

# CYBER-BULLYING

## What Is Cyber-bullying?

Cyber-bullying is the deliberate use of social media platforms, information and communication technologies, new media technologies i.e. (email, phones, chatrooms, discussion groups, applications, instant messaging, blogs, video clips, cameras, hate websites/pages, blogs and gaming sites) to repeatedly harass, threaten, humiliate and victimise another with the intention to cause harm, reputation damage, discomfort and intimidation.

In 2015, Australia was ranked 3rd in the number of searches made on the topic of cyber-bullying via Google.

Cyber-bullying can include:

- **Harassment** – sending ongoing abusive, insulting or unwanted messages. Tormenting someone with hateful and hurtful text messages, emails, posts or instant messages that offend, humiliate or intimidate.
- **Flaming/Trolling** – disagreements online between 2 individuals using aggressive and or abusive language, gradually resulting in others joining in.
- **Denigration** – spreading lies, rumours or gossip about someone to damage their reputation or friendship.
- **Impersonation** – pretending to be someone else by posting and sending inappropriate material online i.e. saying things they wouldn't normally say face to face.
- **Outing and Trickery** – placing someone else's information online without their consent. Trickery is persuading someone into providing secrets or embarrassing information and then placing these online. This could be done through a fake website, profile or by editing someone's own profile.
- **Exclusion** – deliberately excluding someone from an online group or excluding them from activities because they have not participated in an online activity.
- **Cyber-stalking** – following someone through cyberspace and repeatedly harassing or denigrating them which may raise significant fear in the individual. Moving with them to different sites or applications and posting threatening messages.
- **Sexting** – sending or posting messages, videos or photos of sexual nature. It's illegal to post pictures or images of another without their consent and or if the individual is under 18 years of age.
- **Pornography** – possession and manufacturing of pornographic images and videos of an individual under the age of 18 is illegal and is covered by State and Commonwealth Laws.

Social media has enhanced our ability to be connected and engaged, the technology sector is now the largest in the world. Australia is one of the most connected and engaged in the world and on average we own at least 3 devices. While social media has fantastic benefits, it has come at a devastating cost, with families, friends and most importantly victims who feel there is nowhere to turn to.

Words do hurt, and we're reminded of the consequences of cyber-bullying almost on a daily basis with reports that 1 in 5 Australians experience cyber-bullying (Office of eSafety Commissioner, 2018).

Some Australians are showing signs of being addicted to their devices and for some there is now a dependency on technology that is to be reachable and contactable all the time (techno stress – inability to disconnect). There are phenomenon's such as FOMO (fear of missing out) and FONK (fear of not knowing) which has impacted on our ability to be connected to our social media platforms and devices.

Cyber-bullying is now the second most common form of bullying in Australia. Some behave with no responsibility while others are callous and ruthless. Cyber-bullying is intergenerational, and anyone can be a victim, whatever their age. Cyber-bullies have the ability to target individuals 24/7, they can remain anonymous and significantly impact a large number of users and individuals instantly. Cyber-bullies can intrude in places that were once regarded safe – our homes. Perpetrators, predators, paedophiles and groomers can influence and gain access to our most vulnerable.

Victims of cyber-bullying can feel powerless, lonely, upset, insecure, desperate and have feelings of refuge as there is no escape from the perpetrator who continues to harass, troll or stalk the victim. Everything posted online is stored even if deleted, every time a message is sent it's saved by phone companies even after it's deleted. Emails and private messages sent are stored by host providers of the platform. Chat conversations through companies like messenger and other social media applications are stored on servers. Every device that accesses the internet has its own Internet Protocol (IP) address that can be traced back to the user. Ignorance of the law is no excuse – users should consider their online actions as authorities are responding to inappropriate behaviour with heavy fines and prison terms.

### Cyber-bullying and the Law.

Bullying is a crime in Victoria and the crimes amendment (Bullying 2011 – section 21A) of the stalking provisions are now in effect. This amendment strengthens the existing stalking and harassment provisions of the Victorian Crimes Act 1958 and covers bullying/cyber-bullying behaviours. Police now have the power to prosecute for stalking and serious bullying conduct.

