

# Children and online technologies

## Internet advice for parents

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Children today are growing up in a world where the internet has always been available, and is an essential tool. They are 'digital natives', always surrounded by online technology and accessing the internet from an increasingly early age.

Children use the internet for many reasons. These include:

- finding assistance with school assignments
- learning skills, research and gaining knowledge
- for entertainment
- meeting new people who share similar interests and
- keeping in touch with friends.

There are many ways for children to get online. There are many benefits — but there are also some risks.

In learning and applying safe internet skills, and sharing these with their children, parents can help keep them safe and ensure that the whole family enjoys positive online experiences.

Following are some of the most common issues faced by parents are their children, and some hints and tips for how to address these issues.

## Cyberbullying

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Cyberbullying is defined as the use of information communications technology, particularly mobile phones and the internet, deliberately to upset someone else. Children using online technologies can be cyberbullied or harassed through internet services like email, chat rooms, instant messaging or social networks.

## Advice for parents

Cyberbullying includes teasing, spreading online rumours and sending unwanted or threatening messages or defamatory material.

Common signs that a child is being cyberbullied might include:

- Changing patterns of how they use the computer, such as seeming unhappy when they have been online
- Receiving a sudden increase in SMS messages
- Becoming withdrawn, appearing distressed
- Becoming anti-social, avoiding friends
- Falling behind in homework, being reluctant to go to school.

While cyberbullying can have a damaging effect, parents can encourage their children to take control of the situation. They can do so in a number of ways.

- Ignore — advise children not to reply to any messages from a bully. Often if bullies don't receive a response they will give up.
- Block — learn how to block a bully, so they can't make contact.
- Collect evidence — keep a record of the harassing messages and any replies. This may help parents, or the authorities, if necessary, to find out who is sending them.
- Keep usernames and passwords secret. If someone misuses a username and password to post damaging information about a child it can be difficult to remove.
- Report — children should learn to recognise messages that are threatening and tell a parent or carer immediately. Cyberbullying, if threatening, is illegal and can be reported to the police.
- Contact the website administrator (often known as the webmaster) to ask for content

to be removed, if bullying information has been posted on that website.

- Contact the phone provider and report unwelcome calls or text messages.

### Helpful tips

- Check the privacy settings on websites and see how to report abuse.
- Use support services such as the Kids Helpline or the Bullying No Way website.
- Talk to the child's school if cyberbullying involves another student.
- Report threatening messages to the police.

## Exposure to inappropriate material

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Online, children may be exposed to inappropriate material, such as sexually explicit content or sites that promote violent or racist views inadvertently.

### Advice for parents

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) administers the Online Content Co-regulatory Scheme which enables members of the public to complain directly about online content they believe is prohibited by law. An online complaint form is available on the ACMA website at [www.acma.gov.au/hotline](http://www.acma.gov.au/hotline).

ACMA can take action about internet content that falls within the classification RC (refused classification) or X18+. This includes content that contains:

- Detailed instruction in crime, violence or drug use
- Child pornography
- Material that advocates the doing of a terrorist act.

ACMA can also take action about content that falls within the R18+ and MA15+ classifications if it is hosted in, or provided from, Australia and is available to minors. This includes content that contains implied sexual activity, strong violence or other material that requires an adult perspective. For more information on ACMA's role in regulating online content visit the ACMA website.

### Helpful tips

- Learn about safe searching techniques and share this with your children.

- Identify safe or child-friendly websites.
- Report to ACMA any material suspected of being prohibited.

## Privacy

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Without considering the consequences, children sometimes post private information about themselves online. This can include their name or address, photographs, a mobile phone number, their school name and details of their friends or families. Providing personal information online can result in being targeted for spam, advertising material or viruses. In some cases, websites prompt users to reveal private information on forms or through pop-ups. Not all these requests are legitimate.

### Advice for parents

To help guard privacy, children should be encouraged to ask a parent or carer before they give anyone on the internet their personal details. Once information is posted online it is very difficult to remove.

Children should be encouraged to learn how to use the privacy settings on their profile sites, so that information they post is not publicly accessible.

### Helpful tips

- Contact the author or the web administrator if a website contains personal details that have been disclosed without authorisation or their children's personal details. Web administrator details are commonly located on website home pages.
- Contact the Office of the Federal Privacy Commissioner if personal details have been mishandled by a Commonwealth Government agency, or a private sector organisation in Australia.

