

TOP TIPS FOR CYBER SAFETY

By Professor Donna Cross



1. Keep digital devices in communal areas

- Allow digital devices only in areas of your home that can be supervised. Check in regularly with your child to see what they're viewing.
- Remember laptops, mobile phones, tablets, gaming consoles and other forms of technology can be connected anywhere in your home if you have wireless access, even bedrooms and bathrooms.
- Keep technology out of bedrooms. This is particularly important for privacy and for sleep. Sleep is essential for growing bodies. Help your child to establish a good sleep routine uninterrupted by devices.
- Have your children agree to only use webcams in shared family locations, not in bedrooms. Keep them covered when not in use.

2. Know your children's digital friends

- Talk regularly with your children to learn more about their digital friends.
- Ensure the friends your children communicate with digitally are people they know in real life.
- Have your child agree to never meet someone offline who they have only met online, without an adult being present. An online friend can be an offline stranger.
- Remind your children to respect the personal information of friends, family and others and not share photos or information about others without their permission

3. Become tech savvy

- Try to stay up to date. With so many other commitments taking up your time as a parent it can be difficult to keep up to date. The easiest way to do this is to ask your child about the sites or apps they are currently using at the moment and show you how to use them.
- Every few weeks try to set aside a time to research the age ratings for the sites, apps and/or games your child uses so you can determine age [appropriateness and suitability](#). One of the best sites to find out information about this is: <https://esafety.gov.au/esafety-information/games-apps-and-social-networking>. This will help you to set age appropriate rules for your child's use of these sites. Seek your child's input—this will help your child to understand any potential risks. As they get older you can review your rules together to align these with their maturity level.
- Regularly check the security settings on your child's social networking site and ensure it is set to private.

4. Set parental controls and privacy settings

- Use [Parental controls](#) and install and regularly update [filtering software](#) to help block unwanted content, pop-ups and restrict access to specific content and pages.
- [Install and regularly update anti-virus and other e-security software](#) to restrict unauthorised access to data on your home computer.
- Activate safety features on [web browsers](#) to protect your and your child's devices and personal information.

5. Help your children to Google themselves

- Find out what is written in cyber space about your child (and other members of your family)
- Talk with our children about what information is available about him or her online. One way to do this is by doing a Google search on his/her name, your home address and mobile numbers to see what is mentioned or what images of them or your home are online.
- Help them to set up a [Google alert](#) to notify you and them when anything about them is posted online.

6. Look for signs of bullying

Cyber-bullying is often intended to damage a person's relationships, social status or self-esteem. As a result, the warning signs can be harder to notice compared to physical bullying. Since most (about 85%) young people who are cyber bullied are also face-to-face bullied, it is possible that the warning signs are not only related to technology¹.

If your child is being bullied s/he may start to avoid: ¹

- the person or people who are bullying them,
- using their phone or the computer where once they enjoyed using both,
- friends with whom they previously spent time, or
- going to school.

Warning signs that collectively might indicate that your child is being bullied include: ¹⁻³

- Being scared or having nightmares,
- Losing or having damaged possessions,
- Putting him/herself down,
- Having no friends or party invitations to other young people's homes,

- Having difficulty sleeping,
- Withdrawing from activities and reluctant to say why,
- Reluctant to eat or spend time having fun in the same way as before, or
- Declining school performance.

Sometimes young people (boys more than girls) who are bullied act aggressively towards others. For example, young people who are being bullied sometimes get in trouble for fighting at school, which differs from their normal behaviour. Young people who are bullied often feel unsafe or lonely at school and, as a result, often try to stay away from school.¹

How to support your children if they are being cyber bullied, what can you do to help? ^[1; 2]

- Stay calm so your child does not get more upset.
- Listen to your child – encourage them to talk with you about how they feel and be as supportive as possible.
- Remind them they are not in trouble (don't take away their access to technology unless they want you to).
- Develop a plan together.
- Ask them what they have done to try to stop the bullying and what happened.
- Ask them what they have seen other students do when they are bullied and if any of the positive actions are actions they have tried or would do.
- Ask them how they would like you to help.
- Ask them if they have talked to anyone else about this, such as a friend or teacher.
- Ask them to show you the messages, e-mails or anything else they have kept.
- Make an appointment for both of you with your child's school to discuss the problem.
- Develop a plan with the school and your child.
- Follow-up with the school and your child at regular intervals to find out if anything else is needed to help him or her.

