



by Martine Oglethorpe

Cyberbullying of children and teenagers is one of the greatest fears facing parents today. The thought of their child being subjected to heinous words, threats to their physical safety, as well as their social and emotional wellbeing, is something no parent wants their child to experience.

Most of the bullying behaviours we now see are happening from behind a keyboard, playing out in social media feeds and gaming chat rooms. It is little wonder parents feel overwhelmed and out of their depth, especially when for most, online is an environment that is relatively unfamiliar.

So what can we do to help our kids avoid these types of behaviours, as well as give them the skills to deal with cyberbullying behaviours should they be exposed?

- **Remind them of all of the things they have control over:** While it may not feel like it, we have a lot of control over what happens online. We can determine who we talk to, what we ignore, what we share, how we comment, who we follow, who we block or hide from our feeds. All of that, helps us determine who is allowed to play a role in our online experiences and ultimately what behaviours we accept on our feeds
- **Give your child time away from the screens:** Everyone needs a break from screens. We want to encourage regular times when a child doesn't need to be tethered to their device. Building a wider community away from the screens helps a child or teen build their sense of self worth. Keeping devices away from the dinner table also gives them a break from being socially switched on and allows them to connect with family without a device. Removing devices at night helps their active brains to switch off, and prepare for sleep.
- **Role play possible responses:** Discuss with your child whether they should respond to bullying or nasty online comments, If they do, then consider how they could respond. Consider the statements or types of people they ignore, block or report.
- **Regularly check the privacy settings:** Every app, game and social network has a settings button that enables you to determine how positive an experience your child can have on that platform and how much control they have. Visit these settings regularly to look at the options available

While nothing is guaranteed particularly when it comes to the online world, we can certainly be taking steps to help our kids. We can give them skills, encourage positive behaviours and thinking that allow them to minimise their exposure to the bullying behaviours of others.

Martine Oglethorpe is an accredited speaker with the Office of the eSafety Commissioner and has presented to numerous parent groups, schools and teachers. She is a speaker, counsellor and educator with a passion for building resilient kids in a digital world. Contact details: info@martineoglethorpe.com.au, themodernparent.net, facebook.com/themodernparent