

Unwanted Contact: Cyber Bullying & Online Predators

The social nature of the Internet (think social networking sites, instant messaging systems, chat rooms, and blogs) connects people who know each other and offers a way for people to make new friends. But not all of these people have good intentions. And the dangers of unwanted contact are on the rise.

Activities such as online grooming (how sexual predators carefully cultivate relationships with underage persons to convince them to have sexual relations with them offline) and cyber bullying (the online harassment of others) are some examples of unwanted online contact that people should understand and try to prevent.

What you can do to limit unwanted contact:

- Be cautious.

Use sites and services that have privacy settings. Do not share personal information online.

- Be respectful.

Treat people the way you'd want to be treated. You could increase the chances of making yourself the target of cyber bullying by saying mean or disrespectful things about others.

- Do not retaliate.

If someone says or does something online that makes you uncomfortable, it is best to ignore them or block them altogether. Retaliation can encourage the bully to continue his behaviour as it gets the desired response from his victim.

- Report bad behaviour.

If someone is harassing you (online or through your mobile phone), tell someone you trust. Report any bullying to the service provider of the email, phone, instant messaging, social networking or other online service that is being used by the bully. If the comments or content are illegal or break their terms of service, they can sometimes remove the disparaging content from the Internet. If the behaviour is extreme enough, they may also provide appropriate account information and content to law enforcement in compliance with legal processes.

- Save the evidence.

If the behaviour continues and becomes increasingly extreme, work with your parents or another adult to save the offending messages, pictures or copies of online conversations. More serious forms of cyber bullying should be reported to the police.

- Don't participate.

Even if you aren't the bully, do not be a participant by simply watching someone else bully another classmate or peer. Stand up for the victim and report it to your parents, teachers, or other adults you trust, who may be able to do something about it.