



How to: Ways to prevent and respond to cyberbullying

This *How To* fact sheet outlines some ways that you can find help to foster an anti-bullying ethos within universities and vocational online environments.

Everyone in the higher education community has the responsibility to build better online spaces. This fact sheet can help you:

- 1.** **Prevent** cyberbullying in higher education
- 2.** **Respond to** cyberbullying in higher education

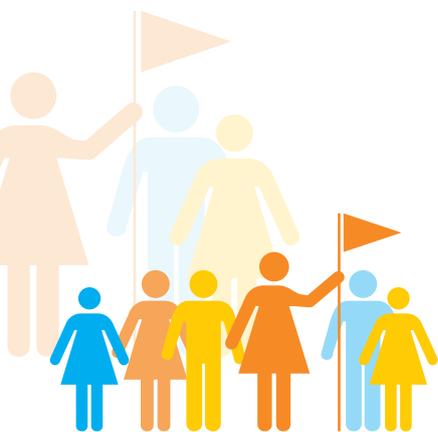
1.

Ways to prevent cyberbullying

In an ideal educational setting, cyberbullying would not happen at all. Preventative strategies can help educational institutions achieve safe and respectful online spaces that deter cyberbullying. In this section, we address the question: How can people foster such ideal, safe and respectful online spaces? Here, you will find some suggestions that can potentially help people foster healthier, respectful and positive online spaces.

BE A LEADING EXAMPLE

Your online behaviour can help create healthy, safe and positive environments that deter the dangers of cyberbullying. You can teach people in your online space how to behave in a civil and positive manner by using your online platforms to share positive content and by making respectful comments. For example, sending encouraging messages, highlighting the achievements of others and sharing content that aligns with the **Online Rights and Responsibilities Charter** might be an ideal way of fostering a respectful anti-cyberbullying environment.





ESTABLISH BOUNDARIES

In online group scenarios, maintaining rules in the discussion page can help set standards that are safe, inclusive and respectful. For example, you might want to outline some of the values that the group can uphold like the values mentioned on [Prevent Cyberbullying's About webpage](#).



PRACTICE EMPATHY

Seek understanding of other people, including those who engage in cyberbullying. Ask yourself questions like, "What does it take for a bully to do what they are doing?" Consider how the way you treat others could shape their own stories in a positive way. Remember, fighting fire with fire and retaliating to a bully by bullying yourself can encourage further negative behaviour. How can you prevent this from happening?

If you're a staff member

Consider ways to educate students and other staff about online courtesy, online empathy, eSafety and conflict resolution.



BE ESAFE



Be mindful of any personal or inappropriate information you are sharing with others online. Update and continue to check your privacy and security settings on your devices. If you are unsure about your online presence, try googling yourself to see what information is available to the public. You can also seek the advice of eSafety professionals to make sure you are safe online.

KEEP UP TO DATE



Read your education institution's policy and procedures regarding bullying and online conduct. Keep up to date on helpful online tools that can provide information about eSafety and cyberbullying. Learn about conflict resolution and online courtesy. You can find examples of helpful tools and information by visiting [**Prevent Cyberbullying's Connect webpage**](#).

PRACTICE REFLECTION



Think about your own values regarding the way you treat other people. Reflect on your actions when speaking with people online compared to speaking with people offline, in everyday life. Do you uphold the same values when you interact with people online?



IF YOU'RE A BYSTANDER

If you notice that another person is being cyberbullied, remember that you are in a unique position to help or hinder the incident. You can take a stand to promote anti-cyberbullying behaviour, too. Consider how you can adopt some of the suggestions in this section. You could assess the severity of a cyberbullying incident and, if necessary, provide support and help those who are involved disengage from the cyberbullying. Remember, liking or commenting on public discussions can be harmful behaviour that can potentially hurt others; be careful of your actions.



2.

Responding to cyberbullying

In this section you will find five guidelines to help you respond to cyberbullying.

PLEASE NOTE: Some cyberbullying cases can be quite unique according to the people involved. If you feel that the strategies in this brochure don't apply to your experience, or if you need further support, you can contact professional services like those listed on [Prevent Cyberbullying's Connect page](#).



1: IDENTIFY THE CYBERBULLYING

It is important to understand what cyberbullying is before you can identify and respond to it. When cyberbullying happens, there is typically an imbalance of power between those involved. Often, one or more people will behave in a threatening, intimidating, harassing or humiliating manner. This can be planned or unintentional behaviour that is repeated. It is important to remember that everyone is capable of being the cyberbully or recipient of cyberbullying in online higher education settings, including the students, staff or other members of the community.



