

# Bullying Prevention

## Parent Fact Sheets

- Set 2



by Lyndall Horton-James

Available only from The Soaring Phoenix

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# Bullying Prevention – Parent Fact Sheets

## Index of Set 2

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More advanced bullying prevention issues are dealt with in the second set of Parent Fact Sheets numbered 21 – 40. More basic bullying issues are dealt with in the Parent Fact Sheets Set 1 numbered 1 – 20. Please note that Set 2 is intended to follow Set 1.

The index is provided for school administrative purposes. It is not intended for parents, although schools may wish to inform their parents about forthcoming issues.

The titles of each Parent Fact Sheet – Set 2 are as follows:

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## Some facts about your ‘electronic’ children

Just about every teen or pre-teen has access to a computer and mobile phone these days. One disadvantage of this is that they are always accessible to cyber bullies and predators. Where once they were safe at home in their bedrooms, now they can be reached wherever they are! Cyber bullies and predators can reach them 24/7.

Cyber bullies like being nasty just because they can.

Cyber bullies use text messages, emails, phone calls, instant messaging, social networking pages and web sites to hurt others. They quickly spread false rumours, send offensive jokes and messages, tease or make fun of someone, tell embarrassing stories, or post photos and videos that make the victims feel uncomfortable or abused, or exclude someone from an online group. They might also make violent or sexual threats which may frighten your child.

What’s more on a computer or mobile phone, just because someone says they’re 17 doesn’t mean they are! These days parents have to be smart, so it’s important that you know the facts.

Even if you’re pretty savvy using these things yourself, some of these facts may surprise you! Many homes now have more than one computer and they are available at school, in the workplace and at local libraries. So it pays to be smart!

- The average age of mobile phone users amongst children is 13 years old. The advent of pre-paid phone cards has increased kids’ access to mobile phones.
- 19% of children worldwide have had a cyber bullying or cyber prank experience. This might include receiving messages, images or videos that were intended as a prank. There are no figures for how these were received by the victim but I’m guessing not well!
- 23% of children have had an encounter with a stranger on the Internet, including 7% of children who report having met someone in the real world that they met online.

## Some more facts

Here are some more facts to help you understand cyber bullying.

- Cyber-bullying has been increasing since 2006.
- 16% of young people say they've been bullied online.
- 14% have been bullied through their mobile phone with boys and girls experiencing similar amounts.
- Girls and boys experience similar amounts of bullying though psychologists say that girls are becoming more aggressive. Just think about how 'road rage' is growing.
- 56% of young people think it's easy to be bullied online.
- 15% of cyber bullying victims feel very alone according to one study.
- Only 10% of parents know what their children are doing online. That's a good reason to put their computers in supervised areas, not their bedrooms!

## Why don't victims tell?

With every kind of bullying, there is a code of silence that stops kids from telling their parents until it gets serious. It's the same with cyber bullying.

The kids are afraid their parents will ban them from using the computer or take away their mobile phone, so they say nothing.

Most of all they are afraid of retaliation from the bully if they speak up. They think that things will get worse if they tell. So they don't tell and things get worse anyway!

Stress the importance of telling someone older and wiser if anything bad happens, especially cyber bullying.

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## What to do if you're harassed online

If your child is being harassed online, tell them to take these steps immediately. Role play these steps at home. Remember, practise makes perfect. If they don't get it the first time, keep trying. They'll get it eventually!

- **Tell an adult you trust.** If it happens at school, tell a teacher. If it happens at home, tell a parent.
- **Leave the area or stop the activity.** Get a drink, watch TV, listen to the radio. Anything different is good. This is like walking away! Calm down and think first.
- **Block the sender's message.** If you are being harassed through instant messaging or email, block the sender's message. NEVER REPLY TO HARASSING MESSAGES.
- **Keep a record.** Save any harassing messages and record the date and time you received them.
- **Advise your Service Provider.** Most service providers have policies to prohibit users from harassing others. They can help you track down the appropriate service provider to respond to.
- **Report it to the police.** Most people think they can get away with it because they think it's anonymous. They are wrong. Most online behaviour can be traced and it's an offence to use a mobile phone or any form of communication to menace, harass or offend another person.

