Cyberbullying

Susan McLean

Cyberbullying can be pervasive and incessant. Parents should be aware of what they can do to help.

What is 'cyberbullying'?

Cyberbullying is when someone is repeatedly mean, nasty, horrible. harassing and/or threatening towards another person using any form of digital technology, including social media, mobile phones or online games.

Like any bullying, cyberbullying often occurs between people that know each other—students at the same school, members of a sporting club, people from the same social circle, 'friends of a friend'. If someone is being cyberbullied, they are also likely to be bullied in person.

Cyberbullying is pervasive and incessant. It differs from face-to-face bullying in that the bully can 'follow' their victim home and into their house. This means that it can continue 24/7. Cyberbullies may take advantage of the perception of anonymity (e.g. using an account in a fake name, or a blocked number) but in many cases it is clear who is behind the bullying.

Cyberbullying can be particularly harmful as it is often very public. Usually, many people can see what is written or posted. Once something is published online, it is difficult if not impossible to remove all traces of it. This means the bullying can be ongoing.

Forms of cyberbullying

• sending nasty texts, posts, instant messages, pictures and/or emails. It can also be a humiliating video.
• repeated prank phone calls.
• setting up a fake account in someone else's name and using that to bully and harass.
• using a person's password to access their account and then pretending to be them
• forwarding others' private emails, messages, pictures or videos without permission.
• posting mean or nasty comments online.
• sending and/or forwarding sexually explicit images (see the Sexting advice sheet for more information).
• intentionally excluding others from an online group or chat.

Cyberbullying

Signs your child may be being cyberbullied

Psychological harm is often harder for parents to identify than the signs of face-to-face bullying, which may include physical injuries. There is no definitive list of signs that indicate cyberbullying but there are some things to look out for:

- **change in mood, demeanour and/or behaviour**: for example being upset, angry, teary or rebellious when not previously
- **change in friendship groups:** it can be normal to change friends during the school year but sudden changes should d be explored.
- **spending more time with family instead of friends**: adolescence is generally a time where friends become very important and parents less so. Look out for a child who suddenly wants to be at home all the time.
- **lowering of marks**: often students who are being bullied show a distinct change in application to studies and a lowering of marks.
- **not wanting to go to places**: a dramatic change in enthusiasm for going to school or sport—this can manifest as non-specific illness (headaches, stomach-aches, generally 'feeling sick.')
- **distinct change in online behaviours**: being 'jumpy' when text messages arrive, not leaving their phone alone, wanting to be online all the time, or never wanting to be online.

Aren't these things normal?

Many of these behaviours may have different causes or may be stages of your child's development. In general, it is important to become the world's best expert on your own child, keep and eye on their behaviour patterns and if you feel something is amiss, explore and let them know that nothing is so bad they cannot tell you about it. Talk early and talk often. Ask them:

> *"Are you ok? Has something happened that is bothering you? Do you want to talk?"*

If you are still concerned then enlist the help of your school wellbeing staff, GP, a counsellor or psychologist.

Cyberbullying

What can I do if my child is cyberbullied?

Praise them for coming to you

This is a big step as many young people may be frightened to tell a parent about cyberbullying. Even if you don't really understand, let them know that you will help them.

Do not be angry with your child

Remember that it is someone else who is doing the wrong thing. Do not threaten to take technology away from them because of what someone else has done.

Do not respond to the bullying

It is important not to respond to the abuse. This is usually what the bully wants, so ignore them. It is natural in many cases to want to 'fight back' but responding with abuse or a threat may get your child into trouble as well.

Inform your child's school

It is important that the school knows what is going on so they can provide support and monitor any issues that may spill onto the playground or classroom. If the bully is a student from the same school, the school will work through the situation as they would with any other bullying behaviours reported to them.

Save and store the content

Keep copies of all the abusive communications. Take a screen shot or print out for evidence—ask your child for help to do this if necessary.

Help your child to block and delete the bully from all contact lists

Most social networking sites allow the user to control who has the ability to communicate with them. Many people feel 'mean' blocking another person, even if that person has already been mean to them—you may want to sit and support your child as they do this.

Use the 'report abuse' button

Most social networking sites have a method to let the site administrators know that a particular user is behaving unacceptably. Never hesitate to report abuse to the site—they must act.

