



# REELiSE

A Parent's Guide to  
Addressing Cyberbullying

# IMPACT OF CYBERBULLYING

**Online actions have very serious real life impacts**

Cyberbullying is the use of digital technology (computers, smartphones, and other digital devices and platforms) to bully a person or group. "Bullying" involves a deliberate pattern of behaviour to harass, threaten, humiliate or upset another. The instigator intends to hurt the target socially, psychologically or even physically.

All bullying is harmful. However, cyberbullying can be more devastating to a young person because:

1. They may not know who is targeting them or why.
2. The bullying can go viral, potentially allowing a large audience to participate in it or find out about it.
3. It feels inescapable. It follows them home, wherever they have access to digital technology.
4. Many adults don't have the technological knowledge or time to supervise online interaction. Bullying can go undetected and unaddressed.

Cyberbullying is a key risk facing young people online. One in five young Australians are cyberbullied and as a result, can experience social, emotional and academic problems. It can have serious implications for mental and physical health and needs to be taken seriously.

This guide is intended to help you:

- understand what you can do to minimise the risk of your child being involved in a cyberbullying incident,
- recognise the warning signs that there may be a problem involving cyberbullying;
- take action to protect and support your child if they do experience cyberbullying or engage in cyberbullying behaviours.



# MINIMISING THE RISK

## Four Practical Steps Parents Can Take

**1. Set rules for online interaction** - Explain clearly when your children can go online and what they can and can't do. Set limits for screen time. Recommendations for daily screen time (other than on school work or educational activities) are:

- Zero for children under 2;
- Less than 1 hour for children 2-5 years;
- Less than 2 hours for children 5-17 years.

Other important rules are:

- Your online friends must be people you know in real life and people you trust to see what you post about yourself and your family.
- You must have strong passwords and change them regularly. You can't share them with friends, only with family.
- We will sit down together regularly and check privacy settings on your social media accounts, apps and devices to ensure they're set at the highest privacy setting.
- You must never share personal information on social media platforms. This includes your name, address, phone number, email address or date of birth.
- Think before you post. Never post anything unless you would be happy for people you didn't specifically share it with to see it. Never post when you are upset, angry or emotional.
- Log out when you aren't using your online accounts or your device. Keep your smartphone keypad locked.

**Note:** There are great resources on the **Office of eSafety website**. These include a guide to the latest games, apps and social media platforms with useful information about what they are, how to protect privacy and report appropriate content. You can find the guide here: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/key-issues/esafety-guide>

**2. Teach respect, responsibility and resilience** - teach your children how to be polite and respectful online.

Discuss how bullying and disrespectful behaviour makes others feel and help your children develop empathy. It's equally important to build resilience – to help your child hone the ability to deflect and ignore hurtful things that others say or post. Help them internalise positive beliefs and to understand that people bully for a range of reasons and it is usually best not to engage or give the instigator of the bullying conduct a reaction.

**3. Keep an open dialogue and explore your child's online world** - Let your children teach you about the apps and websites they're using. Monitor their online activities as you would their offline activities. Ask about where they're going, what their favourite apps and sites are, what they do there, who they're hanging out with and talking to online.

**4. Use Parental controls and safety features where appropriate.** Tailor these and your monitoring activities to the child's age and maturity. You can find out more about how to do this here:

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents/skills-advice/taming-technology>

# QUESTIONS TO ASK

## Maintain open communication about your child's digital life

It's important to maintain an open dialogue with your child about what they're doing and seeing online. If you show an interest and establish a regular dialogue about that aspect of their life, they're more likely to turn to you if something goes wrong. Encourage them to teach you how to use the apps they favour and explore with them features and functionality.

Below are some questions you might like to use.

### General Digital Life Questions

- What apps and sites are you and your friends into these days? What do you do on them?
- Do accounts you follow and the content you see on your feed affect your mood? Do they make you feel good about yourself?
- Have you ever had to block or mute anyone? If yes: Why? If no: do you know how to do that?
- Do you get contacted by people you don't know? What do they want? How do/would you respond?
- Has anyone ever upset you when you've been online or using your phone? What did you do about it?
- What do you do to keep yourself safe online? What kind of personal info do you post or share? What privacy settings have you chosen? How do you handle friend or follow requests from strangers?
- Does anyone else know your password or passcode for any site of social media app? What about for your laptop or mobile phone?
- Do you use secure passwords? How often do you change them?
- Do you think you have a healthy balance of online and offline time?