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## How parents can help

Many kids don't tell their parents if they are being harassed online because they are afraid the computer or mobile phone will be taken away from them. Also they think their parents don't know that the kids have a cyber life, so they're embarrassed to tell their parents if things go wrong. Parents not only have a legal responsibility to make sure their kids are acting in a safe and responsible way online, they have a moral responsibility as well.

So what can parents do?

- Get involved and be aware. Learn everything you can about how your child is using communication technologies.
- Talk about cyber bullying and what your view is. Talk about how you want them to act if cyber bullying is a problem.
- Encourage your child to tell you if someone makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened online. Stress that they won't be in trouble.
- Watch out for the signs of bullying. A reluctance to use the computer may be a sign that something is wrong.
- If bullying occurs from your kids' school, arrange to see the principal and ask for help in fixing the situation.
- Report any incident of online harassment or threats to your local police and your Internet Service Provider (ISP).
- If your child is being bullied by mobile phone, report the situation to your phone service provider. You can always get a new number if the problem persists.
- Encourage your child to act in a safe and responsible way online. Talk about what responsible use means. Teach them not to post anything they don't want you to see or read.
- Make a family contract with clear rules of use that everybody signs.

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## Starting the conversation

It can be tricky starting the conversation about cyber bullying with your children. It's not something that crops up much in everyday conversation. Even if you get their attention, they are likely to shrug off your concerns with a can't-happen-to-me comment. At least you started the conversation. Congratulations! And may there be many more!

Here are some ideas to start you thinking. You may want to use all of them:

- **Nostalgic** You can reminisce about when you were a child compared to all the traps young people now have to contend with – it won't be hard to get cyber bullying in there.
- **Topical** You could comment on an article you've just read about cyber bullying. Ask your kids what they think.
- **Opportunistic** After they have just used the computer or mobile phone, you could ask them how they are protecting themselves online.
- **Interested** You could ask your kids what their school is doing about cyber bullying and why.
- **Concerned** You could talk about your concerns with online traps for young people and hope they join in.
- **Inventive** You can lie a little by talking about your friend and what happened to her daughter online.
- **Current** You can use a news item that you saw on TV or heard on the radio to get the ball rolling.
- **Cunning** You can start talking about it while you are all doing something else that's not related to it at all, like walking the dog or cleaning out the garage. This style is especially good with teenage boys.

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## Bullying with mobile phones

Mobile phones are a blessing, but they can also be a burden. Here's some advice you might want to give your kids about safely using their mobile phone.

### 1. **Protect your number**

Do what you can to stop someone sending you a nasty or unwanted call or message. Try these ideas.

- Only give your number to people you trust.
- Don't leave your mobile phone where someone can see your number.
- Use ID blocking to hide your number when you call someone.

### 2. **Don't respond**

Bullies get their kicks from knowing they've upset their victims, so NEVER respond.

- Keep the message or call (don't delete it).
- Record the time and date and how you felt when you received it. This will be used as evidence.
- Tell an adult – your parents, a teacher, even your neighbour. They won't rake your phone away. It's not your fault!
- If you decide that you want to respond, calm down first. Maybe even wait a while. You don't want to reward the bully by sounding upset and you will if you respond straight away!

### 3. **Don't let them know who you are**

Unless you know the caller or want to know them, don't give anyone any information about yourself – including your name!

Likewise don't put your name on your voicemail. This confirms to the bullies that they've called the right number.

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## More bullying with mobile phones

Your phone doesn't need to be on all the time. Turn it off sometimes. Give yourself a break from the bully.

### **Stealing**

It's best not to flash your phone around and let others know you've got one. Unfortunately, stealing happens, so be safe first!

If your phone is stolen, remember you can block it! This means that the thief can't use it. For more information on safety issues, see [www.mindyourmobile.com](http://www.mindyourmobile.com)

If you are threatened by someone who wants to steal your phone, hand it over! Your safety is more important than your phone.

