

Cyber bullying - what it is and where it happens

IN AUSTRALIA, 90 PER CENT OF 18- TO 24-YEAR-OLDS AND 92 PER CENT OF 15- TO 17-YEAR-OLDS HAVE USED THE INTERNET AND 88 PER CENT OF 15- TO 25-YEAR-OLDS OWN A MOBILE PHONE.

THERE is no doubt there are enormous benefits to being online and making the most of new technology. Blogs, emails, instant messaging, websites, polls, wikis, picture messages, gaming, chat rooms and social networking sites (or SNS's) are all places where you can connect, share, talk, communicate, form friendships, socialise, learn and interact.

However, these places are also where cyber bullying can take place.

Some young people deliberately set out to cyber bully by targeting another user online or via mobile phones. It is often more than a one-off incident.

Have you ever experienced any of the following? These are some of the different forms of cyber bullying:

- Sending nasty or threatening texts or emails
- Posting abusive messages online – on a SNS, in a chat room, or using IM
- Excluding people in online groups or chats
- Posting humiliating, violent or sexual videos or pictures or

- sending them on to other people
- Taking on someone else's identity online in order to upset or humiliate them
- Bad mouthing someone and/or spreading rumours
- Setting up a hate site or a hate group on a SNS or website
- Prank calling, prank texts and messages
- Blogging intentionally hurtful / abusive / embarrassing posts or comments
- Setting up online polls designed to rate / rank / outcast people.

Apart from the obvious (ie. it's online), cyber bullying is different to the traditional form of bullying as it can be anonymous, meaning bullies sometimes feel less responsible and uninhibited by their actions (people say and do things online that they wouldn't normally do face-to-face). It can be more intense because, rather than it being limited to the schoolyard, cyber bullying can occur 24/7.

Being online also means that any hurtful, embarrassing or offensive comments, videos or posts can be available (potentially permanently) to a wide audience, which can only magnify the impact.

This all sounds very dramatic and negative, but being aware of what can happen online is important in order to stay safe, in control and protected.



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