### Cyberbullying

- How big a problem do you think cyberbullying is? Have you ever experienced it? What did you do about it?
- Would you feel comfortable telling me if you were involved in a cyberbullying incident? How would you want me to help you deal with it? Do you think your friends would support you?
- What would you do, if it happened to you? What if it happened to someone you knew?
- Have your posts ever attracted mean comments? How did you handle that?
- Have you ever posted something that embarrassed or hurt someone else? If that ever happened, what would you do?

- Are you posting content that just your close friends can see or are you trying to develop a general following?
- How many followers do you have?
- Do you feel pressured to create particular types of content or behave in a certain way?
- What kind of people have you met on social media outside people you know from school? Do you feel you can trust them?
- Have you ever reported inappropriate content?



# WARNING SIGNS

## Possible indicators your child is being cyberbullied

The following may indicate your child is being cyberbullied:

### 1. Changes in online behaviours

- They seem anxious or nervous when online or using digital devices or depressed or upset afterwards.
- They abruptly shut off or walk away from a device mid use.
- Their device usage routine changes materially.
- They become secretive about online activities and reluctant to use their device in your presence.
- They delete social media profiles or accounts or block contact on their accounts.
- There are a lot of new emails, texts or phone numbers appearing on their devices.

### 2. Changes in social patterns

- They don't want to attend school or social events.
- They withdraw from friends or family.
- There are unexplained changes in their friendship group.

### 3. Changes in habits

- Sleep patterns change – they are not sleeping or are oversleeping.
- Loss of interest in once favoured activities.
- Appetite changes – material increase or decrease in food intake.

### 4. Changes in health

- Frequent reporting to the school nurse to go home ill.
- Unexplained physical ailments – headache, stomach ache.
- They appear depressed or anxious, express hopelessness or make references to suicide.



# WARNING SIGNS

## Possible Indicators your Child is the Instigator of Cyberbullying

The following may indicate your child is cyberbullying others:

### 1. Online behaviours

- They quickly change screens or shut down their device if you approach them.
- They use their device late into the evening.
- They become irrational and extremely upset if they can't use their device(s).
- They avoid discussion with you about their online activities.
- They laugh excessively while online but won't share the joke with you.
- They use multiple online accounts or accounts in other names.