How to support your children if they are cyber bullying others

Parents are usually shocked and upset to find out their child has been involved in bullying. Don't panic, it doesn't mean your child is 'bad' or that you have done something to invoke this in your child. **It does however mean that your child needs your help right now.** S/he needs you to listen, love, support and offer suggestions to help them to change their behaviour.

You can help your child by:^{3, 4}

- Explaining what bullying is and why it is not acceptable.
- Talking about what they think might help them to stop bullying. Ask them what they have tried and how successful it was. Ask if they want you to offer some suggestions.
- Discussing with them how they were feeling when they sent the message (or whatever form the bullying took). Try to understand why they did this from your child's perspective. Ask them how they feel about it now.
- Asking questions such as: Did sending the nasty message make you feel better? Could you have tried to communicate your message or feelings in another, more friendly manner?
- If your child is having trouble with a friendship group at school, consider helping him/her to join an activity outside of school to broaden friendship groups and make a fresh start with other children.
- Talking with your child about the impact of bullying on others. Try to help them to understand what it is like for the person being bullied.

- Asking how they would feel if they were being bullied.
- Making clear rules and consequences and being consistent in addressing inappropriate behaviour.
- Supporting your child to use technology appropriately and not engage in negative interactions.
- Increasing supervision of your child's use of technology.
- Discussing with your child why it is important not to laugh at anyone being bullied, not to join in bullying, not to give a person who is bullying the attention they are seeking and to be conscious of their own behaviour towards other students.
- Encouraging them to demonstrate positive social behaviour by being a proactive positive bystander if they see others being bullied.

Young people who bully others can often be impulsive, insecure, experience identity problems, have higher rates of injury and substance abuse problems, report a lower overall life satisfaction and depression. Furthermore, these students are often at higher risk for self-harming behaviour and future violent behaviour. Clearly, these young people are often experiencing difficulties and need support often as much as those young people who are being bullied. Try to understand why your child is bully others and help them find alternative ways to achieve a similar outcome without bullying.

Other resources

- [More bullying information from Telethon Kids Institute](#)
- [Bullying infographic from Telethon Kids Institute](#)

7. Contact your Internet Service Provider

- Help your children to respond to negative online experiences such as bullying, unwanted contact, or hurtful comments. Help them to practise strategies they can use when problems arise, such as talking to a trusted adult, not retaliating, calmly talking with the person, blocking the person, or filing a complaint. Agree on what they should do if the actions they take fail.
- Ask your children to show you how they can get [help in each of the online places](#) they like to spend time. Talk to them about cyberbullying behaviour and how to report and manage it. Encourage your child to talk to a trusted adult if any content they view or place or contact they have with someone digitally makes them feel uncomfortable.

8. Shoulder surf

- Spend time with your children while they are using their devices so you can ask questions and take an active interest in what they are doing.
- Research the age ratings for the sites, apps and/or games your child uses so you can determine age [appropriateness and suitability](#).

9. Protect passwords

- Encourage your children to not share their passwords with anyone – other than you. Make sure your child uses strong passwords on their accounts and devices
- [Help your child to keep their personal information private](#). This means avoiding using full names, phone numbers, home address, school name and date of birth. Set their online profiles to the highest [privacy settings](#). Online conversations, images and videos might be viewed by others and can't always be removed.

