



Alicia helps Bec take a stand

A story about cyberbullying



Mary Koolhof

Illustrated by Kyan O'Rourke



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Bec and Alicia were *best friends*. They sat together at school, and on Saturdays they loved going shopping and looking at the new clothes in the shops.

One Saturday morning Bec was at Alicia's place.

'The new summer T-shirts are in the shops now!' said Alicia. 'Let's go to town and try some on.'

Bec was very *quiet*.

'No, I don't really feel like it,' she said.

'Why not? What's wrong?' asked Alicia.

'Yesterday I found out something horrible,' Bec said.



'Someone's been *texting* people with really mean messages about me. And I think they've got an old photo of me they've photoshopped to make me look really ugly.'

Alicia looked at her friend in amazement.

'Really? No way! How do you know?'

'I saw Caitlin and her friends all laughing at their phones in the corner at school. They hid them pretty quickly when I went over, but I saw it.'

It's so *embarrassing!* My nose doesn't really look enormous, does it?'

Alicia was horrified. 'Of course it doesn't! Don't let them make you feel bad. You're great!'



But Bec was still worried.

'What if they put that photo up on Facebook? Then everyone will see it!'

'Yeah, that'd be awful. Caitlin's **pretty mean** sometimes. I know she's done this kind of thing before.'

Bec said slowly, 'I think she's mad at me because I was picked for the netball team and she wasn't.'

'Well, that's not your fault. You *deserved* to get in the team.'

'I suppose, but I still think Caitlin's getting back at me.'

'So do you think she did the photo? And she's sending the messages?' Alicia asked.

Bec shrugged and said quietly, 'I don't know. I don't even want to think about it.'



'Don't let her make you feel like that! Caitlin's just trying to get at you. You'll always be my best friend, Bec, so don't let her get to you!'

'Well, what are we going to do? We can't just let it go. It looks like she's been messaging the photo to *everyone!*'

'Could you talk to your parents?' Alicia asked.

'Well, I'm not sure about talking to Mum. She might ring up Caitlin's mum and go off at her. Or she might even go round to her house!'

'How embarrassing - that'd just make Caitlin worse! OK, maybe tell your mum later. But *what can we do* right now?'



Alicia had an idea. 'Could you talk to Miss Johnson at school? She's pretty nice. She *always listens* to us. Maybe we could talk to her. Remember she helped Tanya last year when she had problems with that boy sending her texts all day and all night?'

'What good would talking to Miss Johnson do? I can't prove anything.'

Alicia was still thinking. 'Well, you know my brother Joe? He's studying computing at college. He was doing an assignment on cyberbullying last night.'

'**Cyberbullying?** What's that? Never heard of it,' said Bec.



'It's when someone uses Facebook, Instagram, their phones or something like that to be mean to other people.'

'You mean like how Caitlin keeps texting those messages to people, that's cyberbullying?'

'Yeah, things like that. Joe said that everything you do on a computer leaves a kind of trail. People who do that kind of stuff can be tracked down. They can get in big trouble, too. Some of that stuff's actually a crime!' Alicia said.

'You mean like the teachers can *track what we do* on the computers at school?'

'Right, they can check at work too. Joe said someone in his class lost his part-time job because he emailed a *stupid joke* about a girl at work, and the boss got to hear about it. The police got involved too.'



'Wow, that's serious,' said Bec.

'Well, what Caitlin (or whoever), is doing to you is serious too,' said Alicia. 'Once something's on the *internet*, it's there for people to find.

'Joe heard about a guy who had been tagged in a Facebook photo when he was spray-painting some stupid things on a building. The guy was going for an apprenticeship. Someone at the company saw the photo and they cancelled his interview.'

'Really?' asked Bec.

'Yeah,' Alicia said. 'Joe told me that when

you're going for a job these days, they often Google you to see what they can find. Any *stupid party photos* or anything like that, and you're out!'



'Well I'm not going to let Caitlin wreck my future,' said Bec determinedly. 'Miss Johnson said I've got a good chance of getting a scholarship to do nursing at uni if I put my mind to it.'

'*Awesome!*' said Alicia. 'OK, so let's think about this. Now we know it's cyberbullying, we can't let Caitlin get away with it. We need to stop her spreading those text messages.'

'Yeah, we're not even supposed to have our phones in class!'

'What about telling Mr Tate? He hates mobile phones!'

