
Cyberbullying (online bullying)

Summary

- Cyberbullying is when technology is used to hurt or embarrass someone or to make them afraid.
 - Instant messaging, text messages, email, social networking sites and forums can all be used to cyberbully someone.
 - One in five Australian kids aged between eight and 15 have been cyberbullied.
 - If you are being cyberbullied and you are feeling desperate, ask for help. There are people that can help you now.
 - The sooner you tell someone, the sooner something can be done to change the situation and make you feel safe.
 - There are things you can do to try and make cyberbullying stop.
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Cyberbullying (or online bullying) happens when technology is used to bully someone. So when someone uses instant messaging or chat, text messages, email, social networking sites or forums to hurt or embarrass someone else or to make them afraid, that's cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is different to **offline bullying** because it can be anonymous, it can reach a wide audience quickly and the material (that is, the photo, video or message) can be hard to remove. This means that cyberbullying can be just as or even more hurtful and dangerous than other kinds of bullying.

What does cyberbullying look like?

Cyberbullying can take many forms. You are being cyberbullied if:

- you receive mean, threatening or abusive texts, tweets, emails or Facebook posts (either from someone you know, or a stranger)
- someone keeps sending you harassing messages
- photos or videos of you are shared to try and embarrass or hurt you
- people are trying to stop you communicating with others
- you are being left out of online games or social forums
- you are being trolled or stalked online
- someone hacks into your email, Facebook, Instagram or other social media account and changes your information
- someone sets up and uses fake profiles pretending to be you.

This list is not exhaustive. And sometimes the line between what is okay online and what is not is hard to see.

Why is cyberbullying such a big problem?

Cyberbullying can be more hurtful and dangerous than offline bullying for several reasons:

- People who bully online often do so anonymously. They may set up fake profiles or names. This means the bully can be more bold in what they post. Bullying online can cut deep and make the person on the receiving end feel unsafe and scared.
- Cyberbullying can feel relentless. Lots of teenagers are online constantly, checking messages and getting alerts sent directly to their smartphones. So if you are being cyberbullied, you may feel like you are being bullied 24 hours a day. You may never feel safe or protected from your bully – not at school or at home.
- An online post, image or video reaches a wide audience very quickly.

Research into cyberbullying suggests it happens a lot. One in five Australian children aged eight to 15 has been

cyberbullied. Three quarters of all Australian schools reported cyberbullying in 2015 (and, on average, there were 22 complaints every year in a secondary school).

This means that in an average school, there is a whole class of tweens and teens who are being bullied online.

How does cyberbullying make you feel?

If you are being bullied online, you may feel:

- guilty, like it is your fault
- hopeless and unable to get out of the situation
- alone, like there is no-one who can help you
- like you don't fit in
- **sad and anxious**
- unsafe and afraid
- stressed out, trying to figure out why this is happening to you
- ashamed, humiliated and embarrassed.

If you are feeling desperate or find yourself thinking about harming yourself, ask for help.

Talk to your parents or another adult that you trust (like a teacher). Or you could contact a support service such as:

- **Kids Helpline** Tel. **1800 55 1800**
- **eheadspace** Tel. **1800 650 890**
- **Lifeline** Tel. **13 11 14**

There are people that can help you now.

What can you do if you are being cyberbullied?

If you are being bullied online, the best thing you can do is to talk to someone you trust. If someone writes something online or posts a photo or video that upsets you, tell your mum, dad or carer, a teacher or a friend. The sooner you tell someone, the sooner something can be done to change it and make you feel safe.

There are a few other things you can do too.

- Block the person who is displaying the bullying behaviour. Unfriend them. Block calls and texts from their number. Change your privacy settings. Push them outside your social network.
- Don't respond to online bullying when you're feeling hurt or angry. An angry response is usually just what the person doing the bullying is after. It's better to distract yourself by doing something that makes you feel relaxed and positive.
- Keep a record of any bullying messages or posts. Take screen shots or print off a hardcopy of emails or online conversations. Keep text messages saved on your phone.
- Report the cyberbullying material to the social media site where it was posted. Social media services should remove cyberbullying material that is reported to them. The **Office of the eSafety Commissioner** explains how to do this.
- If the social media service fails to remove the material within two days of your report, you can make a complaint to the **Office of the eSafety Commissioner**.
- And then, sign out, log off, and put your phone away. Put on some music, watch your favourite television show or organise to meet up with your friends. Do something to make yourself feel good.

Are you a cyberbully?

Have you ever cyberbullied someone? Before you say no, think carefully. You might have done something online that you thought was funny or harmless – but it may have felt very different to the other person. It still counts as bullying even if they started it or if they bullied you in real life.

Don't panic. There are a whole lot of reasons why you may have cyberbullied someone.

- You may not have realised that what you were doing could be considered cyberbullying. You might have thought it was harmless or a joke. Or you may not have given it much thought at the time.
- You may also be experiencing cyberbullying. What you did may have been a way to get back at someone who made you feel bad.
- You may have got carried away. Cyberbullying can make you feel popular or powerful. You may not have thought about the consequences of your online behaviour at the time.

The first thing to do is to stop. Say sorry to the person you bullied online. And then make sure you do not cyberbully again.

- Ask for help. Tell your mum or dad, teacher or another trusted adult, or talk to a good friend. You will probably feel relieved to share your problem, and they might have ideas on how to help you leave your behaviour behind.
- Contact one of the support services listed at 'Where to get help'.
- Try using a 'one-minute' rule. After you write something, but before you post or send, step away from your device for one minute. Then come back and review the message. Is it hurtful? How would you feel if someone said this about you?

Remember...

- Cyberbullying is when technology is used to bully someone.
- It can be more hurtful and dangerous than offline bullying because it is often anonymous, can feel relentless and can be seen or read by lots of people quickly.
- One in five Australian kids aged between eight and 15 have been cyberbullied.
- There are things you can do to make cyberbullying stop.
- Think carefully about your online behaviour. If you think you may have bullied someone, the first thing you need to do is stop. Then reach out to family, friends or support services to make sure it stops here.

Where to get help

- Your parents, teacher or school counsellor
- **Kids Helpline** Tel. **1800 55 1800** has comprehensive information on cyberbullying and how to protect yourself.
- **eheadspace** Tel. **1800 650 890**
- **Lifeline** Tel. **13 11 14**
- **Youth central**
- **Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner** Tel. **1800 880 176**

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Reach Out

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