**W** [www.privacy.gov.au](http://www.privacy.gov.au).

## Spam

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Any internet user, including children with a personal email address or mobile phone, can receive unwanted messages. These are called spam. Spam messages may be inappropriate,

offensive or contain computer viruses. They frequently promote products or services. Responding to these messages can lead to further spam.

Simple safety rules apply—if the message is from someone you don't know, don't click on any link in the email and don't respond in any way.

### **Advice for parents**

It is illegal to send, or cause to be sent, unsolicited commercial electronic messages. This includes email, instant messaging, SMS and MMS — text and image-based mobile phone messaging—of a commercial nature. It does not cover faxes, internet pop-ups or voice telemarketing.

Complaints about spam sent from within Australia can be made to ACMA via the online form on the ACMA website.

ACMA has a number of tools available to report spam including the SpamMATTERS reporting button which home users can download as a simple reporting button from:

**W** [www.acma.gov.au/spam](http://www.acma.gov.au/spam).

### **Helpful tips**

- Report any suspected spam to ACMA.
- Download the SpamMATTERS reporting button.

## **Unreliable information**

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The internet is a valuable research tool for children, providing a wide range of useful information. Children may not realise that information on some websites misrepresents the truth, is misleading, out-of-date, biased or simply incorrect. For example, websites with racist material may claim to tell the truth about complex social, cultural or historical issues in a way that appears logical and plausible, but isn't.

### **Advice for parents**

Children need to be able to distinguish fact from fiction online. They also need to develop good browsing and searching skills to ensure they visit safe sites and find appropriate information.

### **Helpful tips**

- Assist children in finding good websites and safe searching techniques.
- Help children review a website before using it. How old is the information? Who wrote the information? Does the website have contact details or statements on privacy or copyright? If not, advise the child to find another website.

## **Socialising online**

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Social networking happens on a variety of services like YouTube, MySpace, Facebook and Twitter. These websites allow users to create profiles, communicate with others and form networks of friends. Social networking sites allow users to:

- create communities of friends
- create and download video content
- share still photos.

### **Advice for parents**

Where inappropriate information appears on a social networking website, users can contact the website administrator to request that the offensive content is removed.

Social networking sites generally have policies about unacceptable content and restrict content that users are allowed to upload. Some sites limit false profiles, content containing nudity or which presents violence. Website administrators generally rely on complaints from other users in identifying unacceptable content.

Users can also complain to ACMA about offensive or illegal material including text, photographs or videos. ACMA may take action if the material meets the criteria for prohibited content.

Complaints about content can be made using an online complaint form at:

**W** [www.acma.gov.au/hotline](http://www.acma.gov.au/hotline).

### **Helpful tips**

- Set house rules about when children can give out or share personal information such as name, address or mobile number.
- Advise children to set profiles to 'private' so

that only people they want to see it can.

- Encourage children to think before they put anything online. Information posted online can be there indefinitely.
- Encourage children to be careful when making new friends online—they might not be who they say they are.
- Report any material suspected of being prohibited to ACMA.
- Report abuse or inappropriate content to the website administrator and show children how to do this.

## Communication

Children use a variety of services to communicate online. These include chat rooms, blogs, forums, newsgroups, email, multiplayer games, virtual worlds, social networks and instant messaging. Internet users may be able to chat in real time, express opinions, send files, view others through webcams, publish and share personal information including photographs.

### Advice for parents

The internet is a public place and the same cautions about interacting with others in real life apply online. Children can forget that people they meet online may not be who they say they are or may experience cyberbullying when communicating online.

### Helpful tips

- Contact the police if a child is in immediate danger from contact made online.
- Advise children that if someone writes something rude or something that makes them feel uncomfortable, they should not respond, and should leave the area immediately.
- Advise children not to open messages from people they don't know.
- Encourage children to remember that online friends are really strangers no matter how long they've known them online. Children should speak to a parent or carer if an online friend asks to meet in real life.
- Advise children to think twice about accepting new 'buddies' or friends.
- Advise children to use an appropriate online

name, not their real name, and not give out private information.

- Learn how to block people. Users may not wish to see messages from a particular person or receive private messages from them.
- Report abuse to the website administrator. Contact details will generally be posted on the site.

*Our thanks to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) for contributing to this section.*

## Internet advice for schools and teachers

The internet is now very much a part of life and learning. As an increasingly interactive medium, it brings with it exciting educational opportunities, but at the same time it also brings some risks.

The website *Working with the Web – A guide to the ethical and safe use of the internet in Victorian schools* has been developed to help schools make the most out of these opportunities and at the same time minimise risks.