Have some 'down time' without technology

It is important for both mental and physical health that your child's life is balanced—so they are not constantly 'online' or spending hours on a mobile phone. This should not be used as punishment, rather as some peaceful time where they are not being bothered.

Use parental controls and restrictions to help manage

Use the parental controls and restrictions on the device to limit or prevent contact, for example, blocking a phone number. Third party apps can also be used. If you need to change a number due to abuse, contact your phone company.

The office of eSafety Commissioner

Serious cyberbullying involving an Australian citizen under the age of 18 years can be reported to the **eSafety Commissioner**. To learn more, visit **www.esafety.gov.au.**

Cyberbullying

If ongoing, report to police

Most cyberbullying between students is usually resolved at school level so ensure that the school is aware and investigating as per their Bullying and/or Student Engagement Policy. This is the first step.

If this is not successful in resolving the situation then you could consider making a report to local police.

There are three main reasons a police report may be necessary:

1. Despite the best efforts of the school, parents or any other responsible adults, the bullying does not stop

2. When it is not possible to know who is behind the bullying (e.g. fake accounts/blocked numbers); or

3. When threats have been made to your child's personal safety.

Cyberbullying is a criminal offence in Victoria as well as every other State and Territory of Australia. There are both State and Commonwealth Laws applicable to this behaviour and you do not have to put up with any form of online bullying.

What if my child is the bully?

It often comes as a shock to be told that your child has been bullying another student online. It is important that parents support schools in their handling of the situation. Don't try and play it down.

Schools have policies and programs to deal with all parties (bully, target and witness), involved in bullying incidents.

Parents can help to prevent online bullying. Be involved, and aware of what your child is doing online. Once you are aware that your child has bullied someone else online, you can help them understand that their behaviour is both unacceptable and possibly criminal as well.

Steps to take

As a parent you could:

- discuss why it is not acceptable to be nasty or mean online and offline
- let them see there are consequences for poor behaviour both on and offline—don't bail them out
- acknowledge that they may be feeling guilty or awful about their behaviour, and discuss ways they can rectify the situation
- work together to improve the situation by offering an apology to the victim and removing posts etc.
- talk to them about their actions and try and find out why they behaved in this way and take steps to ensure it does not continue
- ask them to imagine they were the victim— how would they feel? (try to encourage your child to have empathy for the target)
- if the bullying is on an age restricted social media platform and they are under the specified minimum age of use, they should not have an account. Shut their account down immediately.
- develop a home-based Acceptable Use Agreement—set clear rules and boundaries about their online behaviour and your expectations and consequences for breaching this agreement.
- if the poor behaviour continues or your child cannot see the harms they are causing, enlist the help of your school wellbeing staff, GP, a counsellor or adolescent psychologist. to support both your child and yourself.

Online Grooming

Susan McLean

Young people are quick to embrace and explore the online world, but parents should be aware of the risks.

What is online 'grooming'?

Online grooming occurs when an adult uses electronic communication (including social media) in a predatory fashion to try to lower a child's inhibitions, or heighten their curiosity about sex, with the aim of eventually meeting them in person for the purposes of sexual activity. This can include online chats, sexting, and other interactions.

The process may start with sending pornographic images to 'normalise' the discussion of sexual activities, and then move to requests for naked images or to perform a sex act on a webcam.

Any site, game, app or platform that allows one person to communicate with another can be used for grooming. Those that are particularly popular with young people will also be popular with online predators

Who is at risk?

All young people who use technology are at risk, some of course more than others. Online predators are very clever and will focus on those who are happy to respond when contacted. Social networking sites and gaming platforms are designed for communication and many allow the sharing of personal information, providing an easy way for online offenders to find their next victim.

Young people are naturally curious and trusting and will engage in online discussions about things that they would not openly discuss in the physical world.

Children may make poor decisions about allowing people into their online lives, believing that those who seem 'nice' online will be the same in person. Many will refer to a random online acquaintance as an "'online friend"', dropping their guard and allowing the grooming process to take place.

