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Bullying with Mobile Phones Is your child a victim? What you can do to help

A mobile phone can be a great communications and safety tool for everyone, including children. Unfortunately, some kids are using mobile phones to bully others.

Although schoolyard bullying in itself is not new, the use of new technology to bully adds a new dimension to the problem, and may make parents and others feel less able to tackle it. AMTA hopes the following information will help you better understand and tackle the problem.

1. What might bullying with mobile phones look like?

People are using mobile phones to send insulting, threatening or unpleasant voice, text and picture messages, either directly to their victims, or to spread malicious rumours. Some bullying also leads to the theft of the victim's mobile phone. Bullying can also occur when children use chat services.

2. No bullying is acceptable

Bullying is not harmless. In some cases it can constitute criminal behaviour.

3. My child's being bullied. How can I help them?

Finding out that your child is being bullied is a stressful and distressing experience. But it's important that you try and stay calm so that you can deal rationally and effectively with the problem. Here are some hints from the experts:

a) Communicate. Listen to your child. Encourage them to discuss bullying with you. Be aware of your own reactions. Make it clear that being a target for bullying is **not their fault**. And (if relevant) assure them that you can help, despite not knowing nearly as much about mobile phones and computers as they do!

b) Help your child develop and implement strategies to deal with bullies.

This might include general advice about trying to avoid seeing the bullies alone. Specific advice for children on strategies for mobile phone bullying is included in "Bullying with Mobile Phones – what you need to know to get the bullies off your back" Key messages for kids include:

- **Protect your phone number.** Only give it to friends, and keep a note of who you've given it to. Consider using caller ID blocking to hide your phone number when you call someone.
- **Don't respond** – responding gives the bully the 'kick' they're after.
- **Keep the message** (and time and date it was sent) as evidence, and tell your parents, teacher or another adult.

- **Don't give out personal information** to anyone you don't know (or don't want to know), including your name. Similarly, don't leave your name on your voicemail as it confirms to the person doing the bullying that they've called the right number.
- **Turn your phone off** sometimes. Give yourself a break from seeing/hearing from the bully.
- **Stealing: safety first.** Don't fight to keep your phone if someone is physically threatening you. Your safety is more important than your phone.
- **If your phone *is* stolen, remember that you can block it** – meaning the thief can't use it. For more information on security issues, see www.mindyourmobile.com.

c) **Talk to your child's school, and other parents.** Firstly, ensure your child's school is aware there is a problem. Don't assume they know – it's not always obvious. Secondly, see if your child's school has rules covering the use of mobile phones in their grounds, and, if so, whether the relevant sanctions have or can be applied in your child's case. (If no rules are in place, perhaps suggest they be considered¹.) It may also be worth sharing your experiences/ getting support from other parents who have faced similar problems.

d) **The law is on your side.** People who bully believe (incorrectly) that mobiles are a means of taunting their target anonymously. They are wrong. It's a criminal offence to use a mobile phone to menace or harass or offend another person². And almost all malicious calls can now be traced.

If a sanction imposed by your child's school seems ineffective, you or the school **may consider it appropriate to involve the police.**

Also talk to your mobile phone company to see if they can help. Your phone company may be able to stop certain numbers calling you. They may also be able to provide you with a new phone number. Ask them about your options. Company care numbers are listed below.

4. Further information

More detailed information on general bullying is available on the Kids Help Line website: <http://www.kidshelp.com.au/research/infosheets/07Bullying.pdf>, or call them on: 1800 55 1800

If your child feels physically threatened, you may wish to contact the police in your state or territory.

¹ AMTA has produced a policy template to assist schools. The document is provides a template for schools to adapt and adopt as they see fit, and governs the use of mobiles in their school. For more information, see: <http://www.amta.org.au/default.asp?Page=256>

² Crimes Act 1914 Section 85ZE; Crimes Legislation Amendment (Telecommunications Offences and Other Measures) Act 2004.

Useful Phone Numbers

Parent Help lines

ACT: 1800 637 357
NSW: (02) 9787 5255 (Sydney metro area)
or 1800 637 357
NT: 1300 30 1300

QLD: 1300 30 1300
TAS: 1800 808 178
Vic: 13 22 89
WA: (08) 9272 1466 or 1800 654 432

For technical assistance (eg on how to use features your phone or phone service) call your mobile company's customer care number:

"3": 133320

AAPT: 138 886

Optus: 1300 300 937

Telstra: 125 111

Virgin: 1300 555 100

Vodafone: 1300 650 410

Or for handset-related issues:

Motorola: 1300 138 823

Nokia: 1300 366 733

Sony Ericsson: 1300 650 050.

Samsung: 1300 362 603

NEC: 131v9262

LG: 1800 638 080

Useful Internet Sites

Kids Helpline: www.kidshelp.com.au

Cybersmart Kids Online: www.cybersmartkids.com.au

Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association: www.amta.org.au

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