To find out more visit:

**W** [www.education.vic.gov.au/management/elearningsupportservices/www/default.htm](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/elearningsupportservices/www/default.htm)

For websites which offer support and advice in relation to cyber bullying go to:

**W** Notalert [www.notalert.gov.au/home.html](http://www.notalert.gov.au/home.html)

**W** Cybersmart Kids Online [www.cybersmart-kids.com.au](http://www.cybersmart-kids.com.au)

**W** Bullying. No Way! [www.bullyingnoway.com.au/](http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/)

**W** Kids Helpline [www.kidshelpline.com.au](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au)

### Talk to someone

#### Kids Help Line

**T** 1800 55 1800

**W** [www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)

#### Reach Out

**W** [www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au)

Email: [info@reachout.com.au](mailto:info@reachout.com.au)

#### Life Line

**T** 13 11 14

**W** [www.lifeline.com.au](http://www.lifeline.com.au)

**For further information contact:  
Cybersafety Contact Centre**

For advice about online safety issues  
**T** 1800 880 176

**Australian Communications and Media Authority**

For further advice about online safety issues  
**T** 1300 669 024  
**W** [www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au)  
**T** [www.cybersmartkids.com.au](http://www.cybersmartkids.com.au)

**Federal Privacy Commissioner**

**T** 1300 363 992  
**W** [www.privacy.gov.au](http://www.privacy.gov.au)

**SCAMwatch**

**T** 1300 302 502  
**W** [www.scamwatch.gov.au](http://www.scamwatch.gov.au)

**The Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy**

Advice about online security issues  
**W** [www.staysmartonline.gov.au](http://www.staysmartonline.gov.au)

**Internet Industry Association Security Portal**

Further advice about online security issues  
**T** 02 6232 6900  
**E** [info@iia.net.au](mailto:info@iia.net.au)  
**W** [www.security.iia.net.au](http://www.security.iia.net.au)

Report a Crime

**Crime Stoppers**

**T** 1800 333 000

**Australian High Tech Crime Centre**

Further advice and to report Electronic Crime  
**W** [www.ahtcc.gov.au](http://www.ahtcc.gov.au)

**Australian Federal Police, Child Protection Operations Team**

Further advice and to report suspected online child abuse or exploitation  
**E** [national-OCSET-omc@afp.gov.au](mailto:national-OCSET-omc@afp.gov.au)  
**W** [www.afp.gov.au/contact.html](http://www.afp.gov.au/contact.html)

## Staying safe on MySpace – A guide for parents

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### About MySpace

MySpace.com is one of the internet's leading social destinations for connecting with friends, discovering content and culture, and making a positive impact on the world. By integrating web profiles, blogs, instant messaging, email, member forums, music, video, photo galleries, classified listings, events, groups and school and university students, MySpace has created a more connected community.

The following provides parents with information on how to address MySpace-related issues that may arise as a result of teens using MySpace and how to contact MySpace with questions or concerns that relate to your teen's use of the site. It is important for parents and users generally to note that the MySpace Terms of Use Agreement only permits those aged 13 years or older to use the site.

### How your teens are using MySpace

Your teens are using MySpace to connect with friends and find other people that share similar interests. They are using MySpace to discover new content and culture, as well as express themselves, their thoughts, ideas, creativity, and opinions on politics, art, music and life. They do this through blogs; choosing the design of their MySpace page; the music, movies and books that are listed as their favourites; the original or favourite art or photography they display on their page; and the way they describe themselves in the 'About Me' section of their profile. They may be discovering and showcasing all their various talents, such as filmmaking, comedy or music by sharing their accomplishments on areas of the site; and they are learning about new musicians and artists in the same way. They may be joining support groups for broken families, eating disorders or depression to help each other through the difficult and tumultuous times teens often encounter. In addition to all this your teens are being exposed to different cultures and countries as MySpace continues launching throughout the world.

## How to discuss your teen's MySpace profile

Now that you know a little more about how and why your teens are using MySpace, you can begin a discussion with them about their profiles and their use of the site. Ask them what kind of information they have posted online. Ask them to show you what their MySpace page looks like and how they created it. Have them tell you about their 'Top Friends'. Ask them to take you through what they typically do on MySpace, whether it is search for new music or message with friends from their sports team. These are the same questions you ask when they come home from school – just applied to a different space.

While you're talking with them about their MySpace profile, you can remind them that the same rules apply in the online world as do in the offline world. For example, you tell them not to talk to strangers when they leave the house. That holds true online. You tell them not to open the door of the house to anyone they don't know. That also holds true online. The rules which you have taught them to apply in the physical world to keep them safe translate easily to the online space, and your teens need your guidance, your rules and your discipline while they navigate both the physical and online worlds.