10. Talk to your school

- Many young people do not tell an adult when they are experiencing cyber bullying. This is often because they feel ashamed or afraid of how adults will respond. Young people tell us the worst thing their parents can do is to over-react and try to take control of the situation. Your child does need your help, but s/he needs you to help them to be better able to solve the problem for themselves. This is very empowering and will usually result in the best outcome for your child.
- Young people want and need to build their confidence to solve these problems themselves. **Our role as parents is to help our children, listening actively, non-judgmentally and providing support.**
- Before you approach the school ask your child which, if any, actions s/he has already tried, if they were helpful and what they would try next time. Ask him/her how s/he would like to approach the problem with the school. Discuss what outcome your child wants from involving the school. Other strategies include:
 - **Phone the school and ask who is best placed to help your child:** It may be best to go directly to the classroom teacher, or the year coordinator or Deputy Principal.
 - **Make a time to talk:** It is best for your child to come with you to the meeting, so ensure the time is convenient for all involved. Try to avoid turning up without an appointment.
 - **Explain what is known:** It may help for you and your child to have some notes or information about the bullying behaviour to show as examples and a record of the timing of these incidents.
 - **Describe strategies:** Ask your child to explain if they can what they have tried to deal with the bullying and their success to date.
 - **Ask for a plan of action:** The plan will most likely vary according to the digital technology involved. The plan may be different for each of the technologies involved if the bullying is occurring through more than one type. The school may wish to consult other staff before deciding on a plan of action. This is quite normal and appropriate.
 - **Consider setting a date and time for a follow-up meeting** with your child, the staff member previously approached and you to talk about how the situation is progressing.
 - If your child did not attend the meeting, ensure you **discuss with your child what happened** and the agreed strategies. It is important to ensure your child is comfortable with these actions.

What are other parents doing?

We asked a group of parents for their rules and advice regarding their child's use of digital devices. Here are some of their top tips:

- Study desks are setup in the dining room, with screens facing the room
- No phones/computers etc in the bedroom
- No electronic devices until ready for school
- Time limit on device use; Using a timer helps to take turns
- Have a box to put mobile phones, x-box controllers, iPads etc in after school – children have to do homework, chores, etc to earn their use, rather than taking devices as a punishment
- No devices during meal times
- No phone and device use in the car
- No phones in bathroom/toilet
- No digital devices one hour before bedtime
- All devices handed to parents at 9pm. If any devices are 'missing' children must find them (check under pillows)
- Buy a family charging hub and have all devices, phones, iPads etc charging in kitchen overnight
- Turn off WiFi at night
- Have children conduct a 'time management audit' to work out how often, when and why they use their devices most frequently.
- Phones placed in a bucket during social gatherings
- Plan family activities/family time outside the house to distract everyone from technology
- No technology day for whole family on set weekend days
- Discuss digital technology use decisions with them
- Spend some time each day talking to your children about their day or share your day with them

Other ways that parents have taken action can be found [here](#).

Family agreements or media plans

Consider working with your family to develop an [agreement or plan](#) to negotiate and agree on rules that encourage safe and responsible digital behaviour. Having an effective family agreement is about building a positive relationship with your child and increasing their sense of rights and responsibility for their own and others' actions using digital technology.

Some ideas for family agreements may suit children of any age. However, some become more appropriate as your child matures and some are for parents.

Every child is unique and as a parent, you are best placed to decide which of these responsibilities are most suitable for your child.

There are some basic responsibilities which apply to all types of online behaviour. Ask your child to agree to:

- Discuss with a parent/carer if he/she is being bullied online or has received threatening, frightening messages or anything that makes them feel uncomfortable, such as being sent or being asked to send inappropriate content.
- Tell an adult when he/she stumbles across something which is inappropriate or frightening. Reassure them they will not get into trouble.
- Be respectful online and think carefully before they post, text or share because content can remain online forever and shared by others without their permission, and may upset others.

The most important consideration when negotiating a family agreement is that it works for your family. Talking about how and why being safe online with the whole family is important. Your children need to understand why a family agreement is necessary. Make it clear to your child that your main concern is helping them stay safe online. If mistakes happen, it is important they feel like they're able to approach you and talk about it.

