life

## How to report cyberbullying

Most apps and games have community guidelines that set out appropriate behaviour, as well as how to use reporting tools. Make time with your child to find the community guidelines and reporting tools of their favourite apps and games and talk through them together.



### Collect

Grab evidence such as screenshots or screen records of hurtful messages or images, usernames or profiles, making sure to include the time and date of harmful behaviour. Be sure to do this before your child exits group or private chats, as evidence can be lost.

### Submit

Send your evidence to the site and allow 48 hours for response.

### Escalate

If they don't respond or remove the offending content or user, [submit a report to the Office of the eSafety Commissioner](#).



If someone is threatening to share, or has shared, nudes, intimate or private images of your child, they are committing a crime – even if they are both under 18 years.

You can take screenshots or recordings of when and where it was shared, but do not take screenshots of the intimate image or video, itself, as this can be a crime. There's more information from the [Office of the eSafety Commissioner here](#).

## What to do if your child needs more help



### Take action by contacting:

- [eSafety Commissioner](#)  
to report cyberbullying and online abuse
- [Australian Cyber Security Centre](#)  
to report identity theft and fraud
- [Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation \(ACCCE\)](#)  
to report child exploitation material
- [IDCARE](#)  
to get identity theft support



### If your child needs to talk to someone about their feelings or worries, they can contact:

- [Kids Helpline](#)  
on 1800 55 1800 for free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling services
- [13YARN](#)  
on 13 92 76 for a free, private and confidential talk 24/7 with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Crisis Supporter

## About Optus Digital Thumbprint

Optus Digital Thumbprint supports digital safety and wellbeing for young people and families. Find out more at [www.digitalthumbprint.com.au](http://www.digitalthumbprint.com.au)