### **The law is on your side**

People use mobile phones to bully others because they think they're anonymous and they won't get caught. They are wrong! Always report the matter to the police. It's against the law to threaten, harass or offend another person by using a mobile phone. Almost all malicious calls can be traced.

Your phone company can stop certain numbers or give you a new number, so report it to them too.

### **Useful numbers**

"3":	133 320
AAPT:	138 886
Optus:	1300 300 937
Orange:	133 488
Telstra:	125 111
Virgin:	1300 555 100
Vodafone:	1300 650 410

The Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association website is [www.amta.org.au](http://www.amta.org.au)

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## Some signs of cyber bullying

Cyber bullying can be very hard to detect. Parents need to think about the signs that their children may need help. These signs may help you. Is your child:

- Spending long hours on the computer.
- Shutting down windows on the screen when you come into the room.
- Reluctant to talk about internet activities.
- Using the computer mainly for chat-rooms, not homework.
- Showing changes in behaviour like stomach aches, head aches, trouble sleeping, crying, and eating more or less.
- Not wanting to go to school.
- Wanting to be brought home from school during the day.
- Hiding an unexplained lack of money or the loss of belongings.

## What harm can it do?

Cyber bullying, like others forms of bullying, attacks the victims' self-esteem and confidence. Hence the crying, reluctance and other behaviours are signs that bullying might be happening.

Some teenagers have been driven to suicide by cyber bullying, when they could stand it no more.

Most victims feel embarrassed, ashamed, angry, or depressed and they withdraw.

Cyber bullying is pervasive, often anonymous, and easily spread to hundreds or even thousands, of people.

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## Types of cyber bullying

Cyber bullying can happen email to email but parents need to be aware that there are many types of cyber bullying. You also need to consider chat rooms, news groups, instant messaging, bulletin boards, discussion groups, and blogs. This list will get you started. Cyber bullying is:

- Creating websites by pretending to be another person.
- Sending offensive messages, jokes, cartoons or stories to a person.
- Sending offensive messages about a person to a group.
- Sending threats.
- Sending or posting insulting, untrue or cruel messages about someone.
- Sending vulgar, embarrassing or personal photos like those taken in a changing room or toilet.
- Sending or posting personal, embarrassing or private information about a person or their family.
- Revealing secrets told to a former friend.
- Excluding someone from an online group when they should be included.
- Pretending to be a friend to extract personal information which is then made public.
- Telling true or untrue sexual information.
- Pretending to be someone else and sending a message which then has a negative impact on that person.

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## About happy slapping

Happy slapping is a misnomer for an assault which is filmed or photographed. I'm sure the victims don't feel 'happy' about it at all! No one likes to be assaulted.

Complaints about happy slapping started in 2004 and are still going on. It started on public transport and has spread to the playground and street. You need to know about it, as a caring parent.

### What is happy slapping?

Other members of the gang photograph or film on their camera phones a stranger being hit over the head by the perpetrator. The pictures are then circulated by mobile phone or put on the internet. This has become a dangerous craze. A number of people have been killed or maimed this way. Just think about the footage you've seen on TV.

### It's a criminal offence

There are many offences caused by happy slapping. Firstly, it's an assault, so the police need to know. Secondly, it's harassment if the pictures are circulated, so the police need to know again. It might even be against telecommunication law. If so, the police can advise you.

Either ring Triple Zero (000) or Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000, or even go to your local police station, but, whatever you do, report it immediately to the police. These people have not only hurt someone, they've broken the law too.

### What if it happens at school?

If it's happening at school, tell the teachers and principal too. The school needs to know so they can help stop the problem. Still report the assault to the police. An assault is an assault, even if it happens at school.

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## Twitter safely

You probably know all about Twitter but it's worth drawing your attention to it as a caring parent. Because of the open nature of Twitter, there are many traps for young people and it's your role to keep them safe.

