

In the old days, bullying was (for the most part) limited to school yards and the playground. With more and more kids using the Internet and mobile phones to chat and connect, it's not surprising that bullying has crossed over to cyberspace and is on the up.

Cyber bullying occurs when someone (or a group of people) uses digital technology to repeatedly and intentionally upset another. It's a form of abuse which can be subtle or confronting - think teasing, name calling, spreading nasty stories or excluding someone from a group. It usually takes place within chat rooms, over emails, on social networking sites, online forums and even on mobile phones.

Stick with us for the rest of the factsheet - we'll run you through some simple tips (for you and your family) to help spot and deal with "not so nice" behaviour online.

Draw a line and know when it's been crossed

Understanding what's acceptable online (for yourself, your family and others) plays a big part in knowing where to draw the line.

- Don't respond to a bully - if they're ignored they often lose interest. Plus, they don't deserve the attention.
- Avoid forwarding messages or pictures that could upset others. Sure, you might not have started it, but forwarding on malicious material means you'll be part of the problem, not the solution.
- Bullying behaviour is reinforced when people watch but don't do anything. If the tables were turned, you'd appreciate someone sticking up for you, so be an active bystander and don't stand by. Stand up!

Know the signs

Victims of cyber bullying will often keep quiet. They might think telling someone could make things worse. For example, kids are often afraid of being blamed or having their Internet privileges taken away. Keep an eye out for the following telltale signs.

- Frantic keyboard flurries and mouse clicks when you walk in the room are giveaways that the person behind the screen might feel the need to hide something. Watch out for sudden computer shutdowns and swift switcheroos of what's up on screen.
- Withdrawn or moody behaviour. More often than not, kids that are being bullied are likely to experience mood swings, become anxious or have trouble sleeping.
- Cyber torment, in fact anything online, often leaves some form of digital footprint.

Talk and take note

Encourage everyone in your family to talk and share. If they run into any issues, they should be able to talk openly and feel supported. The Kids Help Line (www.kidshelp.com.au) is a mouse click away or kids can call for free on 1800 55 1800, any time, day or night.

If an issue looks like it's getting out of hand, it's a good idea to start keeping notes. Ensure all communication is recorded (screenshots, copies of emails and notes).

- Print out (and date) all evidence of bullying. Don't delete emails or pictures as these can be useful in tracking down the bully.
- Block and remove any bullies from social networking sites so that they're not able to make further contact.
- It's also a good idea to report the issue to your child's school - they should have policies in place to deal with bullying and harassment.

What happens online might not always stay online

As an Internet user, you leave behind a digital footprint - think of it as your cyber paper trail. With this in mind, step away from the keyboard and think about what you're posting or uploading online. It might not matter right now, but it may come back to haunt you later, say when you're applying for a job.

- As a family, develop an "Internet Contract" with guidelines for both parents and kids. Kids can roll up their sleeves and write a contract for their parents, and vice versa.
- "Friend" your own kids - but spare them the embarrassment of commenting on their photos or posting on their wall.
- Enjoy some time 'offline' and switch off mobile phones and lap top computers at night time and leave them on the kitchen bench.

Pick up more hints and tips from **iiNet's Online Safety Series** from iinet.net.au/safety.