In other states stalking and harassment laws cover parts of the Victorian Act but there is no specific law that makes bullying a crime.

The Commonwealth legislation governs online stalking and harassment behaviour.

The crimes legislation amendment (telecommunications offences and other measures Act) – (No. 2) 2004 makes it a crime to use a carriage service to menace, harass or cause offence. The alleged individual could be found guilty under – 474.17 A (1) if:

- (a) Person uses a carriage service;
- (b) Does so in a way (whether by method of use or content of a communication, or both) that reasonable persons would regard as being, in all circumstances;  
Menacing, harassing or offending;  
Penalty: Imprisonment of up to – 3 years.

### Signs of Cyber-Bullying.

Cyber victims may feel anxious and isolated during the initial stages of cyber-bullying. Early detection is important for prevention and harm minimisation, including the health and well-being of the individual.

Cyber-bullying victims could show signs of cyber-bullying by:

- Keeping to themselves and no longer engaging with their usual friends.
- Changes in sudden behavior i.e. become angry, intense and negative.
- Secretive – minimises screen, hides device or deletes messages immediately.
- Irritated, loses interest, enjoyment in online activities, anxious, hesitant/guilty about going on line – (receives an abundance of messages).
- Decreased appetite, health problems, addiction and nightmares.
- Depressed, no care or attention about their on-line behavior.
- Self-esteem issues – children with low confidence could be prone to behaving inappropriately online as they don't care of the repercussions.
- Uses hostile language that advocates and incites violence or aggression towards the perpetrator.
- Is making comment about planning/preparing to commit online or off-line inappropriate behaviour.

### How to prevent cyber-bullying?

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- Block the bully and ask them to stop making comment.

- Don't open and resist the temptation to respond, retaliate or reply to messages if cyber-bullies don't receive a response they are likely to give up.
- If you do respond – an assertive approach is recommended – “Can I please ask you stop, remove the ..... I don't appreciate the message” etc.
- Do not send, post or show offensive and inappropriate content, messages, pictures, or videos about others online.
- It is illegal for a minor (under the age of 18) to post explicit photos of themselves on-line.
- Permission should be sought prior to posting any photo of another individual online.
- Maintain a record of harassing messages/replies, as evidence and report to appropriate authorities i.e. teacher, parent, adult, employer, manager, internet service provider (ISP), Police, Office of the eSafety Commissioner (users under 18) or talk to a trusted friend.
- Think before posting personal information, name, address, phone number, details of family/friends and personal photographs or videos.
- Do not agree to meet individual's offline who you don't know personally.
- Be aware that strangers can download, store, share/forward your personal information to others, which has the potential to create more avenues for cyber-bullying, harassment, stalking and intimidation.
- Do not open spam messages, click on prize offers, hyperlinks and popups that offer free or discounted items as there could be viruses or Trojans.

### Work with A Trusted Adult:

- Seek their opinion and knowledge.
- Have the game or application road tested by a trusted adult.
- If the threatening/harassing behaviour is occurring at school, talk to your teacher, welfare coordinator or your principal. If outside school hours, speak to your parents, a trusted adult, Police or contact the Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner.
- We recommend using parental controls or inbuilt computer security features.
- If the behaviour is a workplace bullying issue and is occurring outside normal work hours, contact your employer or Police.

## Monitor Usage

If constant online use is having a negative impact on your wellbeing or that of your friends and family, then this may be a sign for a break. Apply time limits to internet usage, excessive amounts of social media engagement can distract the user from the ability to self-regulate feelings. It could interfere with development of empathy, social and problem-solving skills (typically obtained by exploring unstructured play and interacting with friends). It's important to have direct face-to-face interaction.

There is no suggested time limit however should excessive usage affect sleep, self-esteem or cause stress, the Foundation suggests a break from social media, balance is key.

Parents could install a filter that not only records the amount of time used but can automatically disconnects the service temporarily once a set limit has been reached.