Here is some advice you might want to give them:

Firstly, get them to put their Twitter profile into PRIVATE mode to stop the whole world seeing their updates. To do this, login to Twitter.com and go to SETTINGS. Scroll to the bottom of the page and click "Protect my tweets". Click save.

If you want someone to see your updates, you will have to FOLLOW each other. If another Twitter user follows you, they can't see your updates until you follow them back. This gives you control over who sees what. Now that's got to be a good thing!

### **Pictures and other media**

Be careful what you post on Twitter. Never post anything that could embarrass you, now or later. And never post anything that could get you or someone else in trouble. Ask yourself: "Could Grandma see this?" That's a good test.

### **Your location**

One of the advanced features of Twitter is showing your location. Never use this. Keep it TURNED OFF to stay private.

### **Twitter spam**

Like any network, Twitter can be used by nasty people who ruin it for everybody. They steal accounts and pretend to be a Twitter user by sending messages to trick you into clicking a link. Then they steal your account and do the same thing to your friends. Beware!

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## Social network safely

Websites like Facebook, Bebo, YouTube and MySpace offer lots of fun. So too do instant messaging on MSN, gaming and discussion forums. But what do kids do when things go wrong?

Cyber bullying is rife on the internet and most young people will experience it at some time. Abusive comments and false information being posted are common. What do you tell your kids so they can use social networks safely? These ideas may help:

1. If you come across anything on the internet that makes you feel uncomfortable or upset, especially people making suggestions to you, tell your parents or another adult. The police might need to be involved too.
2. Grooming is when someone older pretends to be your friend. They might pretend to be younger than they are too. Eventually they will make a sexual suggestion to you. NEVER MEET THEM! Don't delete anything that you think is bad because the police can trace it, if you save it.
3. A stolen identity happens when someone either hacks into your account or pretends to be you when they set up a new account. Try to pick an unusual password and use letters and numbers too. Don't use your name, nickname, birth date or pets' names because people who know you can guess these things or find them out. Don't let anyone sign you in or change your password as soon as they do.
4. Rumours and gossip are the worst things about social networking sites because they're so public. Lots of people will see them and believe they're true. Bullies make sure everyone sees these abusive comments. Keep secrets to yourself because former friends will happily tell your secrets. Only tell your friends things that won't embarrass you if they tell them later on. Remember the police will want to know too, if there's been harassment. Gossip and rumours might be harassment so report it to the police.
5. Anyone who threatens you has also committed an offence. If you can't print out the threat, take a photo of it and take it to the police.

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## More on safe social networking

Social networking is complex and can be abused in many ways. Parents need to be aware of all the ways it can be abused. Hopefully you will never need this information. But if you do, you'll know what to say to your children.

1. Some people blackmail others into doing bad things. For example, some people have forced young people into taking off their clothes and filming themselves, otherwise if they don't take part their parents will be told something embarrassing about them. That's blackmail! Tell your parents. Even if you only know the person's email address, the police can find them, so report it to them.
2. It can be tempting to hit back if someone has posted a rude comment about you on a social network but don't! This is called 'flaming' and it makes things worse. Get your parents to contact their ISP to find out the best way to remove the website. Much better!
3. Instant messaging systems are a great way to chat to a friend. If things turn nasty, you can block people from seeing you online and you can save abusive comments.
4. Putting photos taken by a camera phone on the net is simple. Just make sure you have the person's permission to take their photo and that they don't mind if thousands of people see it. Don't upset people, take their picture, then upload their picture on the net so that other people can have a laugh. That could be harassment. Then you'd be in BIG trouble. Don't let anyone take photos of you that might embarrass you either. Report it to the police if they do.
5. Even if you use a hotmail or yahoo address for your email, the police can trace it.
6. Many employers search the internet before they employ people. Always remember that nothing is secret in cyber space!

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## Dangerous websites

If they've got a couple of hours and some software, anyone can put up a professional-looking website. Just because a site looks safe, doesn't mean it is. Be warned! **No laws will protect young people who use these sites.** Warn your children about this.