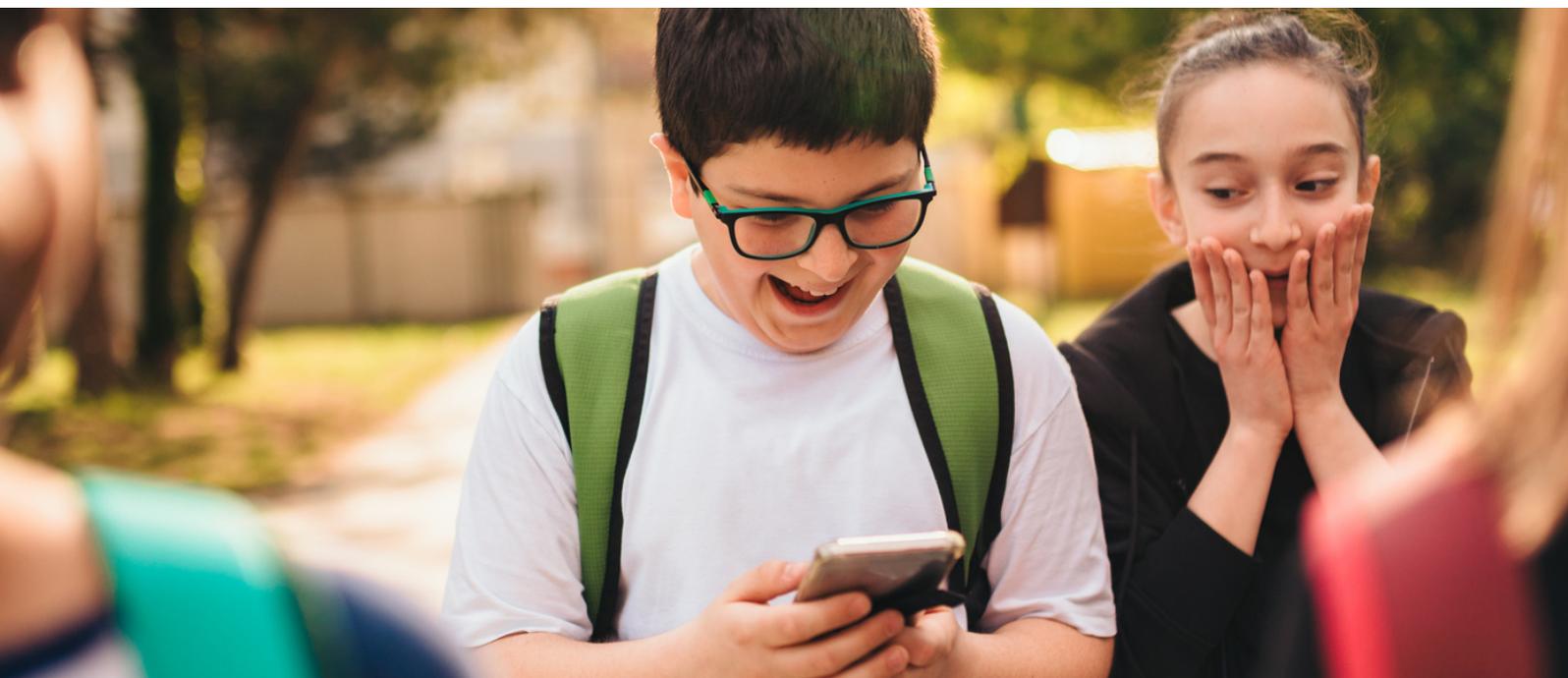
### 2. Changes in Social Patterns

- They become increasingly withdrawn or isolated from the family.
- There are unexplained changes in their friendship group.

### 3. Changes in Behaviour

- There are increased behavioural issues or disciplinary actions involving your child.
- They appear overly concerned with popularity or status.
- They demonstrate a lack of empathy or violence towards others.
- They display arrogance about their technological prowess.

If you see any of these indicators, be proactive. Take the time to investigate the underlying cause. To help your child, it's important to treat cyberbullying seriously but not to overreact. For your child to be comfortable opening up to you about a hurtful, embarrassing or shameful event, they need to know you won't make it worse by getting angry or highly emotional. Work with them calmly to make them feel safe and supported. It's important to understand the facts and causes and to rectify the situation in the best interests of all concerned.



# WHAT TO DO

## A guide for action if your child has been cyberbullied

### The Golden Rules:

1. Treat it Seriously.
2. Make Sure Your Child is and Feels Safe
3. Provide Calm and Unconditional Support

### Maintain an Open Dialogue

1. Demonstrate through words and actions you will work together to stop the cyberbullying and you won't aggravate the situation.
2. Don't dismiss their perspectives. Take time to find out exactly what happened and the context. Don't minimise the situation or excuse the instigator's actions.
3. Keep your child connected with supportive friends and family.
4. If the cyberbullying involves another student, talk to the school and get their help in managing the issue.

### Don't Block Online Time

1. Online life is an integral part of life as a young person today. While it's natural to want to protect your child from harm, removing their access to technology as a strategy to address cyberbullying can operate to further isolate and victimise them. It can also reduce the likelihood of their reporting future incidents.
2. Reassure them you won't block their access to the internet or use of their devices, but will help them to block contact from the instigator.
3. Encourage them to do things offline that they enjoy.

### Don't Contact the Instigator's Parents

1. Parents can become defensive and emotional if their child is accused of cyberbullying and confronting them can aggravate the situation and further upset your child.
2. If you have a good relationship with the instigator's parents and feel contact could be beneficial, be careful how you make that approach to avoid further drama and possible retaliation.

