



A PARENT'S GUIDE TO CYBERBULLYING



**SCREEN
SANITY**™

A U S T R A L I A



CYBER BULLYING

WHAT IS IT?

Cyberbullying is willful, repeated harm inflicted in online spaces, including texts, chat rooms, social media, YouTube, and gaming sites/devices.

WHAT THE PROFESSIONALS ARE SAYING...

“Mental health professionals have seen a correlation between increased incidents of suicide and the use of cell phones. In the past, when kids were bullied, they could get an evening or weekend reprieve at home. But now, every time your phone beeps, you’re vulnerable. **24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**”

TIM DEWEESE
JOHNSON COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH



GOOD TO KNOW

According to teachers

Teachers report that cyberbullying is their #1 safety concern in their classrooms in a recent Google survey.

Isolation

Only about 1/3 of kids who are being bullied will actually ask an adult for help.

WHAT DOES CYBERBULLYING LOOK LIKE?

While similar to stereotypical bullying in terms of form and technique, **cyberbullying can much more devastating.**

- On the internet, someone could be told, **“kill yourself” (or KYS)**, for anything from having expressed a desire to commit suicide to having been bad in a game.
- Cyberbullying can look like teens gossiping and lying through texting, creating fake accounts and profiles for others, or taking embarrassing photos of people when they don't expect it and then **posting them online for anyone to see.**
- Victims may not know who is targeting them, or why—**the aggressor can disguise themselves and be anonymous.**
- **The hurtful actions can go viral**—and a large number of people (in a school, neighbourhood, city, world) can participate in extensive victimisation with a few keystrokes or touches of a screen.
- Due to the physical distance allowed by technology, the aggressor does not have to see the response of the victim. **It is much easier to be cruel online** because we don't have to face the consequences.
- Because people can access the internet anywhere, if someone is a target of online bullying, **it's not as though they can transfer schools to escape it.**



44%

of Aussie teens have been bullied or harassed online

SEXTING VS. CYBERBULLYING

it's important not to confuse **sexual bullying** (such as someone sexting someone else) with the behavior of predators. The response to a **predator grooming a potential victim** should be totally different than the response we take to a bully.



Learn more at [SCREENSANITY.ORG.AU](https://www.screensanity.org.au)



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CAN I PREVENT CYBERBULLYING FROM HAPPENING TO MY CHILD?

Not fully, but you have a serious advantage if you take a driver's ed approach to smartphone and social media introduction. At Screen Sanity, we call this "Ride. Practice. Drive." Before you hand your child the keys to a car, they spend many years shadowing you in the backseat, learning the rules of the road.

Before you give your child unsupervised online access, start a conversation about Cyberbullying—one road hazard they will encounter frequently.

Use any opportunity that gives you a natural way to bring the topic up, whether it's a school assembly, something you see on your own feed, or a situation in a TV show. Not sure what to ask? Here are some ideas:

- ?** What kinds of bullying have you witnessed? How did it make you feel?
- ?** Did you feel like you could do anything to stop it from happening? What do you think might have happened if you stepped in?
- ?** Have you ever been bullied? If so, did you tell anyone? Why or why not?
- ?** Do you feel like you could talk to me if you are bullied? How do you think I will react?
- ?** What does cyberbullying look like? What ways can people protect themselves?
- ?** How would you respond if you noticed someone cyberbullying?

HOW CAN I PREPARE THEM TO HANDLE CYBERBULLYING?

As they gain access to new apps and devices, it should feel like a "learner's permit"—with you logging hours by their side, pointing out examples of cyberbullying when you see them, coaching them with ongoing support and assistance. You'll want to start with strong limits, and release them slowly.

Install a monitoring app like **Bark** as a safety net, an app that monitors a device and flags inappropriate content

Make it non-negotiable that passwords are shared with parents.

Only allow a small number of friends and family when they start texting.

When they start a new social media account, make sure it's private.

Create device-free zones —like bedrooms overnight, which is prime time for harmful content online.

Engage with your child's online activities, showing them how to identify and block unwanted solicitations (you can do so anonymously), reject messages from strangers, and report inappropriate content immediately.

CYBERBULLYING

WHAT ARE WARNING SIGNS THAT SOMEONE IS BEING BULLIED?

Only about a third of kids who are being bullied will actually ask an adult for help. It's therefore crucial that you're aware of the **warning signs that your kids might be being bullied.**

These include:

- problems sleeping
- changes in eating habits
- loss of possessions
- injuries they can't account for
- loss of interest in activities they enjoy
- decline in academics
- isolation or loss of friends
- lowered self-esteem
- self-destructive behaviors

With cyberbullying specifically, look for behaviors that demonstrate your kids are anxious about their devices. For example, watch for if they become upset before, while, or after using their devices or if they don't want to talk to you about their online activity.

WHAT IF MY CHILD WITNESSES CYBERBULLYING?

Those who witness cyberbullying have a critical role to play. By standing up against bullying, they can make a huge difference.

