

CYBERBULLYING



It's almost impossible to imagine life without the internet and mobile phones. With the touch of a button you can be connected to friends and family wherever they are. But these technologies can also be used in a negative way – causing hurt to others. Cyberbullying is a growing problem. In Australia, about one in 10 teenagers has experienced some sort of bullying using technology.¹ Being the target of cyberbullying is not your fault and there are things you can do to put a stop to it.

WHAT IS CYBERBULLYING?

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying that is carried out through an internet service such as email, chat room, discussion group, online social networking, instant messaging or web pages. It can also include bullying by SMS through mobile phones.* It can happen in school, or out of it, any hour of the day, from people you know, and sometimes people you don't know. It can leave you feeling unsafe and alone.

Being cyberbullied might include having any of the following happen to you:

- being sent threatening emails
- being teased or made fun of online
- having rumours spread about you online
- having unpleasant comments, pictures or videos about you sent or posted on websites (e.g. MySpace, Facebook)
- being sent unwanted messages
- having someone use your screen name or password and pretending to be you to hurt someone else
- being deliberately ignored or left out of things on the internet.

Cyberbullying can happen to anyone. People often become cyberbullies simply because they can – the internet allows a person to be fairly anonymous, so some people who would not otherwise behave this way feel they can get away with it. People can also be bullied online by groups of people such as class groups or collective members of an online community.

IF A FRIEND IS BEING CYBERBULLIED

It can be hard to know if your friends are being cyberbullied. They might keep it to themselves. If they are being cyberbullied, you might notice that they may not chat with you online as much, they suddenly receive lots of text messages or are

unhappy after they have been on the computer or checked their phone messages. They may stop hanging around with friends or lose interest in school or social activities. If you get the impression that your friends are being targeted in this way, let them know they have your support and show them this fact sheet.

IS IT DEPRESSION OR ANXIETY?

Being bullied in any way can lead to anxiety, lower your self-esteem and may leave you feeling alone, sad, angry or scared. In these situations it can be hard to know whether your feelings are a normal reaction to events or whether what you are experiencing is actually a more serious mental health problem. You may be experiencing an episode of **depression** if **for more than two weeks** you:

- have felt sad, down or miserable, or irritable most of the time
- have lost interest or enjoyment in nearly all of your usual activities.

You might also be:

- not doing so well at school, university or work and/or
- experiencing changes in your relationships with family and friends.

You may be experiencing an anxiety disorder if, for some time, worry and fear have overwhelmed you and got in the way of other parts of your life – like how you do at school or work, and how you get on with other people.

Visit: www.youthbeyondblue.com

Info line: **1300 22 4636**

beyondblue: the national depression initiative



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO STOP CYBERBULLYING?

If you are being cyberbullied, it is possible that you're feeling powerless and isolated. But there are options and things you can do to stop the problem.

Tell someone – The most important step is to talk to someone you trust, a parent, friend, school counsellor or teacher. People do take cyberbullying seriously and will be happy to help you.

Don't reply to bullying messages – It'll only get worse if you do. By replying, the bully gets what he or she wants. Often, if you don't reply, the bully will get bored and leave you alone.

Block the cyberbully – Depending on the way that the bully is communicating with you, it may be possible to block their messages or texts. If you are not sure how, your phone or internet service provider can help you.

Report the problem – Your school or university may have policies about cyberbullying and can take action against it. Your ISP or phone provider may also be able to help. Websites like Facebook and MySpace have links where you can report abuse.

Keep the evidence – Keeping copies of texts, emails, online conversations or voicemails as evidence can be useful if it comes to tracking the bully down. This doesn't mean that you have to keep looking at them (just keep them in a separate folder on your phone or computer) but, if you prefer to delete the messages, you could just keep a record of the communications, including the time and date they took place.

Change your contact details – Get a new user name for the internet, a new email account, a new mobile phone number and only give them out to your closest friends.

Keep your username and passwords secret – Keep your personal information private so it doesn't fall into the hands of someone who'll misuse it.

If messages are threatening or serious, get in touch with the police – Cyberbullying, if it's threatening, is illegal and the police may be able to take action.



▶ **LOOK**
for the signs of depression



▶ **TALK**
about what's going on



▶ **LISTEN**
to your friends' experiences



▶ **SEEK HELP**
together!

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- If you are being cyberbullied, it's important to remember that it's not your fault and that it's OK to let someone know as they may be able to help you. This is especially important if the way you feel about being bullied is starting to affect other aspects of your life.
- Stand up and speak out! If you see or know about cyberbullying happening to friends, support them and report the bullying. You'd want them to do the same for you.
- Don't forward messages or pictures that may be offensive or upsetting to someone. Even though you may not have started it, you will be seen to be part of the cyberbullying cycle.
- Remember to treat others as you would like to be treated when communicating online.

MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

You can speak to trained counsellors by phoning these 24-hour telephone counselling services:

Lifeline 13 11 14 (cost of a local call)

Kids Help Line 1800 55 1800 (freecall)

Information and support is also available from the following websites:

beyondblue www.youthbeyondblue.com

or www.beyondblue.org.au

info line 1300 22 4636

Information on depression, anxiety and how to help a friend

Cybersmart www.cybersmart.gov.au

Tips to stay safe online

Inspire Foundation www.inspire.org.au

Online programs to improve mental health

headspace www.headspace.org.au

Information, support and help near you

ReachOut.com www.reachout.com

Information and support for young people going through tough times

The websites below can help you to find health services in your area. They list services that are either free of charge or low cost:

Lifeline Service Finder

www.lifeline.org.au/service_finder

Kids Help Line

www.kidshelp.com.au

If you or a friend want to communicate with someone via email or online, Kids Help Line offers confidential, non-judgemental, emotional support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

SOURCES 1. The Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study (ACBPS): Results of a quantitative survey of students and staff
*ReachOut.com – www.reachout.com
beyondblue – www.beyondblue.org.au
Cybersmart – www.cybersmart.gov.au

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