2: SEEK SUPPORT

If you have identified that cyberbullying is happening to you or someone around you, first assess how it is affecting you and if you need support. It is often very reassuring to know you have someone who's aware of the situation and happy to support you. Talking to your friends, family, colleagues, teachers, counsellors or psychologists might help. Take care to speak with someone who you feel safe with; someone who will keep your situation confidential if you want. They might help you see their positive viewpoints about you and the situation, but most importantly, make sure they are a careful listener who will allow you to express your opinion on the matter. Remember, there are often counselling, support and health care professionals available in universities as well as professional online services you can access. You can find some helpful services by visiting [Prevent Cyberbullying's Connect page](#).



3: DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO RESPOND

Sometimes responding to negative comments can help to stem the tide of bullying. But this needs to be done carefully. Make sure to pick your battles; sometimes confrontation can escalate the problem. If you don't feel comfortable with talking to the cyberbully in a calm manner, you might decide to avoid retaliation and ignore the cyberbully by blocking or unfriending them. Sometimes it can be helpful for you to switch off your devices and focus on something else.



3: DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO RESPOND (CONT.)

If you decide to respond to the cyberbully, first think about how your response can shape the way other people behave online.

Consider asking yourself these questions:

- Is there a way that I can respond without getting involved in any arguments, or escalating this incident?
- Is there a way I can focus the conversation on a different topic, or in a way that has positive outcomes?
- How can I be assertive and challenge what the cyberbully (or cyberbullies) have said, not **who** they are?
- How can I respectfully establish my own boundaries without undermining my own values?
- Am I being accountable to my own online responsibilities?

Depending on the situation, you might be able to explain to the cyberbully that you don't feel comfortable talking about the topic. It is possible that a short explanation about why you don't feel comfortable might give them an opportunity to reassess their own actions. However, this depends on who is involved.

No matter the situation, remember to take your time. If you don't feel ready to read what their response will be or if you feel too emotional it is best to take things slowly. Remember, sometimes the best thing you can do is not respond.

If you're a bystander

Consider how you can lend a hand by speaking with the people involved and offering a different perspective on the cyberbullying matter.



4: CONSIDER TAKING FURTHER ACTION

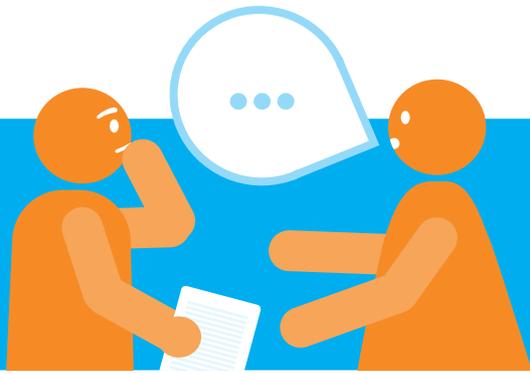
You have a right to report cyberbullying behaviour and might find this an important step if the cyberbully continues to mistreat people online, or if their initial behaviour is severely inappropriate, extremely offensive or harmful to you and others.

If you choose to report the cyberbullying, it is important that you collect evidence including the time and date of the cyberbullying behaviour. Take screenshots or photos of the content and save it. Record the URL and platforms that were used by the cyberbully, or any other information that you think will be important (e.g., username/s of the cyberbully).

Often, cyberbullying behaviour conflicts with your university or vocational institution's policy on bullying and harassment. In this case, you can inquire about the appropriate process for reporting the cyberbullying behaviour by speaking to a relevant support or education staff member that you trust. For example, your university might have a counsellor who can provide you with more information.

Taking legal action

In many countries there are laws to protect you against being abused, stalked, threatened or defamed. If you live in Australia, you might find this [**Law Fact Sheet**](#) helpful. If you want to take legal action you will need relevant evidence for your case. You can find more information about collecting evidence on [**The Office of the eSafety Commissioner website**](#).



5: PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE

Support services like counsellors at university are not just for people who may have mental health concerns. Anyone who has a personal concern can seek help. Many universities provide free or subsidised counselling, support, or formal health care from qualified professionals. Some of these services are face-to-face counselling that can be booked by phone, email or in person. Other services can be accessed over the phone or on the internet, through online counselling and online resources available on websites.

When you inquire about professional support, the staff will determine who will be best suited to help you. Sometimes staff will refer you to a different professional within your institution. At other times, they might refer you to an external professional like a local GP or psychiatrist.

If you book an appointment with your support staff, remember that what is discussed during your appointment will remain confidential. Qualified support staff are ethically bound to ensure that no private information is released without your consent. However, these staff are also legally and ethically obligated to disclose pertinent information if there is a risk of harm or abuse.

In a typical appointment, you will be asked to describe your problems and explore ways to help you with the problems. Be aware that your concerns will be assessed to determine what impact they have had on your wellbeing. Hence, you might be asked about your personal thoughts and emotions. It is important that you feel comfortable and able to talk freely during these appointments. You are always allowed to seek help from a different professional or discontinue your professional help if you feel uncomfortable.