Teach your child to:

1. Report it

Reach out to a trusted adult for help, and report the behavior. On most sites, kids can report behavior anonymously, so they aren't labeled a snitch.

2. Block it

On many apps and sites, you can block the bully.

3. Don't Share it

Screenshot the behaviour as evidence to share with an adult, but do not forward it on, comment on it, or give it a "like." Your child can get in trouble if the harmful content is traced back to them.

4. Call it Out

Consider how the victim feels, and actively provide encouragement for the victim. Find ways to nurture empathy and compassion.

THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP YOU CAN TAKE TO PROTECT YOUR KIDS FROM CYBERBULLYING

Have open communication, and teach them what proper and safe online behavior looks like.

According to teens themselves, the best ways to stop cyberbullying are by blocking the aggressor, ignoring him or her, getting parents involved, taking a break from technology, and reporting abusive behavior to the hosting site or app.



CYBERBULLYING

WHAT DO I DO IF MY KID SAYS (S)HE'S BEING BULLIED?

Separate the kids involved.

Determine if what happened was actually bullying: is the harm being done in a willful, repeated way?

Remember, the majority of kids who experience bullying won't tell anyone. If your kids come to you and actually tell you that they're being bullied, that means the pain they're experiencing is more significant than their fear that the bully will hurt them or that they'll be seen as a tattletale.

If you believe your child is being bullied, it's critical that you're first and foremost empathetic and make sure your children know that you hear them. Your child must know for sure that you will intervene rationally and logically, and not make the situation worse. One of the toughest things you'll have to deal with as a parent is controlling your reaction when you hear your kids are being hurt. You will be tempted to go right into "protect" mode, become upset or angry, and swiftly mete out justice. But you must **remain calm and gather all the facts**—otherwise, you'll shut your kids down.

Make sure they know you don't blame them for what's happening. Kids are often afraid to share because they blame themselves. Keep in mind that if your children come to you with a story about someone else being bullied, what they're saying might or might not be genuine. They could present the information to you as though it were about a third party, but actually be talking about themselves.

Determine if they're either: 1. emotionally stable and frustrated; or 2. in crisis, meaning they're in fight or flight mode and could be considering self-harm or suicide.

If your kids are not in crisis, address the problem based on the kind of bullying that is occurring (physical, social, verbal, cyber). As you seek to help your kids, be on the lookout for how you can **empower them to handle their situations without you getting involved.** Do intervene if that's what's necessary. But if your kids can safely deal with the problem themselves, that's ideal.

If the bullying has happened online (e.g., if there are texts or sexts or posts), report the harmful behaviour and/or block the user doing the bullying. **Save as much of that info as possible with screenshots.** You will need it if third parties are involved. Do not forward the screenshots to unrelated parties. As you work toward potential solutions, get your kids' opinions on what they think are the best strategies, with the goal of stopping the bullying behaviour. Bear in mind that in worst-case scenarios, the best solution might in fact be transferring your kids to another school.

If your child is in immediate crisis (e.g., considering suicide), ask if they've thought of hurting themselves. If so, ask them why and how they've thought about hurting themselves. Your goal is to find out if they've progressed so far as to actually be planning how to take their lives. Most kids will not have gotten to the planning stage, so if they have a plan, you need to get in touch with a psychologist immediately (not the school) and get your kids long-term help.

See the additional resources section on the next page for more information.



CYBERBULLYING

HOW CAN I EMPOWER MY CHILD TO BE RESILIENT IN THE FACE OF CYBERBULLYING?

Work with your kids to figure out potential solutions to stop the bullying problem.

Depending on the situation, you might need to talk to the school or the parents of the kid who is doing the bullying. If the situation involves criminal behaviour or physical threats, you will need to involve the police.

Encourage your kids not to react to minor instances of aggression, and teach them resilience to hostility. Words do have power to hurt us, but the more your kids can work on not internalising hurtful words, the more resilient they will be, not just now, but for the rest of their lives.

Limiting who they have contact with online can go a long way toward reducing the harm they experience from others. They should also save any evidence of cyberbullying in case this information is needed if the authorities have to be involved.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

esafety.gov.au

Parent Guide to Cyberbullying

esafety commissioner

How to Stop Cyberbullying

Headspace

Lifeline

13 11 14

Kids Helpline

1800 551 800

Suicide Call Back Service

1300 659 467

Headspace

1800 650 890

ReachOut

How to Talk to Your Kids About Bullying

Be Strong

Preventing Cyberbullying: Top Ten Tips for Educators

Cyberbullying.org

Bullied kids suffer academically, too, study says

CNN

From LOL to LULZ, the evolution of the internet troll over 24 years

Splinter

I Was Almost A School Shooter

Aaron Stark, TEDxBoulder

Bullying is Not Just a Kid Problem

Cyberbullying Research Center

Reference Materials

Cyberbullying Research Center

Resources

International Bullying Prevention Association

5 Ways to Deal with Hate Speech Online

Common Sense Media

