



Netiquette

Online interactions are becoming as important as face-to-face ones. Learn how to manage your online relationships and develop good ‘netiquette’.

Why do we need ‘netiquette’?

Online friendships are so important to young people that many of them would endure pain rather than lose access to them. On average, young people have 56 online friends. As one young man commented:

“I’d rather lose a leg than access to Facebook.”

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 online, they go really badly. And unlike the real world, there is no forgetting about it. As we know, things published online are difficult, if not impossible, to remove.

Almost two thirds of children have had a negative experience online and 20 percent feel badly about something they have done online. In fast-paced heated interactions in chat rooms, people who are usually friendly and positive can post nasty and hurtful comments with devastating consequences.

We need to develop ‘netiquette’—standards of behaviour for people online. Netiquette is about relationships and how people behave, rather than about particular websites or pieces of 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 ‘nana rule’

Online actions have real life consequences. If you wouldn’t do it in real life, don’t do it online. Use the ‘nana rule’—if you wouldn’t want your nana 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.

Be a responsible user of technology

Be honest with yourself. Computer games and fast-paced online interactions reduce dopamine. This means it is hard to get motivated to do anything else once you have been online for a while.

Do your study before you go online.



Take a STAND against cyberbullying

Silence

Do not respond to abusive messages. The number one rule for dealing with cyberbullying 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. Cyberbullies are cowards who often try to hide their identity and behave in nasty ways to build themselves up and to put other people down. Cyberbullying is a pathetic act.

Never deal with this problem alone

Get help! No one can cope with this alone.

Don't be provoked

Some cyberbullies 'troll' or 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 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.

For parents: 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 cyberbullied is because they fear they will lose access to the computer.

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

Behavioural change is important to pay attention to. While it is tempting to take away the screens, this is not always such a great idea. It is better to ensure computers are in a shared space, and impose some limits, such as a turn off time. If parents are able to get interested in the games and use these in conversations you will be able to more clearly understand the appeal gaming has for their child. It is also good to help children maintain off screen interests and activities.

Some children retreat into an online world to deal with loneliness, distress and depression. Often these kids are very private and difficult to engage in conversations making it hard for parents to gauge how much to worry. It is important for parents to pay attention to other behavioural changes such as poor sleep, low energy, irritability beyond usual levels, and changes in appetite. Get help if needed.



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Know that people take cyberbullying seriously and that you will be taken seriously

The Australian Government has committed \$125 million to improving online relationships. If you are bullied online, let your school know and let the police know. There are legal avenues that can be taken to stop cyberbullying.

Develop a code of netiquette

Some ideas include:

- Don't bully or be mean to others on-line.
- Let people know that cyberbullying is a weak and cowardly act of hatred online.
- Don't harass or stalk people online.
- 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 shared 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 online wants to meet you in person, ask an adult to accompany you.

Students helping students

Adults will never know enough to completely protect young people when they are online. For this reason, some schools are setting up groups of students to mentor and assist younger students managing the online world.

These students, called for example 'ambassadors' or 'cyber doctors', develop the netiquette code or '**Acceptable Use Agreement**' for the school and gain input from other students.

They can help others when bad things happen online. Working with a teacher, they educate themselves about online relationships and then are available for anyone in the school who needs them. They collect information about the types of incidents that occur.

If someone has done something online that they regret or have experienced something negative they can request help to resolve the issue.

Often young people are in the most powerful position to help others cope and disentangle the complexities of cyberbullying.

