Cyberbullying information and advice for parents and care givers

The information in this guide appears online at http://www.cyberbullying.org.nz/parents/

What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is bullying. It's using the internet, a mobile phone or other technology like a digital camera to hurt somebody or embarrass them.

Children are growing up today with access to more and more technology. As 'digital natives' they understand and adapt quickly to new ways of communicating and often use the internet and mobiles phones as the main way to reach friends 24/7.

Technology means that bullying can now happen outside wherever and however your child communicates with friends - on websites, online chat and on their mobile phone.

What does cyberbullying look like?

Bullying in 'cyberspace' can include:

- Posting nasty or threatening comments on your child's social networking profile (e.g., Bebo, Facebook...etc.)
- Sending anonymous messages
- Hacking existing website accounts or creating fake profiles for people they want to intimidate or embarrass.
- Circulating photos or videos of people they are targeting – these can be real images or digitally altered to cause offence or embarrass the victim.
- Cyberbullying often scares or embarrasses people so they feel upset or ashamed.
- Spreading rumours or try to isolate others using this technology.

Is cyberbullying a big deal?

Yes, very much so. In 2007, 1 in 5 New Zealand high school students reported being cyberbullied. Targets of cyberbullying often say that it makes them feel scared, depressed, angry or ashamed.

Research in the UK has shown that because cyberbullying can continue away from school and at any time of the day or night it often has more of an impact than physical bullying.

Anonymous text messages can make the person being bullied feel like there's no escape.

When pictures or videos are put online these can embarrass the target in front of the whole school and can rapidly spread and be viewed by anyone across the globe. Even if the original bullying website or video is deleted it can live on and be hard to remove completely.

What can I do to prevent cyberbullying?

- Talk with your children about cyberbullying and see how they understand the issue.
- Reassure your child that you will not remove their technology as a knee-jerk reaction to problems (including cyberbullying). Young people tell NetSafe that fear of losing access to their computer or mobile phone is one of the reasons why they often don't report cyberbullying.
- Advise younger children to be careful who they give their mobile number to and to not pass on friends' numbers without asking them first.
- Remind them not to respond to texts from people they don't know.
- Talk with your child about what images, if posted online or sent on a mobile phone, could get sent on to others and be used to bully or embarrass them.

More help and advice:

For more advice on staying safe online see:

- [Netsafe](#) - information for parents and caregivers
- [Netsafe NetBasics](#) - animated episodes about computer security issues
- [Facebook Safety](#)
- [Bebo Safety](#)
- [MySpace Safety](#)
- [YouTube Safety](#)
- [Windows Live Family Safety](#) and [Windows Live Help for MSN Messenger](#)

What can I do if a child is being cyberbullied?

- If a child tells you they've been cyberbullied reassure them that they've done the right thing to trust you with the problem.
- Save evidence of all bullying messages and images. You can save messages on a mobile phone and take screen shots of bullying on websites or instant messenger (IM) chats. This may be used later if you report the bullying to school or the police.
- If the bullying online or on a mobile phone involves physical threats, contact the police. Making threats of harm is criminal behaviour in New Zealand.
- Bring in any evidence you have when you meet with the police (messages stored on a phone or print outs of screenshots). If you are worried about safety contact the Police immediately.

Cyberbullying and school

If you think the person bullying your child is at your child's school, tell the Principal or Deputy Principal as soon as possible.

Education Law in New Zealand (Education Act 1998) includes the National Administrative Guideline 5, which says that schools are to provide a "safe physical and emotional environment for students".

This includes addressing behaviours (such as cyberbullying) that occur outside of school but which have implications for student well-being while at school.

Cyberbullying on websites

Report internet cyberbyllying to the website where the bullying took place - usually there is a "Report Abuse" button or "Safety" link.

Cyberbullying on IM / online chat

If you can, block the bullying messages coming through.

Take screenshots of any bullying messages sent and save them as evidence.

Cyberbullying and mobile phones

If bullying messages are coming through to a mobile, contact your phone company.

Report the abuse to the network and ask them to take action. The company should be able to trace the source of the messages and warn the bully they may lose their number and/or access to the network if they continue.

When to call the police

If any cyberbullying threatens harm - like hurting or fighting - this breaks New Zealand law. Save the evidence and contact the Police.

'At a Distance' – standing up to cyberbullying

Watch the New Zealand made short film about cyberbullying at
http://www.cyberbullying.org.nz/at-a-distance-film/