



## Policing the pc

Keep cyber bullies away from your child with these stay-safe tips.

As parents we aren't always aware of what's happening in our kids' lives. We think we know, but can you really know about everything your child is exposed to online? Today bullying has taken on a new form. No longer is it just the other kids saying things to your child at school. Now there's a new and faster form of bullying where your child can be bullied anytime and any place, regardless of whether parents are nearby. It's called cyber bullying and it's a serious concern. In fact, results of a survey released at a bullying conference in Melbourne late last year revealed that cyber bullying is the number one safety problem confronting young people, ahead of drug use.

Cyber bullying is bullying that's done through internet services such as emails, chat rooms, discussion groups and SMS. A child being bullied in this way can, for example, receive hundreds of harassing SMS messages while the bully can choose to remain anonymous. An example of the type of message sent may be 'I hate you - everyone does'. The messages can be hurtful, degrading, teasing or even spread rumours. And electronic messages have the potential to reach a huge audience quickly, far more than the group of three or four friends who usually support the bully at school.

So how do you know if your child is being bullied? It's common for children who are being bullied to have trouble sleeping or wake up with nightmares. You may notice they're upset without reason, moody or complain of feeling unwell. They may become antisocial or avoid their friends. Falling behind in their homework is another key indicator.

To protect your child, as a family you need to discuss this issue clearly with rules and boundaries. You can't afford to take it for granted that your child is safe - you need to discuss safety strategies with your child about online problems, just as you do for the real world. It's up to you to learn as much as you can about cyber safety and to talk to your kids about the online world.

These seven key cyber-safety messages are a good start:

- \* Respect others:  
Be aware what you send can offend.
- \* Think before you send:  
Know that you're in a very public and permanent forum.
- \* Keep passwords secret:  
Treat passwords like your house key by keeping them guarded at all times.



- \* Block bullies:  
Learn how to block or report online bullies.
- \* Don't reply to harassment:  
Bullies can keep proof of your response which can be spread further.
- \* Save the evidence:  
Learn how to keep pictures and offending messages.
- \* Tell someone:  
A trusted adult, provider of the service and /or your school.

For more information on protecting your child from cyber bullies, log on to [www.cyber-safety.com](http://www.cyber-safety.com), where you'll find an internet-use contract you can print, read to your kids and get them to sign.

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