

eSmart Guidance: Why students don't block and report cyber bullying – and what parents can do

Most social media and gaming sites let you block or report someone for bullying you. Blocking is one of the most common tactics students use when they are bullied online.

Students are much [more likely](#) to block negative content than to tell a teacher about it, for example.

However, the majority of cyber bullied students still don't block the people responsible, or don't find blocking helpful. And it's even less common for students to report bullying to the website where it happened. For example, a U.S. [survey](#) found that only 1 in 13 students who'd been cyber bullied resolved it by making a report to the site.

What's wrong with blocking and reporting?

Some students don't block or report because they've found another solution, or because they're not upset by what happened. This is fine. However, there are others who still need help but don't believe that blocking or reporting will work.

Students often worry about how people might react. For example:

- 'What if I block or report someone, and they respond by becoming more aggressive?'
- 'What if the person I've blocked keeps trashing me in front of other people instead?'
- 'If I report someone, will people think I'm "dobbing"?''
- 'I've reported bullying to a website before, and they didn't help me.'

A [study](#) from the U.K. found that 1 in 5 young people who'd been bullied online believed reporting was ineffective. Unfortunately, students who've been severely cyber bullied are more likely than their peers to [believe](#) they cannot trust anyone to help them.

There are age and sex differences, too: boys and younger children are less likely than girls and older teens to report bullying to [gaming](#) or [social media](#) sites.

And students who are [vulnerable](#) due to disability, illness or trauma are also less likely to use blocking or reporting successfully. Many of them have not had cyber safety education that was relevant to their lives, or do not have trusting relationships with tech-savvy adults.

So, what can parents do?

1. Understand the tech

Start with Australia's [eSafety Guide](#), which explains the most popular social media and gaming sites, including how to report inappropriate messaging, control who sees your information, and stop someone from contacting you.

2. Talk with your teens

Most [young Australians](#) who take formal action against cyber bullying, such as reporting it to the website, have also spoken with someone they trust, like a parent or friend. By talking regularly with students about what's happening online, we can help them build confidence to make a report if they need to.

Ask students what they know about blocking and reporting, and get them to show you how these functions work. If they don't know, find out together.

Talk through some practical scenarios, such as:

- 'What would you do if you didn't want to read someone's mean comments?'
- 'What would you do if you'd blocked someone and they contacted you another way?'
- 'Would you handle it differently if it was a stranger or someone from school?'
- 'Do your friends ever block or report people? Why / why not?'
- 'What would you do if someone blocked you?'

There are no perfect solutions, but parents can support teens to think about what actions they could take and the possible outcomes.

Be aware: some students block others as a form of 'social bullying': to make that person feel rejected and shunned. So, talk with students about the difference between blocking someone to avoid being bullied, and blocking someone to hurt them.

3. Explore other tactics

Many social media platforms offer ways to reduce contact with someone without blocking them. For example, Instagram introduced their '[Restrict](#)' function because teens wanted a less confrontational way to avoid people. Some sites will let you:

- Reduce the posts you see by a particular person
- Limit that person's access to your posts
- Hide that person's messages, or divert them to a different inbox
- Filter out comments with negative key words.

Talk to your teens about whether they would 'restrict', 'remove', 'ignore', 'mute', or 'take a break' from someone. Have they ever done this? What happened next?

You might also have a broader conversation about avoiding people who don't treat us well. Teens may need guidance about things like:

- Making new friends or finding different people to spend time with
- Acting nonchalant, bored or unimpressed if someone insults or teases you
- Making clear you will only be friends with people who treat you with respect.

4. Contact the eSafety Commissioner

Children under 18 or their parents/carers can [contact](#) the eSafety Commissioner to get serious cyber bullying material removed. They will typically:

- Get back to you within 48 hours
- Expect you to report the bullying to the website where it happened first
- Ask for evidence – e.g. screenshots, files
- Accept reports even if the people bullying you are unknown or overseas

After assessing a complaint, the eSafety Commissioner can request that the site remove the bullying content within 48 hours.

5. Encourage resilience

Teens who've been cyber bullied are [more likely](#) to take positive action, such as reporting to the website, if they have high resilience. Resilience refers to a person's ability to cope with adversity and 'bounce back'.

We can support teens by:

- Teaching them [problem-solving skills](#) and encouraging them to make decisions.
- Making sure they have responsible people they can ask for help – such as relatives, neighbours, mentors and teachers – and that they know [how to ask](#).
- Encouraging them to discover their strengths, build skills, meet challenges, and make a difference – for example via sports teams, volunteering, Scouts, martial arts, or cultural and scientific spaces. (See [Cyberbullying Research Centre](#).)
- Exploring things like [mindfulness](#) meditation and cognitive behavioural therapy.
- Supporting them to [make friends](#) and [connect with community](#).