Online Grooming

What to do

It is very important to talk to your child about these issues, so that are aware of things they may confront in the digital space. Do not avoid talking about predators for fear of upsetting them, as the potential harms can have far greater consequences. Let them know:

- they can tell you about any problems they are having or if someone makes them feel uncomfortable online
- they should only engage online with people they personally know and trust in real life to reduce risk
- it is okay to trust their instincts: if something feels odd or strange then it probably is
- 'Good friends' don't make them do things that make them feel uncomfortable.

Check that your child has appropriate security settings in place for social networking sites to help protect their online privacy. Visit www.esafety.gov.au for more information.

Warning signs

Signs of grooming might include the following:

- You find nude images or pornography on your child's computer. Online predators may send pornographic images first to 'normalise' their requests for pictures.
- You see sexualised search results as your child 'googles' what they have been asked.
- Your child engages online with people they don't know personally.
- Your child uses sexualised language.
- Your child spends an increasing and / or an excessive amount of time online.
- Your child receives unexplained gifts (e-vouchers are common).
- Your child is displays mood changes (hyperactive, secretive, hostile, aggressive, impatient, resentful, anxious, withdrawn, depressed).
- Your child is excessively secretive about their use of communications technology, including social media.
- There are people on your child's "'friends' list" that you do not know and your child has never met offline.

Police Assistance

If you believe your or any child is in immediate danger please phone 000.

If you are at all concerned about the possibility of your child being the victim of an online sexual predator please contact the police for advice and assistance.

If you are at all concerned about the possibility of your child being the victim of an online sexual predator please contact your local Police Station or your local Sex Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team (SOCIT).

Inappropriate Content

Susan McLean

Young people have access to a virtually limitless world so parents should be aware of the risks.

What is inappropriate content?

The internet offers young people amazing opportunities to connect and learn, but it can also expose them to content that is both age and developmentally unsuitable.

Content on the internet is not sorted into age or appropriate areas and without supervision and guidance, a child can either unintentionally or purposely find content that is sexually explicit, extremely violent or inappropriate. We know that exposure to this type of content can also be psychologically damaging.

Just as you would ensure that the books you read to your child are age appropriate and the TV shows they watch are suitably rated, you should monitor what your child is doing, and where they are going in the digital space.

Most internet users will at some stage come across confronting content online and in the majority of cases this will not cause long-term harm. Problems can arise when this exposure is constant and is not discussed with a parent who can provide a balanced view.

Some specific examples of potentially damaging content for children and teenagers include sites which encourage eating disorders or self-harm. For young people with mental health issues such as depression or an eating disorder, these sites can be damaging as they create an environment where users may normalise behaviour which is harmful (for example encouraging self-harm, or extreme calorie restrictions).

Be aware that young people can find these find these sites easily.

Most of these disturbing websites are not 'illegal' which means that they will remain online and it is up to a parent to monitor and manage. You would not feel safe allowing your child to wander aimlessly through a large city, alone and in the middle of the night so remember that the internet is like a large city, full of good and bad and a place that a child needs to be supervised.

The issues of curiosity and exploration are the same for every generation, but the internet means there is far more information which is far more easily accessible. Parents may once have looked up a 'rude' word in a dictionary—children today will Google the word instead. Rather than looking up pictures of nude bodies in a biology textbook, kids can now access pornographic content very quickly online.

What can I do to protect my child online?

The most important thing you can do is engage in open and honest communication. Use the internet together and make it part of your family's activities. The more you explore together, the more you will learn about their online behaviours and interests.

# Inappropriate Content

More options include:

- **Have a home-based 'Acceptable Use Agreement'.** You have rules in the real world about what your expectations are, you can have similar rules and consequences for the internet.
- **Use an internet filter.** These can be downloaded for free or purchased from a retailer. Remember that sometimes filters fail, and they can be bypassed by a tech savvy child. Make sure your filter is working.
- **Use parental controls.** You may not be aware that computers, tablets, smartphones and gaming consoles have some level of parental control—for example, the ability to block access to certain categories of websites. These are not the default settings, so you must activate them yourself. Some search engines allow parents to restrict content and some modern modems have parental controls.

Talk with your child

Talk early and talk often! Ensure that you regularly talk with your children about their online experiences. Check with them about any inappropriate or scary content they may have come across and reinforce that there is nothing so bad that they cannot tell you about it. If you hear about a site which concerns you, have a look for yourself.