Here are some simple rules for Internet Safety to share with your teen:

- Don't forget that MySpace profiles and forums are public spaces. Don't post anything you wouldn't want the world to know (such as your last name, phone number, home address, IM screen name or specific home address). Avoid posting anything that would make it easy for a stranger to find you, such as where you hang out every day after school or your school name and location.
- People aren't always who they say they are. Be careful about adding strangers to your friends list. It's fun to connect with new MySpace friends from all over the world, but avoid meeting people in person whom you do not fully know. Be careful when adding your friends' friends to your own list. If you

must meet someone, do it in a public place and bring a friend or trusted adult.

- Harassment, hate speech and inappropriate content should be reported. If you feel someone's behaviour is inappropriate, react. Talk with a trusted adult, or report it to MySpace or the authorities.
- Don't post anything that would embarrass you later. Think twice before posting a photo or information about you that you wouldn't want a potential boss, teacher or a family member to see!
- Don't lie about your age. MySpace diligently protects its users of varying ages. When you lie about your age you circumvent these safety measures and MySpace must take action on your profile upon discovering the misrepresentation.

Please remember that your role is critical when it comes to communicating and enforcing these rules. Your children should not be on MySpace if they are under the age of 13, however you can always begin a dialogue regarding internet safety regardless of age.

### How to contact MySpace.com

MySpace is committed to addressing any problems that parents may have regarding the site as soon as possible after these concerns are raised. MySpace has created an e-mail address for the exclusive use of parents at:

**E** parentcare@myspace.com.

This email address should be used only by parents who are trying to contact MySpace about an issue related to their child's use of the site. For other contacts at MySpace, go to [myspace.com](http://myspace.com) and click on the 'Contact MySpace' link at the bottom of the page.

## Protecting your teens online

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### Underage users

While persons under the age of 13 do attempt to register under false dates of birth, MySpace actively endeavours to identify and remove such underage users through the use of an advanced algorithm. MySpace deletes thousands of profiles per week for age misrepresentation.

Parents can help MySpace enforce its age restrictions. If you have children who are under the age of 13 and have MySpace accounts, please email the web addresses/ URL of their profiles to [parentcare@myspace.com](mailto:parentcare@myspace.com) so that they can be removed from the site. Please be sure to include the following in the email:

- The web address of the child's profile
- Your relationship to the child
- The actual age of the child
- Your contact information.

For additional contact information, visit the MySpace parents' section at:

**W** [myspace.com/safetyaustralia](http://myspace.com/safetyaustralia)

## Site wide safety infrastructure

MySpace utilises numerous techniques to increase the safety of all of its users, and especially that of its younger users. This safety infrastructure makes it all the more important that your teens use their correct age when joining MySpace.

MySpace has incorporated protections into the website that are appropriate to the age of its younger users. The youngest users on MySpace have the most stringent built-in safety protections. All 13 – 17 year old profiles are automatically set to private upon signup. By default, only adults who know either the last name or email address of a 13 – 15 year old member can add that member as a friend. Additionally, the only individuals who can see profiles of 13 – 15 year olds are individuals on their 'Friend' list; 13 – 15 year olds' profiles can be made public only to other minors on the site.

All users under the age of 18 can block all users over the age of 18 from contacting them or viewing their profile, and vice versa. As teen users get older MySpace provides them with additional freedoms, for example, 16 – 17 year olds can choose to change some of the default privacy settings.

## Software

In addition to the safety infrastructure explained above, MySpace has developed a free software tool called ParentCare to help parents

determine whether their teen has a MySpace profile and the age, username, and hometown they have nominated. For more details about the program and instructions on how to download and install ParentCare, go to:

**W** [myspace.com/parentcare](http://myspace.com/parentcare).

MySpace's goal is to empower you as parents to engage in conversations with your teens about internet safety and this software tool is another step in a continued commitment to developing safety and security programs for its online community.

Once this software is installed on your computer, it will identify the profiles of anyone who has signed onto MySpace using that computer, and will provide you with the corresponding username, age, and hometown. Any changes to the member's username, age, and hometown on MySpace, regardless of where the user logs in, will be recorded by the software so long as the home computer was on when the changes were made.

MySpace is always looking for new and better ways to ensure a safer user environment and the ParentCare software is an important step to empower parents and initiate conversations about online safety.

