



Optus
Digital
Thumbprint



Cyberbullying, GenAI, and keeping your child safe online

A guide for parents and carers

Cyberbullying is changing

More than 1 in 2 children aged 10-17 have experienced cyberbullying, with reports to the eSafety Commissioner rising sharply in recent years. Alongside mean comments and rumours, young people are also being bullied with content made using Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI), including altered images, videos and cloned voices. The technology is becoming so advanced that sometimes it is hard to tell what is real and what is fake.

As cyberbullying continues to evolve, parents and carers play an important role in helping children navigate online experiences safely and confidently.



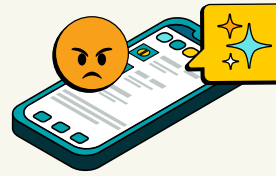
How to spot the warning signs of cyberbullying



Often children don't communicate that they're being bullied for fear of having their phone or internet access being taken away, or that the situation might get worse. According to eSafety, the warning signs of cyberbullying include:

- Being upset after using the internet or their devices, such as mobile phones.
- Changes in personality, such as becoming more withdrawn, anxious, sad or angry.
- Appearing lonelier or more distressed.
- Unexpected changes in friendship groups.
- A slide in their schoolwork and results.
- Changes in their sleep patterns.
- Avoiding school or clubs.
- A decline in their physical health.
- Becoming secretive about their online activities and device use.

Common forms of AI-generated cyberbullying



Cyberbullying Type		What it can look like
 Deepfake images & videos		Using a 'Digital Mask' to put your child's face onto someone else's body in a photo or video to make it look like they were somewhere they weren't.
 Voice cloning		Taking a snippet of your child's voice from a video and using a computer to make them "say" things they never actually said.
 Fake screenshots & messages		Creating made-up conversations that look exactly like real chat history to trick friends or damage a child's reputation.
 Group chat exclusion		Using "Digital Walls" to automatically block, remove, or ignore a child in private groups, making them feel invisible to their friends.
 AI-generated rumours		Using AI tools to quickly create and spread made-up stories or hurtful comments that make it feel like "everyone" is saying something untrue.

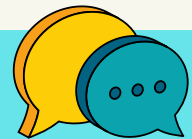
Cyberbullying often happens in private online spaces such as group chats, disappearing messages, gaming platforms and social media apps, making it difficult for parents and carers to see when it is happening. [In many cases](#), the person responsible is someone the child knows in real life, such as a friend, classmate or peer from school.

Coping with the emotional and mental stress of cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can feel distressing and overwhelming, triggering a range of emotions such as fear, anger, anxiety and sadness. While some children and young people may experience these feelings for a short time, others may experience [longer-term impacts](#).

Recent Optus research¹ found that 74% of parents identified a challenge related to how their child copes with cyberbullying. The most common concern was helping children manage the emotional stress caused by cyberbullying (24%), followed by knowing how to protect themselves online (19%).

How you can support



Keep communication open and try not to take devices away. Young people are more likely to reach out for help when they know they won't immediately lose their device or be blamed.

Start calm, judgement-free conversations about online life. Ask curious questions like, "Have you heard people talking about deepfakes?" or "Is AI something people at school are using much?"

Look out for signs that something may be wrong, such as your child seeming quieter, withdrawn, upset, or suddenly changing how they use their devices or interact with friends.

¹ Optus Customer Research and Insights, May 2026

A few simple steps to help prevent and respond to cyberbullying



Set accounts to "private" where possible, so your child has more control over who can view, contact or interact with them online.



Show children how to block, hide or report harmful content and fake accounts, giving them practical ways to respond to cyberbullying.



Talk about what to do if altered images, videos or rumours are shared online, so your child knows where to seek help if something goes wrong.



Remind them that AI-generated content can look real even when it is fake, helping them think critically about what they see online.



Encourage pauses before reposting emotional or embarrassing content, as online posts can spread quickly and be difficult to remove.



If cyberbullying occurs, stay calm, reassure your child they are not in trouble.

Where to get help

If your child is experiencing cyberbullying, support is available. Every situation is different, and support may be available through your child's school, a health professional, online platforms and specialist support services.

If your child is in immediate danger or at risk of harming themselves or others, call Triple Zero (000) immediately.

You can also get support from:

- [eSafety Commissioner](#)
- [Kids Helpline](#) on **1800 55 1800**
- [13 Yarn](#) on **13 92 76**
- [Lifeline](#) on **13 11 14**

About Optus Digital Thumbprint

Through our Sustainability strategy, Optus is enabling all Australians to achieve, thrive and belong in a digital world.

Optus Digital Thumbprint supports digital safety and wellbeing for young people and families. Find out more at www.digitalthumbprint.com.au