Let them know that they should come and tell you when they have any problems online, see something that they know is wrong, or anything that upsets them and most importantly they will not get in trouble.

Children often fear telling a parent about an online issue as they think this will result in blocking their access to the computer and internet. Don't threaten to disconnect your child—this will only cause them to keep online problems hidden from you.
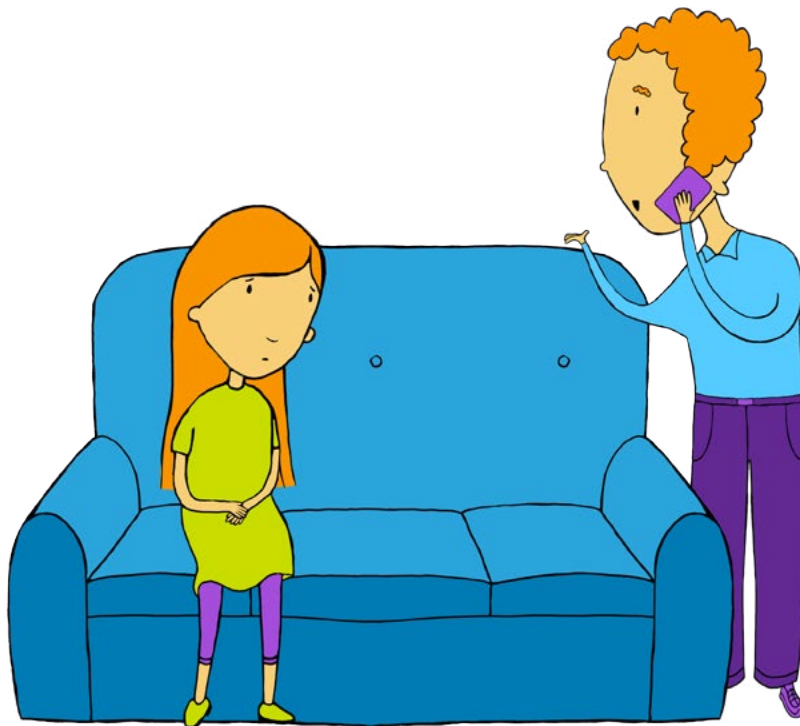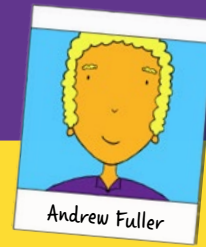
Netiquette

Online interactions are becoming as important as face-to-face ones. Learn how to manage your online relationships and develop good 'netiquette'.

Why do we need 'netiquette'?

Online friendships are so important to young people that many of them would endure pain rather than lose access to them. On average, young people have 56 online friends. As one young man commented:

> *"I'd rather lose a leg than access to Facebook."*

The strength of online relationships mirrors the best and at times, the worst, of face-to-face relationships. The only problem is that when things go badly online, they go really badly. And unlike the real world, there is no forgetting about it. As we know, things published online are difficult, if not impossible, to remove.

Almost two thirds of children have had a negative experience online and 20 percent feel badly about something they have done online. In fast-paced heated interactions in chat rooms, people who are usually friendly and positive can post nasty and hurtful comments with devastating consequences.

We need to develop 'netiquette'—standards of behaviour for people online. Netiquette is about relationships and how people behave, rather than about particular websites or pieces of technology.

The following guidelines have been compiled from suggestions made by thousands of young people and may be useful to consider or use as a discussion point.

The 'nana rule'

Online actions have real life consequences. If you wouldn't do it in real life, don't do it online. Use the 'nana rule'—if you wouldn't want your nana to know about it, don't put it on the web!

Your future employers, friends and partners can and probably will, trace your cyber-trail.

Be a responsible user of technology

Be honest with yourself. Computer games and fast-paced online interactions reduce dopamine. This means it is hard to get motivated to do anything else once you have been online for a while.

