

[Type the document title]

CYBER-BULLYING: HELP AND SUPPORT

Cyber bullying involves abuse by internet, mobile phone, social networking sites and other electronic means. Help and support to stop cyber bullying is available here and some solutions are offered for help with this destructive and harmful behaviour.

It would seem that a simple solution to cyber bullying lies in the ability of the victim to identify the sender prior to opening the abusive messages, whether email, text or SNS posting. Just as you would avoid the bully if they are seen approaching, you can take responsibility for your own protection by not opening the hurtful message and/or forwarding it to someone who can provide protection, such as a parent or teacher. This is not possible, of course, when postings and texts are sent anonymously.

Of course if you are afraid of the bully because of this form of bullying it is understandable that you will find it hard to help and protect yourself and seek help. However you can control the abuse by redirecting or deleting the messages.

The cyber -bully uses a range of means to bully a victim. These include:

1. Emails to your email address
2. Mobile phone text messages to your number
3. Social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter etc) messages abusing or telling lies about you

Each type of cyber-bullying provides some clues to effective help and support.

Some ideas which should help you to ignore, redirect, delete or track the bully and their abusive messages are:

1. Emails:

- a) The cyber bully must know your email address in order to send intimidating or abusive messages.
- b) You will probably keep the messages private to avoid others knowing about the bullying.
- c.) Keeping the bullying a secret only helps the bully. You must expose them.

Solutions:

- change your email address and only give to known and trusted friends and family;
- redirect the abusive messages to a person who can protect you such as a parent or teacher
- try to get an individual email address at school since addresses such as 'student name /number@name of school or institution' provide a template for the bully to guess your email. The bully can easily work out the email address of a victim using this template.
- You must ignore, redirect or delete all emails from the bully so as to avoid exposure to the abuse.
- Tell everyone about the abuse and show them the messages including parents and teachers and your true friends.

2. Mobile Phone Text messages:

- a) The bully must be aware of your mobile phone number in order to send intimidating or abusive messages
- b) You probably keep the messages private because you are afraid of the bully and what they will do next
- c) Sometimes you may not know who has sent the message

[Type the document title]

Solutions:

- change your phone number and give only to trusted friends and family
- forward the abusive message, without opening, to a teacher or parent
- ignore, redirect or delete all texts from the bully without reading them so as to avoid the abuse.
- Reveal the messages to someone who can help you such as a teacher or parent. Don't protect the bully.

Often this is not what happens and the bully continues to have access to you via these means and this can prove to be highly distressing. At home, limited access to mobile phones and supervised computer time, especially after school or late at night, can offer some protection. Having unlimited access to mobile phones and computers without having any adult monitoring of the content is the equivalent of you being locked in your room with your abuser and this is a scary idea. Parents have a responsibility to ensure your safety and wellbeing, but this is not possible if you don't tell them what is happening. You may need to accept that adult intervention may sometimes be necessary to secure your safety and mental health. You may want to take responsibility for your own protection and consider overnight restrictions on mobile and internet usage to limit access by the bully. The fact that their abusive messages keep having an impact and get the fearful responses they seek, is what sustains the bullying.

3. Social networking sites:

- a) The site is often a private and exclusionary site accessible only to the cyber-bully's selected friends. You may only hear from somebody else about the abusive or denigrating information posted about you. You can't retaliate on the site or correct the information.
- b) The rules are very different for such sites. There is the issue of 'freedom of speech' which has been used in some cases to uphold the right of the cyber-bully to denigrate or criticise, even slander the victim with no recourse to legal sanction.
- c) You are limited in what you can show others because you don't have access to the site

Solutions:

- Since you can't communicate with the abuser on their site you must ignore their postings and contribute to other more productive social networks
- You may open an individual site to counteract the abusive messages or lies of the cyber bully
- You can seek intervention from the person in charge of Facebook and other sites if the language or content of the abuse is contrary to cyber communication regulations.

These solutions may seem obvious but the complicating factor always is the distressed mental state of victims of cyber-bullying and their reluctance to expose themselves to further and possibly physical abuse should they use these responses.

Be brave. Don't allow a bully to destroy your confidence. Expose them and their abuse to everyone you know. Your reputation will not suffer from this. You should be seen as strong and resilient for resisting them. Make sure you have somebody on your side like a parent, older brother or sister or teacher. Self-guard your life.

Cyber bullying is a destructive and harmful activity, which requires you to develop skills for self protection and help seeking. Cyber Bullying has entered the realm of severe abuse but help and support are available.

Dr. Jean Healey has extensively researched many aspects of bullying. Her new book 'Childhood Bullying A Deadly Serious Matter' is available through Amazon or the Bullywatch website. Find out more about Cyber Bullying at <http://bullywatch.com.au> and download a free e-book about cyber-bullying.

Email: support@bullywatch.com.au

© Dr. Jean Healey, All rights reserved worldwide.