

A heads-up on cyber-relationships

Adapted from an article by Andrew Fuller
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On-line relationships are becoming as important as face-to-face ones.

The strength of online relationships mirrors the best and, at times, the worst of face-to-face relationships. The only problem is that when things go badly on-line, they go really badly! As we know, **what goes on the net, stays on the net.**

In fast-paced, heated interactions in chat rooms, people who are usually friendly and positive can post nasty and hurtful comment, with devastating consequences. For this reason, we need to develop netiquette – standards of behaviour for people on-line.

Cyber-safety is about relationships and how people behave, rather than about technology.

The following guidelines have been compiled from suggestions made by thousands of young people, and may be useful to consider or use as a discussion point.

The Suggested Rules of Netiquette:

1. What goes on the net, stays on the net.

Virtual words have real life consequences. **If you wouldn't do it IRL (in real life), don't do it online.** Use the "Nanna rule" – if you wouldn't want your nanna to know about it, don't put it on the web. Your future employers, friends and partners can, and probably will, trace your cyber-trail.

2. Don't ban – PLAN! Parents should not threaten to ban access to the internet if bullying occurs.

The main reason young people do not tell their parents when they are cyber-bullied is because they fear they will lose access to the computer.

Parents should let their children know that they will help them cope with upsetting events online, but won't insist they stop using the computer.



3. Take a STAND against cyber-bullying:

Silence – do not respond to abusive messages. The number one rule for dealing with cyber-bullying is – don't respond, don't interact and don't engage.

Take a copy of all abusive messages – these may be useful legally later on. Create a new folder called "Abuse", and move hate mail and messages into this folder.

Accept that bullies don't think like you do – trying to sort it out with them, or asking them to stop, won't work. Recognise that you are not dealing with a person who has the same mindset as yourself. Cyber-bullies are cowards who often try to hide their identity and behave in nasty ways to build themselves up, and to put other people down. Cyber-bullying is a pathetic act.

Never deal with this problem alone – get help! No one can cope with this alone.

Don't be provoked. Some cyber-bullies play "the baiting game". A provocative comment is made, and those who respond in irritation are encouraged to engage in conflict with those who respond assertively. The provoker watches, waits and stirs the pot.

Become an observer. Although you may be the target of the cyber-bully's anger, you can train yourself to act as an observer. This takes you out of the firing line, and enables you to study the bully and collect evidence.

4. Know that people take cyber-bullying seriously – and that you will be taken seriously!

If you are bullied on-line, let your school know and let the police know. They are legal avenues that can be taken to stop cyber-bullying.

5. Develop a code of NETIQUETTE. Some ideas include:

- Don't bully or be mean to others on-line
- Let people know that cyber-bullying is a weak and cowardly act of hatred on-line
- Don't harass or stalk people on-line
- Don't pass on embarrassing photos or posts about others
- Parents should not allow kids to have webcams in bedrooms. Skype should only be allowed if the computer is in a family room. Chat roulette should be discouraged
- Know that circulating some photos means that you risk being charged with child pornography
- Only add friends that you know, and do not add 'friends of friends'
- If someone on-line wants to meet you in person, ask an adult to accompany you.

6. Be a responsible user of technology.

We need to be good cyber-citizens. Be honest with yourself. Computer games reduce dopamine. This means it is hard to get motivated to do anything else once you have been online for a while. Do your homework – or what needs to be done – before you go on-line.

For further information about managing cyber-relationships, please go to

www.andrewfuller.com.au