### Consider Counselling

1. Cyberbullying can have significant impacts on health and wellbeing. Your child may benefit from speaking to a mental health professional or a third party who can give them objective advice.
2. With your child's agreement, talk to the school counsellor or a teacher or contact a psychologist.
3. Other great options to support your child include Kids Helpline and eheadspace. See p.9

### Stop the Contact

1. Don't respond or retaliate. Advise your child not to respond to attempts by the instigator to engage in conversation or dialogue. Responding can encourage escalation of the bullying.
2. Block the Instigator. Prevent further communication by helping your child change their privacy settings on social networking platforms to restrict those who see their posts or profile. Block or delete the instigator as a friend or contact on those platforms and from contacting your child on their smartphone.
3. Blocking contact options are available at both the device, game, app or social media network level. A quick Google search can provide you with detailed instructions. The Office of eSafety also has a great guide to popular games, apps and social networking sites with links to help centres, reporting abuse and managing people:

# WHAT TO DO

## A guide for action if your child has been cyberbullied

### Collect the Evidence and Report the Bullying

1. Keep mobile phone messages, take screen shots or print emails or social networking conversations that show the bullying and record dates and times. The Office of the eSafety Commissioner: [www.esafety.gov.au](http://www.esafety.gov.au) has useful guides about how you can take a screenshot on various devices. If the bullying material contains sexualised images, possessing or sharing those images if they are of someone under 18, can be a crime even if you are just taking a screenshot for evidentiary purposes.
2. Record URL's where upsetting content has been posted.
3. Report to the school if school peers are involved. Your child's school can usually help even when school peers aren't involved.
4. Report it to the relevant social network or mobile phone service provider. Most social networks have report abuse buttons.
5. If the content isn't removed in 48 hours report it to the Office of the eSafety Commissioner at [www.esafety.gov.au/reportcyberbullying](http://www.esafety.gov.au/reportcyberbullying). You can make that report on behalf of your child if they are under 18.
6. Report it to the police if you are concerned for your child's safety or if pictures or videos of a sexual nature are involved.



### Empower Your Child

1. Try to build your child's confidence and involve them in the decision making.
2. If they are struggling to open up to you, involve a trusted older sibling or other family member or pursue a counselling option.
3. Keep an eye on your child. Discretely monitor their eating and sleeping habits, ability to concentrate and make decisions and general mood.
4. Keep your child engaged with external interests like sport or drama that connect them with other young people outside their school environment or with activities that involve the extended family. It's important to reinforce the message that they are loved and supported and that there is a bigger world out there.
5. Help your child identify coping strategies.



# WHAT TO DO

## A guide for action if your child is the instigator

All kids are capable of bullying. Bullying not only poses social, emotional and academic problems for the victim. It can cause harm to the instigator too. The important thing is to recognise and address the bullying behaviour. This can be an emotional and stressful time for parents.

### Understand Why People Bully

There are many reasons kids bully others. Some want to feel powerful, to be treated as a leader, to cultivate a following and improve their popularity.

Others have low self esteem, are feeling angry or frustrated, or struggle socially. Some lack empathy and don't see their behaviour as a problem. Others have been victims of cyberbullying themselves.

Whatever the reason, it's important to take steps to address the problem.

### Plan of Action Overview

If your child has been involved in a bullying incident its likely you will be told by someone else - a parent, teacher or child. This can be confronting but there are 3 important things you need to do to help your child and those that have been the targets of any bullying behaviour:

1. Stay calm and listen.
2. Talk with your child calmly to clarify and counsel.
3. Work proactively to resolve the situation.

### Handling Being Told About It

It's difficult to hear a negative accusation directed at your child. It's also difficult to raise that accusation with you. However telling you enables you to address the issue proactively. Try to remain calm.

Listen carefully and gather as much information as you can. Take notes.



Thank them for informing you. Acknowledge the issue is important and you don't condone bullying. In fairness, you'll investigate and seek your child's perspectives about what you've been told and take the appropriate steps to address the situation.

Take the time to process what you've been told and to address your feelings about it BEFORE you talk to your child. It can help to talk it through with a partner or good friend to lend some perspective.