Privacy

Ideas for young people	7-11 Yrs Old	12-15 Yrs Old	16 and Older
I will use the passwords we have agreed to as a family and I will not share my password with anyone (like my toothbrush) or change it without telling my parents.	✓	✓	
I will not share my password or personal information, like my full name, phone numbers, home address, school name and date of birth, with anyone online or offline, except my parents.	✓	✓	✓
I will ask my parents' permission and to help me sign up for new games, websites or apps	✓	✓	
I will always set my online profiles to the highest privacy settings and will not include any personal information my social media profiles	✓	✓	✓

Games, apps and websites including social networking sites

Ideas for young people	7-11 Yrs Old	12-15 Yrs Old	16 and Older
I will talk with my parents if something happens online which makes me feel uncomfortable or unsafe, like bullying, unwanted contact, or hurtful comments.	✓	✓	✓
I will actively protect my digital reputation by being careful what I upload, or post, or respond to on the Internet. This includes the images I share digitally.	✓	✓	✓
I will check my digital reputation often (at least every couple of months) including both a general content search and a search of images/video relating to me.	✓	✓	✓
I will respect the age restrictions on games, apps and websites	✓	✓	✓
I will allow my parents to help me set up my profile, including appropriate security settings.	✓	✓	✓
I will only accept friends that I know offline onto my accounts.	✓	✓	✓
I will manage my list of friends so I feel comfortable with who is on these lists and the type of information I share with them.	✓	✓	✓
I will use my devices within the time limits negotiated with my family and I am responsible for managing my time.	✓	✓	✓
I will not meet someone in person who I have only met online without an adult being present. An online friend can be an offline stranger.	✓	✓	✓
I will let my parents know what games, apps and websites I am going to visit.	✓	✓	
I will let my parents know if I use a new game, website or app.	✓	✓	
I will ask my parents' permission before I sign up for new games, websites or apps and get their help with the sign-up process.	✓	✓	
I will only use chat digitally if my online profile is set to the highest privacy setting and I have permission from my parents.	✓	✓	
I will be careful with whom I share my private files (such as school work, personal photos, personal blogs etc).	✓	✓	✓
I agree not to use private chat rooms and will only use webcams in shared family spaces.	✓	✓	✓
I will not open junk email; spam or any files that are sent to me from people I don't know.	✓	✓	✓

Mobile Devices (e.g. mobile phones, tablets, hand held gaming consoles)

Ideas for young people	7-11 Yrs Old	12-15 Yrs Old	16 and Older
I understand there are certain times when I cannot use my device, I agree to turn it off and leave it in a family space prior to bedtime.	✓	✓	✓
I will not take and/or share photographs of other people without their permission.	✓	✓	✓
I will text appropriately; including <i>not</i> forwarding hurtful messages or pictures and will let my parents know if I am receiving nasty messages on my device.	✓	✓	✓
I will not accept credit or share credit with my friends without the permission of my parents.	✓	✓	✓
I will ensure my device has a pin lock or passcode.	✓	✓	✓

Sharing images online

Ideas for young people	7-11 Yrs Old	12-15 Yrs Old	16 and Older
I will immediately delete any inappropriate content I receive either via the Internet or mobile phone.	✓	✓	✓
I will not send or forward inappropriate content to others. I understand in many instances forwarding inappropriate content of a sexual nature can be illegal and I (and the recipient) could face criminal charges.	✓	✓	✓
I will let my parents know if I am receiving inappropriate, distressing or upsetting content on my phone or online.	✓	✓	✓
I will seek help and assistance from a trusted adult(s) if I make a mistake.	✓	✓	✓
I will talk with my parents about images, which are appropriate or inappropriate to post online.	✓	✓	✓
I will only post pictures of my friends or other people with their permission.	✓	✓	✓
Before posting an image, I will consider the appropriateness of it and whether it could damage my reputation or others' now or in the future.	✓	✓	✓

Embrace

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Embrace at Telethon Kids Institute is Australia's first comprehensive research centre devoted to the mental health of children and young people aged 0-25 and will seek answers to our most pressing mental health issues.

Let's rally behind **Embrace** to give kids a brighter future.

embrace.telethonkids.org.au



Maggie Dent
Parenting Author and Embrace Ambassador

"Research is the key to working out how we can create a safe base around our young people, so they can come out the other end."

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