Do your study before you go online.
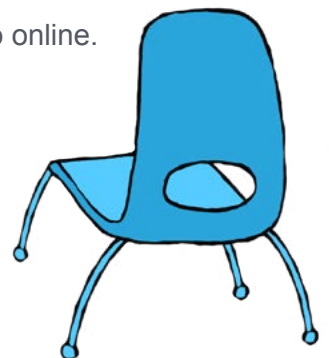
Netiquette

Take a STAND against cyberbullying

Silence

Do not respond to abusive messages. The number one rule for dealing with cyberbullying is: **don't respond, don't interact and don't engage.**

Take a copy of all abusive messages

These may be useful legally later on. Create a new folder, called 'Abuse', and move hate mail and messages into this folder.

Accept that bullies don't think like you do

Trying to sort it out with them or asking them to stop won't work. Recognise that you are not dealing with a person who has the same mindset as yourself. Cyberbullies are cowards who often try to hide their identity and behave in nasty ways to build themselves up and to put other people down. Cyberbullying is a pathetic act.

Never deal with this problem alone

Get help! No one can cope with this alone.

Don't be provoked

Some cyberbullies 'troll' or play 'the baiting game'. A provocative comment is made and those who respond in irritation are encouraged to engage in conflict with those who respond assertively. The provoker watches, waits and stirs the pot.

Become an observer. Although you may be the target of the bully's anger, you can train yourself to act as an observer. This takes you out of the firing line and enables you to study the bully and collect evidence.

For parents: don't ban—plan

Parents should not threaten to ban access to the Internet if bullying occurs.

The main reason young people do not tell their parents when they are cyberbullied is because they fear they will lose access to the computer.

Parents should let their children know that they will help them to cope with upsetting events online but won't insist they stop using the computer.

Behavioural change is important to pay attention to. While it is tempting to take away the screens, this is not always such a great idea. It is better to ensure computers are in a shared space, and impose some limits, such as a turn off time. If parents are able to get interested in the games and use these in conversations you will be able to more clearly understand the appeal gaming has for their child. It is also good to help children maintain off screen interests and activities.

Some children retreat into an online world to deal with loneliness, distress and depression. Often these kids are very private and difficult to engage in conversations making it hard for parents to gauge how much to worry. It is important for parents to pay attention to other behavioural changes such as poor sleep, low energy, irritability beyond usual levels, and changes in appetite. Get help if needed.

Netiquette

Know that people take cyberbullying seriously and that you will be taken seriously

The Australian Government has committed $125 million to improving online relationships. If you are bullied online, let your school know and let the police know. There are legal avenues that can be taken to stop cyberbullying.

Develop a code of netiquette

Some ideas include:

- Don't bully or be mean to others on-line.
- Let people know that cyberbullying is a weak and cowardly act of hatred online.
- Don't harass or stalk people online.
- Don't pass on embarrassing photos or posts about others.
- Parents should not allow kids to have webcams in bedrooms. Skype should only be allowed if the computer is in a shared family room. Chat roulette should be discouraged.
- Know that circulating some photos means that you risk being charged with child pornography.
- Only add friends that you know and do not add 'friends of friends'.
- If someone online wants to meet you in person, ask an adult to accompany you.

Students helping students

Adults will never know enough to completely protect young people when they are online. For this reason, some schools are setting up groups of students to mentor and assist younger students managing the online world.

These students, called for example 'ambassadors' or 'cyber doctors', develop the netiquette code or '**Acceptable Use Agreement'** for the school and gain input from other students.

They can help others when bad things happen online. Working with a teacher, they educate themselves about online relationships and then are available for anyone in the school who needs them. They collect information about the types if incidents that occur.

If someone has done something online that they regret or have experienced something negative they can request help to resolve the issue.

Often young people are in the most powerful position to help others cope and disentangle the complexities of cyberbullying.
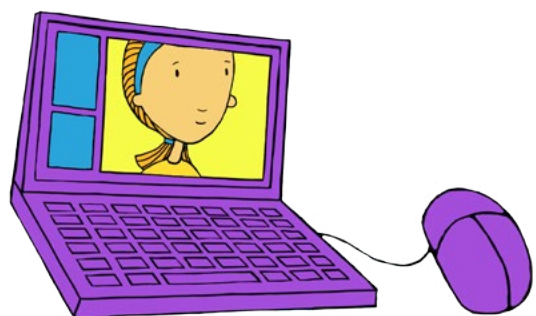
Problematic Internet Use

Young people and the online world are synonymous, but when does it become excessive?