## Content

MySpace expects its users to strictly adhere to its Terms of Use, and can delete user accounts for uploading inappropriate videos or images, or taking part in hate speech or harassment. MySpace makes every effort to review all images, profiles and videos hosted on the site. MySpace also relies on its users to report any content, contact, spam or area of the site that violate its Terms of Use. MySpace takes these reports very seriously and takes appropriate action. Please encourage your teens to report any and all activity that they feel should be reviewed by MySpace.

## How to remove an imposter profile

If your teen discovers that a false MySpace account has been created with their likeness and/or identity, MySpace will remove the profile in question following an imposter profile removal

process. Guide your teen to make contact through the 'Report Abuse' link located at the bottom of the page of the imposter profile so that the removal process can be initiated.

## How to remove your teen's MySpace profile

MySpace is committed to helping parents with any inquiries they have regarding their teen's profile on the site.

If you would like to remove your teen's MySpace profile, or have concerns that your teen has not reflected his/her appropriate age, please visit online so that MySpace may directly assist you. Please go the MySpace Safety site at:

**W** [myspace.com/safetyaustralia](http://myspace.com/safetyaustralia)

or click on the 'Safety Tips' link at the bottom of every MySpace.com page.

## Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying has been described as an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself and it is an issue that MySpace takes seriously. MySpace's Terms of Use specifically prohibit cyberbullying and other similar conduct and MySpace attempts to respond quickly to any instances of such conduct that it discovers.

If your teen is a victim of cyberbullying on MySpace, please instruct him or her to do the following:

- Click the 'Report Abuse' link located on the bottom of the MySpace.com web page that carries the bullying content. A screen-shot of this page will be sent with your report.
- In the 'Complaint' field select 'Cyberbullying' from the drop down menu.
- Include a brief description of what has occurred in the 'Additional Information' field.
- Click the 'Submit' button.

Upon receiving this report, MySpace will investigate and take appropriate action.

Appropriate remedial action taken by

MySpace in response to cyberbullying includes, but is not limited to, recommending that the user block the cyberbully from contacting them and permanently removing the account of the cyberbully.

It is usually best for those teens who are the subject of cyberbullying to contact MySpace themselves in order to expedite a resolution. Additionally, in case more information is needed from the teen, such as copies of the messages sent by the cyberbully, as well as links to the profile in question, it is easier to gather this information directly from the teen. Teens who are victims of cyberbullying should consider that deleting harassing messages may impact on the ability for MySpace or other authorities to investigate a complaint.

Parents can report cyberbullying to [parent-care@myspace.com](mailto:parent-care@myspace.com). Keep in mind that it will be helpful to MySpace staff in rectifying the problem if you have the following information when making contact:

- The MySpace.com web address (URL) of the victim of the cyberbullying.
- The MySpace.com web address (URL) of the alleged cyberbully.
- Copies of messages and/or other forms of communication sent by the cyberbully to the victim.
- Your relationship to both (or one) individual(s) involved.
- Your contact information.

Most of the above is information you will need to get from your teen when they approach you. Without it, it will be difficult for MySpace to address the complaint.

Parents should also be encouraged to work with any teens involved in order to resolve the issue. MySpace cannot meet with the teens in question to discuss the situation. As a parent who may know the teens in question and can actually meet with them if necessary, your assistance in matters of cyberbullying can often help better resolve the situation. Another resource at your disposal is the educational community. You may want to contact your teen's school administration for assistance.

If you hear about any kind of physical threats posted on MySpace, please gather as

much information as possible on the threat and contact your local police immediately, so they can take appropriate action, including contacting MySpace. MySpace regularly works with law enforcement authorities where criminal conduct is involved.

The information you gather should include as many of the following items as possible:

- The method of transmission of the threat (such as a bulletin, blog or private message).
- A print-out copy of the web page that shows where the threat is posted.
- The MySpace.com web address (URL) of the alleged cyberbully.

You should also copy, paste and send links to where the threats are posted in an email to [parentcare@myspace.com](mailto:parentcare@myspace.com). Please also be sure to include your contact information.

## Community and Collaboration

MySpace collaborates with state and federal law enforcement on issues involving child exploitation, missing or runaway children, or other relevant matters. MySpace has created a 24-hour hotline for law enforcement, as well as a guide to aid law enforcement in their investigations.

MySpace enlists the help of the community and organisations such as the Australian Federal Police and State and Territory Police, the Australian Communications and Media Authority, the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect and The Melbourne Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre to achieve the goals of safety enforcement and education.

Internet safety is an important topic in the advancing technological world, particularly where those under the age of 18 are involved.

MySpace remains available to assist parents, families and the community in general in furthering the safety of the community of users.