

Cyberbullying and Harmful Communications

- Help for Parents

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Your child or young person may be bullied online or have stuff said to them that they find upsetting. This can happen through any online media including emails, texts, or through social media such as facebook, Instagram or tumblr. No matter how the bullying or unhelpful communication happens, it is important to understand that this is disturbing for most young people and can be emotionally harmful. It can also make the child or young person think about hurting themselves so it is important to manage it straight away.

It is really useful to talk to your child about the risks as soon as they start talking to others online. Most children and young people will post their own work and ideas online and the feedback they get online may be mean and overly critical. It may not be personal at all but your child can find it really upsetting. So it is important that they need to be ready for this and know where to go for help if they need it.

Harmful digital communications

There are many ways that young people bully and harass others online:

- Sending abusive texts or emails.
- Posting negative or inappropriate messages or images on social media sites.
- Taking and sharing private images, including sexual images.
- Forming bullying groups on social media sites or forming groups and deliberately keeping others out to upset them.
- Pretending to be the person they are bullying and then doing things that might make that person look bad to others.

Prevention

Ideally, no young person would have to feel upset or be bullied as a result of these kinds of communications. While this may not be realistic, there are steps you can take to help reduce the impact of bullying if it does happen;

- Have regular talks with your child or young person to make sure that they understand privacy settings, about over sharing information and photos, about the potential to “lose control” of something once it is posted online.
- Get them to teach you about what they are interested in online so that you can understand what they are doing better.
- Set boundaries around online use, help them manage their time. There are special sites that can limit what is looked at online and these may be useful for your whānau.
- Talk about the challenges they may come across (see references at the end of this resource).
- Talk to them about values – your whānau values apply as much online as they do offline and this might help them to make better decisions.

Things parents often ask...

- My child has told me that they are upset by what has been said to them online – what can I do?
- I've found disturbing comments on my child's device sent to them what can I do?
- Someone has told me that my child is being cyberbullied – what can I do?

What to do about it when it does happen?

- Firstly, be supportive and not over react. Young people can and do use bad language and posts can be quite derogatory. It is important to remain calm to best support your young person and help them make good decisions. Let them know you that understand that being bullied is hard and you are glad they told you.
- Parents or caregivers sometimes get involved in the unhelpful conversations. While this is totally understandable, it is unlikely to be helpful. Avoid getting involved directly if you can as your involvement in the conversation may make it worse.
- Be calm and supportive. It is great that your child or young person could tell you, it means they trust you and together you will work out what needs to be done.
- Some young people will prefer to ignore the comments and worry that it will be made worse by reporting it or that contacting the person that said the horrible things. Listen to your child and their concerns and work with them to make a decision.
- You might want to call NetSafe 0508 NETSAFE (0508 638 723) to gather more information about other things you can do to help.
- It can be useful to get the abusive content removed quickly (after taking screen shots in case evidence is needed) by reporting it to the site. Most sites will have a "Report Abuse" button or "Safety" link.
- If they can, "block" future messages from the person sending them the messages. Remember to take screenshots of any bullying messages sent first so that they can be used as evidence if the bullying needs to be investigated.
- If the abuse and harassment is from a student or students at the same school, talk to the school. They may be able to provide further support or help sort things out between those involved.
- Remember that young people make mistakes and do dumb things sometimes. When they do, they need support from whānau and their close friends and may benefit from talking with their school counsellor.

More Advice and Information

- Contact NetSafe if you'd like further help
 - 0508 NETSAFE
 - queries@netsafe.org.nz
 - <https://www.netsafe.org.nz/advice/parenting/>

References

National Administration Guidelines for Schools <http://www.education.govt.nz/ministry-of-education/legislation/nags/>

Harmful Communications Act <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2015/0063/latest/whole.html>

Cyberbullying <http://www.cyberbullying.org.nz/parents/>