What is problematic internet use?

'The Internet appears to be capable of altering the mood, motivation, concentration, and producing a dissociating and disinhibiting experience for users. For some individuals, patterns of use can transform to abuse, taking on a compulsive quality … Many of the daily spheres of behaviour, including work, appear to be affected by this powerful technology.'

Dr David Greenfield, Centre for Internet Behaviour, USA

Problematic internet use is addictive behaviour— and may include excessive or poorly controlled preoccupations, urges, or behaviours regarding computer use and internet access that lead to impairment or distress.

The problem is more common in adolescent males than females and is very often linked to playing online games. In severe cases, online activity takes over the person's life to the exclusion of all else.

Internet addiction has been documented and studied around the world. There are many young people around the world for whom the ability to self-regulate and manage their time online is problematic.

Online games

Computer games today may be very different to what parents remember. Games are online and interactive with players interacting with other gamers all around the world.

Online games can be very involved and immersive, mimicking real life achievements and interactions, demanding huge investments of time from large networks of players.

Online gaming can also be a concern when young children connect with people that they do not know. See the 'Online Grooming' fact sheet for further information on this.
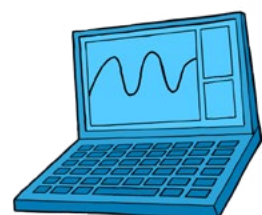
Problematic Internet Use

Risk factors

Some young people have been identified as particularly 'at risk' of developing problems with excessive internet use. A young person could be at risk if they:

- Suffer from depression and/or anxiety
- Have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Have been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Lack social support and have few friends in the 'real' world
- Are bored or stressed (using games as an escape from problems)
- Are at higher risk of social isolation due to a physical disability
- Face a breakdown in family or social bonds.

Signs of problematic internet use

There is no definitive list of signs that indicate problematic internet use but here are some things to look for:

- Losing track of time online
- Having trouble completing homework or household chores on time
- Racing through tasks such as homework to be able to get online and game.
- Isolation from family and friends—replacing real friends with exclusively online friends or other gamers
- Feeling guilty or defensive about the time they spend online—"I don't have a problem; you are the one with the problem"
- Only feeling happy when in the gaming environment

- Withdrawal from daily activities, poor school attendance, withdrawing from sport teams
- Physical symptoms such as carpal tunnel syndrome, dry eyes or strained vision, back and neck aches, headaches, sleep disturbances, pronounced weight gain or loss.

What can I do?

Establishing that your child has a problem around their use of the internet or online games can be difficult. Their behaviour may quickly move from manageable to being difficult to manage.

Make sure you are with them online, check out the games they are playing for suitability and set clearly defined time limits.

Make sure the digital content is age and developmentally suitable for your child. The fact that others your child's age play the game is not a good guide as to its suitability for your child. Check not only the rating of the game, view the content as well.

Set very clear rules about your child's online gaming and have strict time limits. If you see your child continually trying to push the boundaries, staying online for longer than allowed or logging on when you are out or asleep, then do not ignore this.

Seek assistance sooner rather than later. Enlist the help of your child's school, wellbeing staff, your GP and/or a psychologist. The longer you leave this issue the harder it will be to deal with.

Social Networking

Susan McLean

A social network is an online community, often with a common interest.

What is social networking?

Social networking sites allow users to share comments and post images and videos in a contained environment with the account holder in control. The term has now broadened to capture many popular apps and platforms that are not strictly social media but it extends to any app or platform that allows online communication.

The most common site used in Australia is Facebook, followed by Instagram, WhatsApp and Snapchat. For young people, the most popular app is Instagram, followed by Snapchat. Other apps that are particularly popular are YouTube, TikTok and House Party. Many online games also have a social media like function. Each site comes with safety concerns, so please check out the advice on the eSafety website www.esafety.gov.au

Be aware that any app, site, game or platform that allows communication between users can be used to bully or harass and can be used by online predators

What are the risks of social networking?

Using a social networking site can be a lot of fun and is a great way to keep in touch, but it can carry risks, especially for children and young people. All social networking sites have age restrictions (usually 13 years) and it is important for parents to read and understand the site's **Terms and Conditions of Use**. You don't pick and choose which rules you follow in the real world, so please assist your children to follow the online rules as well. Children should not be permitted to access age restricted accounts. Talk about the rules and why they are important rather than working out a way to circumvent them.