'What, the new Vice Principal? I don't think so! He wouldn't **have a clue** who I was!'

'So?' Alicia looked confused.



'Well, if I'm going to *talk to someone* about this, I'd rather talk to someone I know,' said Bec.

Bec had a think. 'I might go and see Mrs Chen.'

'The school counsellor?'

'Yes. Remember she came on school camp with us - when we went rock-climbing? She was *pretty cool*. And remember how she really helped Ashira when her mum was in hospital last year?'

'True,' agreed Alicia. 'So you think Mrs Chen might be able to help sort out the text messages?'

'Yeah, and don't forget the photo,' said Bec. 'If that gets on Facebook I'd totally die of embarrassment.'



'Well, if Caitlin does that, makes up a **fake** Facebook page about you or something, she'd be in big trouble. Joe said that you can contact Facebook about problems like that. They can take a page down and they can also block people from using Facebook, I think.'

'Wow, Caitlin would really hate that – getting blocked from Facebook!'

'Yeah, wouldn't she just! She spends half her life on Facebook and Instagram!'

'OK, that's another thing we need to think about,' said Alicia. 'Facebook **privacy settings**. I'll ask Joe. I want to make sure that only my Facebook friends can see my

Facebook stuff. And he said I can block people from contacting me. I want to do that too.'



'Great idea! And I'm going to check the privacy settings on my Facebook account too. I don't want strangers to be able to see my photos.'

'Awesome! I'll do the same. We can do that this afternoon - when Joe comes home from soccer.'

Bec was looking a lot happier now.

'I think I will talk to Mrs Chen then. I reckon she'd have some ideas of what to do. I want to get this sorted out. I'm sick of **stressing** about it.'

'Cool! I'll come with you if you like, Bec. We can go on Monday at lunchtime.'

I know Mrs Chen is always in her office then. She *helps kids* with their résumés and stuff like that. If anyone asks, that's what we're doing, OK?'



'Thanks, Ali. Now let's go and look at those T-shirts. I've got my birthday money to spend!'



Cyberbullying is the use of technology to bully a person or group. Bullying is repeated behaviour by an individual or group with the intent to harm another person or group." (definition from www.cybersmart.gov.au)

Check out these links to find out what you can do to be safe online.

- www.cybersmart.gov.au from the Australian government for cybersafety information
- www.facebook.com/cybersafetyhelp is the Australian government's cybersafety help page found on facebook
- www.somethingincommon.gov.au/get-inspired/your-eyes-and-ears is an anti-cyberbullying short video
- www.staysmartonline.gov.au/kids_and_teens provides tips on using social networking sites safely. Includes a Budd:e interactive game to explore cybersecurity issues
- www.kidshelp.com.au 1800 55 1800 provides free, confidential online and phone counselling
- angelsgoal.org.au is an Australian anti-bullying and support organisation
- www.iness.com.au specialises in education of children in the dangers of the internet, cybersafety and cyberbullying

If you see something online that you don't like - tell your family or friends. Talk with them about how to be cybersafe.

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This is a Salvation Army and Communities for Children South East Tasmania initiative, funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.



Developed and produced by The Salvation Army and Communities for Children South East Tasmania, this book aims to address cyberbullying behaviour and to encourage children to discuss their feelings with someone they trust. It also conveys the message that friends can be a powerful support for anyone who is experiencing any kind of bullying.

Communities for Children aims to improve the development, health and wellbeing of children up to the age of 12 and their families through innovative early intervention and prevention programs.

Communities for Children provides support for parents and children to improve child development, child safety and family functioning.

We promote social inclusion ensuring families are connected to local communities. Activities and resources focus on supporting parents to raise children who are confident individuals with the capacity to reach their full potential.

For further information about Communities for Children please see the website: www.cfctas.org.au.





Alicia helps Bec take a stand was written for children and pre-teens who might be affected by cyberbullying or know someone who is.

Alicia helps Bec take a stand is suitable for children 9-12 years old.

Mary Koolhof

Author



Mary Koolhof is a teacher and writer who has been involved in many programs supporting children and young people in Tasmania. She has great respect for the work done by The Salvation Army through Communities for Children and is very pleased to be able to support this work.

Kyan O'Rourke

Illustrator



Kyan O'Rourke is a Tasmanian illustrator and animator. She is working in children's television as an animator and designer. She is very passionate about being able to assist with projects through The Salvation Army - Communities for Children program that supports children.



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