



Cyberbullying: Teaching our kids good digital citizenship and resilience

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In the weeks since the tragic suicide of 14-year-old Amy 'Dolly' Everett in the Northern Territory, the media has been saturated with stories about cyberbullying and youth suicide. With the number of Australian children taking their own lives increasing by a third in the past decade and suicide remaining the leading cause of death in children aged 5 to 17, calls have been made for apps and social media platforms that allow bullying to be banned and for tech companies to take more responsibility.

However, Ginger Gorman, a journalist and writer, argues that with social media already enmeshed into the lives of our children, the answer lies in education and resilience. Gorman, who has been viciously trolled online herself, says that banning apps is a Band-Aid solution for a "complex wound". Banned apps will simply reappear within days, or even hours, under new names and will have no effect on bullies and trolls who will switch to the new apps or find other outlets for their hateful messages. In addition, argues Gorman:

The notion of banning kids from social media is akin to stopping kids going to the shopping mall in case they get assaulted. It's ludicrous and amounts to a type of victim blaming that punishes the cyberhate target and not the perpetrator.

Child psychologist Michael Carr-Gregg recently told the ABC that up to 70% of primary-school aged children are on social media and argued that children aged under 12 should not be on social media at all, but Gorman asks, "aren't we better off teaching our kids good digital citizenship and resilience in the face of bullying? Aren't we better off helping them use social media in limited bouts and under supervision?"

Gorman suggests that we do not engage with bullies and trolls who are, after all, simply seeking to hurt their victims and provoke a wounded response. Rather, she argues, we should ignore their vile posts, stand strong and use resources like those provided by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner and Kids Helpline. It is also important, Gorman says, not to lose sight of the positive sides of social media for young people in connecting with friends and family. It is crucial for children, including those who are vulnerable or isolated, to be able to access online support networks and resources via social media.

Echoing this advice, Julie Inman Grant, Australia's eSafety Commissioner, says that parents and the wider community need to "help our young people build the resilience, courage and strength to cope with what they may experience online". Parents are urged to help their children navigate their way safely in the online world, just as they do for the real world.

A survey of 2,360 Australian parents conducted by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner in 2016 found that 90% believe their child benefits from being online, including for school work (73%), finding information (63), entertainment (50%), technology proficiency (47%), connecting with friends and family (30%), problem-solving skills (20%) and creativity (18%). However, 60% of parents also believe their child faces risks online, most commonly accessing inappropriate content (60%), contact with strangers (50%) and excessive use (42%), but also reduced fitness (36%), sharing personal information (35%), cyberbullying (29%), feeling isolated (22%) and negative self-image (20%).

Overall, 66% of parents taking part in the survey were confident in their ability to protect their child online, but 38% said that would like more information about online safety principally advice about how to deal with negative online incidents, online stranger danger, and images going viral. The Office of the eSafety Commissioner

provides a wide variety of online resources for parents including iParent (providing information on how make devices and connections safe and secure); advice on dealing with cyberbullying; and portals to report serious cyberbullying, offensive and illegal content, and image-based abuse (such as the unwanted sharing or posting of images of children and young people).

It is also important to note that serious online harassment and bullying can constitute an offence under Australia's *Criminal Code Act 1995*, attracting a maximum penalty of three years' prison or a fine of more than \$30,000. Serious cyberbullying intended to make the victim feel fearful, harassed or otherwise concerned for their safety can be reported to ACORN (the Australian Cybercrime Online Reporting Network), which may refer the matter on to the appropriate law enforcement agencies.

Kristen Douglas, School Support National Manager for the headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation, says that data for 2005 to 2016 shows that youth suicide has reached a ten-year high, with eight children and young people suiciding every week in Australia. In total, 405 young people aged under 25 died by suicide in 2015, including 14 aged 0-14 and 145 aged 15-19. Douglas says that: "Help-seeking is a proven pathway to suicide prevention by ensuring help is accessed in the early stages, we know that young people can get things back on track."

The Office of the eSafety Commissioner advises parents of cyberbullied children to:

- Collect evidence – take screenshots of the material and copy URLs
- Report cyberbullying material to the relevant social media service/s (see www.esafety.gov.au/safetycentres)

If the content is not removed within 48 hours:

- Block the person
- Report the cyberbullying at www.esafety.gov.au/reportcyberbullying

Kids Helpline also provides online advice for bullying victims, telling them not to respond to the bully, but to block them, take screenshots and report the post or image. They should also seek help from a parent, trusted adult or, if they feel in danger, the police. Kids Helpline is also open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week providing a free and confidential online and telephone counselling service to all children and young people aged 5 to 25.

Australia

Office of the eSafety Commissioner: 1800 880 176 | <https://www.esafety.gov.au/>

Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800 | <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>

Lifeline: 13 11 14 | <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

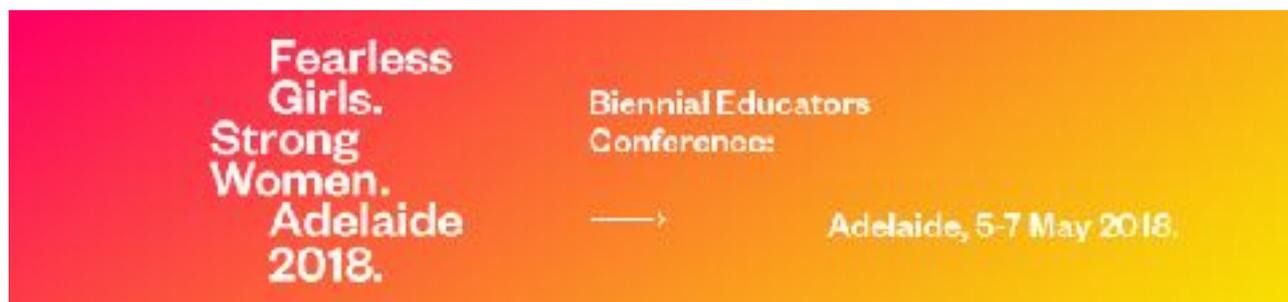
New Zealand

Kidslines: 0800 543 754 (Mon-Fri 4pm to 9pm for kids up to 14) | <http://www.kidslines.org.nz/>

Youthline: 0800 376 633 | <https://www.youthline.co.nz/>

Netsafe: 0508 638 723 | <https://www.netsafe.org.nz/bullying-abuse-support/>

References: see next page



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