Risky websites you need to know about include:

- A self-harm website by a woman who has posted elsewhere on the internet how to kill yourself.
- A self-harm website which contains graphic pictures.
- Several websites claiming to be charities that are really businesses.
- A 'fun' website by a woman who poses as a teenager.
- A self-harm website by a person posing as a teacher.
- An anti-bullying website that asks pupils to give out personal information.

No legitimate website needs to conceal its contact with your kids from you, unless it's reporting your abuse. When it comes to websites and chat-rooms don't let your kids give out any personal information. Sure, it can be exciting to think you might win something if you fill in your details, but you never know what can be done with it. It might be sold to a marketing group, or worse. Tell your kids to be very careful about personal details like name, age or address or phone number. What seems innocent may not be!

## Even advice can be dangerous

Be very careful about taking advice from websites! Make sure the website has a section saying who runs it and what their expertise is. Even then, people can, and do, lie online. Better to be safe than sorry.

A known charity is best if you need emotional advice. Even then, face to face is much better for dealing with relationship issues, or if you feel depressed and alone.

The same goes for medical advice. See a doctor if you're worried about something. Self-diagnosis can be very dangerous indeed!

Make sure your children understand this.

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## If a friend is being bullied

Many parents don't know what to say to their kids about what to do if a friend is being bullied by computer or mobile phone. This information can help. It's also useful to think about if any of these points relate to your own child.

- It can be hard to know if your friends are being cyber bullied. They might keep it to themselves and not talk about it. They might feel ashamed that this has happened to them. You might have to raise the subject yourself.
- If they are being bullied online, you might have noticed that they may not chat with you online much anymore.
- If they are being bullied by mobile phone, you might notice that they suddenly get a lot of text messages.
- If they are being bullied online, you might notice that they are unhappy after they've been on the computer or checked their phone messages.
- They might stop hanging around with friends or have lost interest in school or social activities.

### **What to do if you think cyber bullying is going on:**

- Talk to your friend about how worried you are and ask what is going on. Support your friend. Be there for them.
- Stand up and speak out. Don't forward any messages or pictures that might upset someone. Okay, you didn't start it, but you will be seen as part of the cyber bullying cycle if you send it on.
- Report the bullying. You'd want them to do the same for you. If there is a threat made, contact the police. Either ring Triple Zero (000) or Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000. If it's happening at school, tell them too. The school needs to know so they can help stop the problem. Make sure your friend's parents know what's been happening too.

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## What the school can do

Make sure your children's school is taking a stand against cyber bullying. Are they:

- Bringing the issue into the open by talking about it with staff and students, and writing about it in newsletters to parents.
- Employing experts to search the school computer system for wrongful use.
- Educating staff and students about the trail they leave on the computer system.
- Surveying the students to gauge the extent of the problem.
- Stopping the use of terms like 'inappropriate' and 'unacceptable'. Bullying is always wrong!
- Telling students about the consequences of cyber bullying.
- Discussing with the students their personal responsibility for making technology safe to use.
- Encouraging safe disclosure by having an email address just for these reports.
- Involving students in finding a solution.
- Basing their anti-bullying programs on values not punishment and talking about the role bystanders have.
- Being cautious about banning mobile phones with digital cameras, after all it's the user not the tool that's the problem!

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## Sign the Bullywise™ Cyber Pledge

**By signing this pledge, you can make a commitment to play an active role in stopping cyber bullying wherever it happens. Use it with your family, friends, work mates, club members or school.**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to help stop cyber bullying wherever it happens. I believe that everyone deserves to be treated with respect and dignity. I believe that everyone has a right to feel safe and to be accepted for who they are. I believe that bullying is never OK. I believe that we all have a responsibility to help stop any bullying that we know is going on.

**By signing this pledge, I promise to:**

- Never bully another person on purpose by mobile phone or computer.
- Never to pass on something hurtful about someone else.
- Apologise immediately I am told that I have accidentally bullied someone by computer or mobile phone.
- Tell anyone bullying another person to stop.
- Tell the person in charge if bullying happens at school, at church, at a club or work.
- Help the person who was bullied.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Don't be a cyber bully yourself

Parents can give their kids great advice. Perhaps the greatest advice they can give them is 'don't be a cyber bully yourself'. It's easy to be an unwitting cyber bully if you haven't thought about it before. Give your kids a chance to be great. Talk to them about cyber bullying beforehand!

