

Cyberbullying

What teens should know



- **Treat online communications as carefully as you would face-to-face discussions.** Written messages are easily misinterpreted because we convey much of our meaning through facial expressions and our tone of voice.
- **Stop.** Don't jump to conclusions. Was it meant as a joke? Could you have misunderstood the sender? It's so easy to crack a joke in writing and have it fall flat – or worse, sound like a criticism.
- **Let the sender know the message was hurtful** if you think they may not have intended to upset you.
- **Don't respond at all** if you think their intention was to be abusive. If a bully is baiting you, the worst thing you can do is respond.
- **Block them.** Unfriend them, remove them from your list of contacts or find out if your phone company can block them from phoning/texting you. (Some providers can do that.)
- **Try to have the abusive messages deleted.** If you can't do that yourself, report the abuse and ask for it to be removed.
- **Reread your messages.** Could they be misinterpreted? Have you sent it to the right person, or have you hit "Reply all"?
- **Be patient** – if you are upset about something, wait 10 minutes before you write a message. Remember, once you hit "send" it has gone into cyberspace forever!
- **Use emoticons :) to indicate you are joking, smiling etc.** Simple as it sounds, they can totally change how someone reads your message.
- **Keep your private details private.** Never give your password or logon details to anyone, even your best friends.
- **Leave chat rooms** when you don't feel comfortable.
- **Tell your parents** or an adult you trust if you receive hurtful messages, texts, emails etc. If you're worried they'll overreact or remove your mobile phone "to protect you", explain that it will just make you feel more isolated and victimised.
- **Give yourself some time out.** If you keep rereading the abusive messages, or continue communicating with the bully, you're giving them more power to upset you. Online bullying can seem relentless and comments can fly thick and fast, making a bad situation worse. Spend some time (online or offline) with a good friend, get some exercise or just get out of the house for a while. If it's night-time, turn the computer off and do something else. The more upset you become the less you're able to handle a situation.
- **Be a supportive friend.** Experts say kids can have a bigger impact than adults can when they support their friends who are being bullied. You don't need to expose yourself to abuse – if you see someone bully your friend in a chat room or on a Facebook wall, you can contact them privately and offer emotional support.
- **Tell an adult you trust** if your friend needs help.
- **Don't forward hurtful messages, photos or videos.** It's hard to step in and stop physical bullying, but you have absolute control over what messages you forward.
- **Keep all harassing emails** (and any replies you've made) as evidence. Save them, but don't reread them.
- **Tell your year adviser, school counsellor, sports coach or someone you trust at school.** You may not want to, but if you're worried about the bullying it could affect your schoolwork. You have every right to feel safe and supported at school.