

BULLYING - IS IT A CRIME?

Cyber bullying could be a crime. Knowing how to report it, how to block it and how to prevent it can help you to take action or assist your friends if it is happening to you or someone you know.

BLOCKING CYBER BULLIES

Often ignoring cyber bullying can be a simple way of making it stop. One way to ignore it is by blocking the communications from people who are cyber bullying you. ThinkUKnow has a fantastic step-by-step guide on how to do this across Facebook, MySpace, MSN, Bebo, Twitter, YouTube, mobile phones and other websites (see www.thinkuknow.org.au/site/stop.asp).

For example, in Facebook you can:

- Go to the "Privacy" page and enter the person's name in the "Block" search field at the bottom of the page;
- Remove the person from your friend list;
- Save a copy and then delete any comments they have made on your profile;
- Save a copy and then delete any emails they have sent you through your Facebook inbox without opening them;
- If someone has posted an image of you without your permission and named you in the photo, you

can remove your name from the photo by selecting the "Remove Tag" option. Ask the person who posted the image to take it down. Facebook cannot force people to remove photos unless they violate the Terms of Use. If someone is constantly tagging you in embarrassing or inappropriate photos, remove them from your friend list so that they will no longer be able to tag you in photos;

- If someone has posted an offensive note, you can report this to Facebook using the "Report this Note" link under each note.

Facebook administrators may also take action against the person who is cyber bullying. This might be temporarily banning them from the site, shutting down their account or even blocking them from starting up a new account. If it is occurring via your mobile phone, you can contact your mobile phone provider to report nuisance calls and/or text messages.

If someone sends you a link to a website which is cyber bullying someone, or an email which is spreading rumours about someone, don't forward it on. Delete the message and let the person know that you don't want to receive any more. If you are passing on these cyber bullying messages, you are contributing to the problem.

If the cyber bullying is occurring

between you and someone who goes to your school, you can report it to the school. Schools often have policies and guidelines in place to deal with bullying and implement solutions. The most appropriate people to speak to include your teacher, school counsellor or pastoral care coordinator.

If the cyber bullying escalates and you are genuinely fearful for your safety and well being, you can make a report to your local police (find your local police via the White Pages).

It helps when reporting cyber bullying to have a record of what's been said/posted/texted. For example, chat logs, copies of emails or screenshots of websites. Providing this information will assist in understanding what has occurred and how to address the problem.

IS CYBER BULLYING A CRIME?

Many of the laws in Australia relating to threats and harassment were created before the internet became a part of our everyday lives. But these laws could be used in dealing with offensive behaviour online, such as serious cases of cyber bullying. In particular, where there is a specific threat to someone's physical safety and well being, state and territory laws relating to threatening and harassing behaviour might be used.

Police are often reluctant to charge young people with criminal offences where other, less punitive, measures can be used. This may involve the use of restorative justice, where the person who has been cyber bullied and the people doing the cyber bullying (as well as their support network) are brought together to talk through the issues and come up with an agreed solution. Other options include cautions or disciplinary action taken by schools or parents.

TOP TIPS FOR PREVENTING CYBER BULLYING

- If you're not friends with someone offline, don't add them as a friend online;
- Set your online profiles and accounts to private so that you can control who has access to them;
- Be careful who you share your phone number, email address and user IDs with;
- If a relationship ends badly, consider removing that person from your contact/buddy list;
- Think before you post! If you post something mean on someone's profile, it could encourage them to cyber bully you in retaliation;
- Learn how to block communications on the sites and applications you use and where to report cyber bullying;
- Find out your school's policy on

cyber bullying and who you can talk to;

- Don't share your password with anyone, not even your best friend!
- Make sure you log out of your accounts properly so that someone can't access your accounts and deface your profile;
- Take a stand against cyber bullying. Talk with your school about what you can do to send the message that cyber bullying is NOT acceptable!

Cyber bullying can happen to anyone. It can be upsetting and stressful, impacting on different areas of your life, including; self-esteem, relationships, work or study. But there is help available. Talking to someone is a good starting point, particularly if you are feeling unsafe or frightened. See www.headspace.org.au to find help and support.



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