Here are some ideas you may want to discuss with your child, now that you know a lot more about cyber bullying yourself.

- Treat other people the way you would like to be treated. That goes for the virtual world as much as the real world. It doesn't always work, but it's a great principle to live by. I'm sure you'd want to cover that!
- Don't pass on anything you know will hurt someone else. That goes for photos, text messages, stories, videos, rumours, cartoons – anything that could hurt, probably will.
- Speak up if someone who should be included in an online group has been left out or blocked. Wouldn't you want someone to do that for you?
- Understand that the impact of online bullying is just as severe as face-to-face bullying. It hurts!
- Don't rate your friends on social networking sites. It's very hurtful, can cause confusion and it can really upset your friends.
- Don't be seen as the bully if you contact someone while you're angry, even if you are not angry at them. Give yourself a chance to calm down first. You will sound much better then.
- Don't stop going to a friend's house, going out with them, or seeing them just because you can contact them online.

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## Tips for staying safe online

Your teen or pre-teen needs you to understand how to stay safe online. The following tips will help you. The more you sound like a broken record the better! Say these things aloud and often.

- Never give out passwords or PINS. Even a best friend can be tricked! Better that they never know. Don't use anything obvious like a nickname or your date of birth or a pet's name as your password either. Your password is just for you. Keep it secret.
- Only give your mobile number or email address out to people you trust. Never put it on a social networking page either.
- Keep personal information and photos to yourself. If it's something you don't want the whole world to know or see, say nothing and do nothing!
- Never send messages to anyone when you are angry. Calm down first!
- Don't stay online all the time. Just because you can stay in touch with your friends online, doesn't mean you should stop going to see them!
- If you have been bullied, tell someone! Maybe you don't want to tell your parents. Tell a teacher or your Grandma or your neighbour. Tell someone older and wiser! Whoever you tell, tell someone.
- Don't reply to a cyber bully. The bully doesn't know if you have got the message until you reply. Say nothing! It drives them mad!!!! They will probably give up when they don't get the response they were expecting (like tears and being upset from you).
- Save messages from a cyber bully. Even print it out. If you delete it, it can't be tracked! If it can't be tracked, the cyber bully will get away with it. They might even do it again!
- Don't meet people you've met online in person. Ever!

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## Getting help

Everyone needs help now and then and technology is no exception!

- The Australian Communications and Media Authority teaches kids how to surf the web safely at [www.cybersmartkids.com.au](http://www.cybersmartkids.com.au) Parents can get more information from them at [www.cybersmart.gov.au](http://www.cybersmart.gov.au)
- Take any printouts or saved messages to the police. They will tell you what to do next. The police don't want people bullied either, so let them help you. It is a criminal offence to harass someone or make threats and there are serious consequences for this behaviour. Be aware! If there is a threat made, contact the police immediately. Either ring Triple Zero (000) or Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000.
- If the bully is likely to be at school, tell the teachers the whole story. Printouts or saved messages will help you here too! Report it, report it, report it. Bullying rarely goes away by itself and usually gets worse, not better, when left alone!
- Get your kids to talk to their classmates at school about cyber bullying BEFORE it happens. Chances are that the whole class thinks cyber bullying is dumb! Most people respond better to criticism from their peers rather than adult disapproval.
- Two support services you should know about are Kids Help Line (phone 1800 55 1800) for kids 5 to 25 and Lifeline (phone 13 11 14). Both services are free and confidential. Telephone counsellors can help you. With bullying, everyone needs as much help as they can get!
- Sometimes when they're surfing the web, your kids may come across a website, or other material, that is offensive, obscene or illegal. Know how to escape from such a website. Hit 'control-alt-delete' if the site won't let you exit.

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