# WHAT TO DO

## A guide for action if your child is the instigator

### Set the Scene

Explain you've been contacted about an incident of bullying and you want to understand what happened. Whatever happened you will help your child get through it.

Discuss what you've been told calmly. Your child is much more likely to open up to you if you can stay calm. An angry or abusive reaction can model and reinforce bullying behaviour.

Ask what happened. Who was involved? Why did it happen? How does your child feel about it?

It's important to establish if this is an isolated incident or a pattern of behaviour and what triggers that behaviour in your child. Try to find out if the behaviour happened because your child is upset or jealous or has been bullied themselves.

### Be Empathic

If your child has bullied someone, it's important to look at the situation through their eyes. They won't necessarily have the maturity to understand the consequences of their actions and may try to justify them.

Discuss how their bullying behaviour makes others feel and the possible consequences for those who continue to bully others. Be clear bullying isn't acceptable and they need to stop it.

Assure them that you'll help with whatever makes them feel they need to engage in that type of behaviour. Guide them as to better strategies to manage relationships and feelings.

### Treat it Seriously

Treat the issue with the seriousness it deserves both in the interests of the child being bullied and having regard to the long term impacts for your own child. Find out what is going on and address it. Help your child be accountable and responsible.

### Guide, Supervise and Investigate

1. Help your child understand what they did and its impacts.
2. Work with them to find a way they can be accountable and apologise.
3. Set age appropriate consequences and follow through on them.
4. Identify environmental issues that may have impacted your child's behaviour.
5. Model healthy and socially acceptable ways to deal with conflict and stress and to manage feelings and relationships.
6. Encourage respect, kindness and empathy at home.
7. Make clear rules for online activity and enforce them.
8. Increase supervision and take an active interest in your child's online and offline life.

# WHAT TO DO

## A guide for action if your child is the instigator

### Address Behavioural Triggers

- 1. Problems at School:** Find out if your child is having academic or friendship problems at school. Work out a plan to address them.
- 2. Your Child is Bullied:** Is your child being bullied? This can cause them to engage in similar behaviour.
- 3. Home Environment:** Are there stress factors - a move, death, sickness, divorce, a new baby? How do family members solve problems and manage relationships? Children can replicate behaviours they see. Is there conflict between siblings or other family members?
- 4. Support Structure:** Does your child have the structure and support they need? Do you set rules that are enforced? Do you check in with your child regularly one on one to talk about what is going on in their life?
- 5. Media Violence:** Children can learn to be aggressive from watching media or playing video games glorifying violence. Help them understand those portrayals are unrealistic and inappropriate. Intervene if they initiate that violence in play or social engagement.

### Seek Professional Help

Seek professional advice if you feel your child isn't responding positively to your actions to help them, particularly if you discovered a pattern of bullying behaviour or if your child is experiencing a traumatic event like divorce or death in the family. A professional can help identify any underlying mental health, learning or behavioural issues and work with you to put in place an appropriate care plan.

To find a psychologist near you contact 1800 333 497 or search online: [www.psychology.org.au/Find-a-Psychologist](http://www.psychology.org.au/Find-a-Psychologist)

Other support avenues are also available. If there is a need to talk to someone urgently, call Lifeline 13 11 14 or Kids Helpline 1800 551 800. These services operate 24 x 7.

Parent helplines in each State enable you to talk to a qualified counsellor who can help you work out a way forward. It's confidential unless someone is at risk of harm. You can request an interpreter. **Parent Line NSW** offers a free telephone counselling and support service for parents in NSW with kids from 0 to 18 years. Head to: <https://www.parentline.org.au/> or phone 1300 1300 52.

Support lines for children offering free phone and counselling services include:

**Kids Helpline:** 1800 55 1800  
<https://kidshelpline.com.au/>  
"Kids" includes young adults to 25 years.

**Headspace:** 1800 650 890  
ehespace provides free online and telephone support and counselling to young people 12 - 25 and their families and friends. Head to: <https://headspace.org.au/ehespace/>  
Young people can also visit their local headspace centre.





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