Cyber-bullying: It’s Not Okay!

Facebook, Twitter, texting, email... There are so many ways bullies can get to kids. Yvonne Walus explains what you need to know about cyber-bullying.

Cyber-bullying can be as simple as an insulting text message, or making a hate-filled comment on social media, or posting an unflattering video. In short, it can be anything published digitally that’s aimed to hurt or humiliate another person. Cyber-bullying is bullying. Hiding behind a screen doesn’t make it less so.

While physical bullying is typically confined to the schoolyard, cyber-bullying follows the victim home and launches an attack using a device meant for entertainment and socialising with friends.

Research suggests that approximately one in three high school students have experienced cyber-bullying, and that figure is similar for primary school children. That’s why it’s now against the law to be a cyber-bully: The Harmful Digital Communications Act of 2015 covers all forms of damage spread through emails, texts, and social media posts. It sends a clear message that such behaviour is not acceptable and that there are consequences, including jail time.

As parents, we need to teach children that they need to report any bullying activity and not to retaliate by bullying the bully. We can help them gain self-confidence and discover who they are. Standing up for victims of hurtful behaviour is the key that will allow us to defeat this new culture of humiliation with a culture of kindness and empathy.

### Help Lines

- **IN AN EMERGENCY:** Call 111
- **YOUTHLINE:** 0800 376 633, text 234 (available 24/7), or email talk@youthline.co.nz
- **KIDSLINE:** 0800 543 754 (available 24/7)
- **WHATSUP:** 0800 942 8787 (1pm to 11pm)
- **RAINBOW YOUTH:** (09) 376 4156 (weekdays 11am to 5pm)
- **NETSAFE:** 0508 NETSAFE (0508 638 723) or theorb.org.nz

### Ages & Stages

- **ALL AGES:** If you’re being cyber-bullied, speak up. Bullies are not cool and their behaviour is not okay.
- **PRIMARY SCHOOL:** Children struggle to understand what counts as cyber-bullying. Sometimes a child might say something that they don’t mean to be hurtful, or because they haven’t yet learned that online words may hit harder than words spoken face to face. Or they may not understand it’s wrong.
- **INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL:** “I didn’t know” is no longer an excuse. Children might experiment with saying mean things online on purpose, and it’s important they learn such behaviour is not on. Photos and videos taken in secret may accompany hurtful words.
- **HIGH SCHOOL:** Cyber-bullying might become sexually-flavoured, often bordering on sexual harassment. Photoshopped images may be used to belittle teenagers who are considered popular or successful.