



Cyber Bullying

What is Cyber Bullying?

Cyber bullying is bullying over:

- mobile phone text messages or phone calls
- email
- instant messaging like MSN, Yahoo messenger and AIM
- internet forums or blogs
- social networking websites and online communities like MySpace, Twitter, Facebook and Habbo Hotel.

Cyber bullying is very common, with research showing that 20% of children over 11 have been a victim. The majority do not tell anyone about it (National Children's Home, 2005). Cyber bullying is just as serious as schoolyard bullying, and can result in depression, shame, embarrassment and even suicide. Victims can be cyber bullied anytime and any place, unlike schoolyard bullying where children can find refuge at home.

Over the internet, bullies can remain anonymous or pretend to be someone they are not. This can often result in the bully being less inhibited by normal social constraints. They cannot see the look of pain and humiliation on the victim's face, and being relatively anonymous, they are less likely to have to deal with the consequences of their actions. Less courage and energy is needed to cyber bully than to bully someone in person, and size, strength and age are not barriers.

Forms of Cyber Bullying

- sending harassing or threatening messages
- pretending to be someone you are not
 - pretending to be a 'friend' to gain trust and sensitive information from the victim
 - pretending to be the victim to defame and embarrass them
- publishing hurtful and humiliating rumours and photos or posting personal information on the internet
- flooding someone's inbox with emails
- signing someone's email address up to mailing lists and porn sites.

Signs of Cyber Bullying

- The child's internet behaviour has changed dramatically (spending much more or less time on the computer).
- Your child does not want you to see what they are doing on the internet – turning off screen or minimising windows when you enter the room.
- Dramatic changes in mood, self esteem, beliefs and behaviour.

What Your Child Can Do To Avoid Cyber Bullying

- *Ask for help*, understanding and support from family and friends. Many internet forums and social networking sites are moderated (i.e. monitored) – report the bully if possible. Keep evidence of the harassment, **do not delete the messages**.
- *Block the cyber bully* from contacting you further. Most instant messaging programs and social networking sites allow a 'block' or 'ignore' feature, making them unable to continue contacting you. Remove them from your contact list.
- *Change your email* or chat/social networking account if the bully keeps finding ways to bypass this.
- *Do not react* to the cyber bully. This only encourages them to continue. If they are not getting any response, they will lose their power over you and will eventually get bored and stop.
- *Keep your personal details secret*. Never give details like mobile numbers, email addresses or passwords out on the internet, as you never know who you are really speaking to.
- *Be very careful about what you say or post on the internet*. Don't say or post anything that could embarrass you or be used against you. Behave as you would in public, as the internet is public, and everything you say and do is logged. IP and computer IDs are traceable. If you confide in a 'friend', they can redistribute the conversation among others. You never know who you are really speaking to.
- *Treat others how you would like to be treated*. Don't give others reasons to target you.

What You Can Do To Help Your Child

- *Talk to your child* about where they go online, and who they talk to. If they are being cyber bullied, explain to them that it is not their fault. Give them your support so they feel that they can confide in you.
- *Place the computer in a high traffic area* of the house. Do not allow them to have private computers in their bedrooms.
- *Do not confiscate their mobile phones and internet access*. This will make them less likely to speak to you about their problems, as they will be afraid you will take away an important social outlet for them. Kids will often find ways around this anyway and will do it behind your back.
- *Educate yourself and your child* about the internet and how they are communicating. Learn where the 'block' or 'ignore' feature is and encourage your child to use it. Read the privacy policies and put your child's account on the highest privacy settings. The less information given out on the internet, the better.
- *Encourage your child to participate in activities offline*. Make sure they don't spend all day on the internet. This leads to boredom – causing them to harass others to create a reaction, provoking negativity. Set an internet time limit, and get them involved in sport or other community activities. These help create a support base, higher self esteem and demonstrate that there is more to life than online friendships. Online friendships can be beneficial if they act as an *extension* to current real life social activities, but should never replace them.
- *Google your child*. Keep an eye on anything being posted about your child by typing their name into google like this: "John Smith". Also search their email address, mobile number and home address (keep quotation marks around them). If you find information that you do not want to be posted, ask Google or the site displaying it to disable it.



Telephone Interpreter Service 131 450

If English is not your first language please call the Mental Health Information Service through the Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS). This service is free to non-English speaking Australian citizens or permanent residents. TIS have access to interpreters speaking more than 120 languages and dialects.

Further Reading

www.stopcyberbullying.org

www.cyberbullying.info

<http://www.reachout.com.au/default.asp?ti=2879>

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Campbell, M. A. (2005). Cyber bullying: An old problem in a new guise? *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 15*(1), 68-76.

Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J. (2005). Cyberbullying: Creating a culture of respect in a cyber world. *Reclaiming children and Youth, 13*(4), 224-228.

National Children's Home. (2005). *Putting U in the picture*. Mobile Bullying Survey.

Patchin, J. & Hinduja, S. (2006). Bullies move beyond the schoolyard: A preliminary look at cyberbullying. *Youth and Juvenile Justice, 4*(2), 148-169.

Ybarra, M. L. & Mitchell, K. J. (2004). Youth engaging in online harassment: associations with caregiver-child relationships, Internet use, and personal characteristics. *Journal of Adolescence, 27*(3), 319-336.

Mental Health Resource Centre

The Resource Centre contains material that promotes a better understanding of mental health issues. New books and DVDs are purchased on a regular basis and visitors are welcome to come in and browse.

Members of MHA, CAG and ARAFMI may check-out resources on loan. The length of the loan is 3 weeks. Membership costs between \$10 - \$30 per individual per annum. Please note that most of the reference books are not available for loan

You will find the Resource Centre Booklist on our website: www.mentalhealth.asn.au for further information contact 1300 794 991.

Disclaimer

This information is for educational purposes. As neither brochures nor websites can diagnose people it is always important to obtain professional advice and/or help when needed. The listed websites provide additional information, but should not be taken as an endorsement or recommendation.

This information may be reproduced with an acknowledgement to the Mental Health Association NSW. This and other fact sheets are available for download from www.mentalhealth.asn.au. The Association encourages feedback and welcomes comments about the information provided.

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