Social networking sites require a large amount of time invested in them, not only to set up, but also to continually manage to ensure that the security/privacy settings are at their highest level. This is particularly important when the account holder is a young person.

Many social networking sites work on a 'real name' culture, which means that being truthful in the setting up of an account makes the account safer. You are far better being truthful and using the security settings to protect your privacy, rather than setting up a fake account, or lying about certain information such as age. Facebook for example has a range of important safety settings as the 'default' when the account holder is 13 - 17 years.

Social Media

Many parents are misguided and tell their children to set up the account with an older age for 'safety'. This is NOT a guarantee of safety, sets a poor example and puts the child outside the secure part of the site. You are far better to set up an account with your child together, with clear rules and guidelines, rather than have them set one up at a friend's house behind your back.

Social networking is certainly not all bad, although the media can focus on negative aspects. Embrace social technology with your child and ensure that you have an account on all sites your child does.

What are some ways to assist children and young people in social networking?

Here is how you can assist your child to be safe on social networking sites:

- Ensure that they comply with the age restrictions (DO NOT let them on Facebook under 13 years of age)
- Ensure that they understand how the privacy and security settings work and always have the account set to 'private'. Note that even with this setting, random people may still be able to contact your child.
- Ensure that they can change their passwords and they know how to report and block.
- Ensure that they know who to tell if they have an online issue.
- Set up an account yourself and be your child's friend (this is not going to ensure safety but is part of what is expected of you as a parent.)
- Know your child's password. This is not invading their privacy, it is parenting.
- Have house rules about what your child can post and when they can add new 'friends' (must ask you first). Ensure they know and understand the rules.

Where can I find out more about specific social media sites?

Many social networking sites create their own help guides. These guides provide tips and advice specifically for parents. You can download these guides from the site's Help or Support section, for example:

- **Parent's Guide to Instagram** https://help.instagram.com/299484113584685
- **Help Your Teens Play it Safe - Facebook** (https://www.facebook.com/safety/parents/)
- **Control Your Experience - Twitter** (https://support.twitter.com/articles/470968-families)
- The **eSafety Commissioner** has a section with updated information about the latest apps and platforms. (https://www.esafety.gov.au/key-issues/esafety-guide)

Sexting

Susan McLean
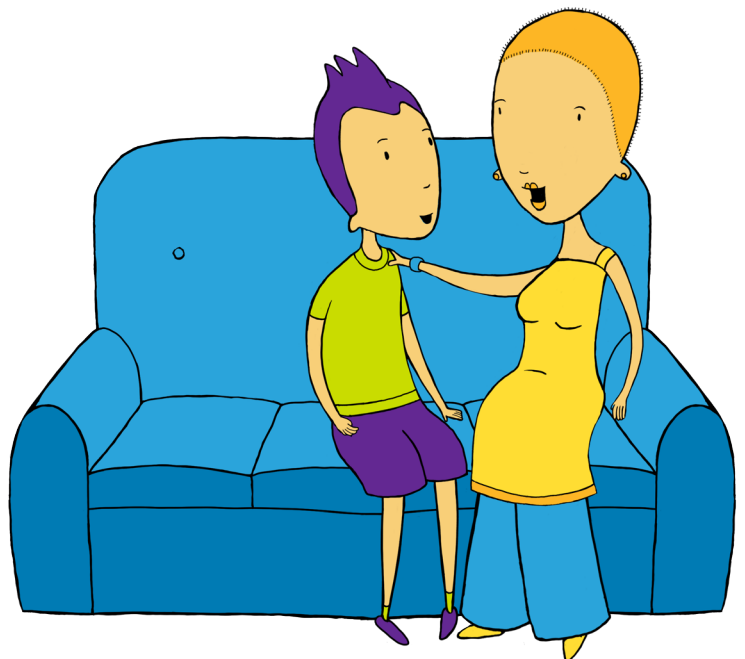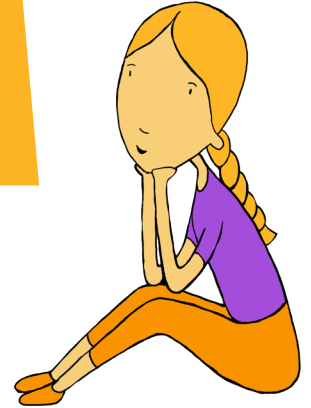
For people under 18, non-consensual sexting is illegal and penalties can be very serious.

What is 'sexting'?

'Sexting', commonly known amongst young people as sharing a nude or a naked selfie, is the sharing of a sexually explicit picture or video via mobile phones, instant messaging apps, and/or social media sites. With modern technology this can be done instantly, but it can have serious and lasting consequences.

What are the possible social consequences of 'sexting'?

Once digital images are sent, they are no longer private and you have lost control of them. You can't get them back. They can resurface again when least expected. They can be published and found by anyone, including friends, family members, complete strangers, and sexual predators. Images can be used to exploit, bully and harass individuals and they can also be used as a form of black mail known as 'sextortion.'

What are the possible legal consequences of 'sexting'?

A naked or sexually explicit picture or video of a person under the age of 18 years is by legal definition child exploitation material and the making, transmission and possession of such images can result in serious criminal charges.

To ensure that young people under the age of 18 years who engage in consensual 'sexting' are not treated at law the same way as a child sex offender, there have been amendments to the law in Victoria to protect young people from criminal charges in certain circumstances. These are:

1. There is no threat, fear, coercion, threat to share or sharing of the image.
2. Not more than two years age difference between the teens.
3. No adult involved.
4. No other criminal act is depicted in the image.

If these four things are present, it means that police can use an educative response rather than the criminal justice system.

Once a person turns 18, the exceptions listed above no longer apply, even if the person obtained the image when they were under 18 years of age. Penalties for the making, possessing and/or transmission of child exploitation material are very serious and can result in imprisonment and registration on the sex offenders register.

There are also two other offences related to this behavior: Distribute an Intimate Image and Threaten to Distribute an Intimate Image. These offences are applicable to everyone, not just young people. This is where an intimate image is shared or threatened to be shared without the consent of the person depicted in the image.

Sexting

What are the reasons for 'sexting'?

Young people are naturally curious and interested in exploring sexuality. They are also exposed to a wide range of sexual imagery in songs, video clips, movies, advertising and online. This can normalise the behaviour and promote the idea that sexual behaviour has no repercussions and many young people see it as a normal part of the flirting and dating process. We are now seeing this behaviour occur in primary schools. Unfortunately the reality is more complicated and young people often only become aware of this after the event.

In Australia we know that 1 in 3 young people aged 14 – 17 years have had some experience with sexting. Teens were also three times more likely to be asked for a nude than to actually send one. Over half of all these requests to send a nude came from someone the child/teen did not know in real life.

Talk with your child

Regularly talk with your children about their experiences. Ask them what they have seen or done, and if they have had any problems.

Reinforce that nothing is so bad that they can't talk to you about it. Ensure them they know they can tell you when they have any problems, if they see something that they know is wrong, or anything that upsets them. Let them know they can tell you about a friend's behaviour.

Children often fear telling a parent an issue as they think this will result in their technology being confiscated. Don't threaten to disconnect your child—this will only lead them to hide problems from you.

What do I do if I find explicit images of my child?

- Take a deep breath and try to remain calm.
- Find a quiet place and talk to them about your concerns and allow them time to respond.
- Ascertain what has happened and who else may be involved. Who were the images sent to? Where are the images now? Who may have them? Were they pressured to send the pics?
- If posted to a social media site, report the images to the site for removal.
- Consider a report to the eSafety Commissioner via the Image Based Abuse Portal www.esafety.gov.au
- Make an appointment to speak to someone at your child's school such as a counsellor, teacher, or principal, and let them know what has occurred.
- Be aware that in some instances, police may need to be involved and schools have certain obligations in relation to the reporting of incidents. Please don't withhold information from the school because you are concerned about police involvement. Police are very well placed to deal with these issues and have tools to minimise the impact.
- If you believe that the 'sexting' is a result of your child being the victim of an online sexual predator rather than adolescent naivety, notify the police immediately.