

Online safety advice for women

Toolkit for Universities

Creating safer online environments



This resource provides women in universities with information about online abuse, including how to respond and where to find support. Every woman, from every culture and race, across all ages, abilities and sexual identities, has the right to their own voice — a voice that should not be silenced by online abuse.

Disclaimer: This material is general in nature. It is made available on the understanding that the Commonwealth is not engaged in rendering professional advice. Before relying on the material in any matter, you should carefully evaluate its accuracy, currency, completeness and relevance for your purposes and should obtain any appropriate professional advice relevant to your particular circumstances. The Commonwealth does not guarantee, and accepts no legal liability whatsoever arising from or connected to, the accuracy, reliability, currency or completeness of any material contained in this resource or on any linked site. References to other organisations or websites are inserted for convenience and do not constitute endorsement.



Australians, in general, are highly connected by digital technology and the rate at which we work and learn online continues to grow. While for many this is a positive experience, for some it results in increased risks and negative experiences including online harassment, intimidation and other forms of abuse.

Women, in particular, are subjected to high levels of online abuse — simply because they are women. This can profoundly damage a woman's confidence, self-esteem and feelings of personal safety. A 2018 survey, for example, found that:

- 30% of women surveyed had experienced cyber abuse or harassment
- 47% of those women were aged 18 to 24
- 37% said that on at least one occasion these online experiences made them feel their physical safety was threatened.

Support for women targeted by online abuse

Women seeking support for cyber abuse have many, varied options. The suggestion, though, that women 'just turn off the technology' is not possible, or even acceptable.

If you are the target of online abuse remember, it is not your fault. You are not on your own, and there are practical steps you can take to protect yourself and to deal with the abuse.

- Report the abuse to the [social media service's safety centre](#). Depending on the platform, you can generally also block or mute the abuse but you should [collect evidence](#) and report the abuse first.
- [Report image-based abuse](#) to eSafety. We can help to remove intimate images and videos that have been shared without consent and provide access to counselling and support.
- Take [legal action](#). If technology is being used to abuse, stalk, threaten or defame you, Commonwealth, state and territory laws may apply.
- Check your social media account settings to keep your personal information private. For all online platforms and apps, [avoid revealing personal details](#) such as your address, email address, phone number and birthdate.
- Disable location services on your devices and avoid 'checking in' to places and venues.
- Enable Bluetooth only when needed and 'remove' paired devices when you are not using them.
- On Apple devices turn off Airdrop to avoid being sent content by people you don't know.
- Update your settings so that others cannot tag or post videos or photos of you.

- Avoid hashtagging anything you don't want to become public.
- Remember to avoid posting content online that may put you or your family at risk, such as revealing your activities and location.
- [Build up your 'psychological armour'](#): it's important to strengthen your confidence and resilience so you are able to handle challenging situations online. This way you can stay in control — and help others who may face a similar ordeal.

If you are in danger right now, contact police on Triple Zero (000).

For non-emergencies, you can call the Police Assistance Line on **131 444** or contact your local police station.



Protecting women at university

Universities Australia, through the 'Respect. Now. Always.' initiative, aims to prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment and to improve support for those affected by it. With a sector-wide commitment to tackling violence against women, Universities Australia has been working hard to gather national data on women's safety at universities to inform policy. A major prevention project with Our Watch and the Victorian Government has been launched to prevent violence against women in, and through, universities. Guidelines and principles for universities have also been developed to support them to respond to disclosures and reports of sexual violence.

If you are a woman experiencing cyber abuse, your university's student welfare and counselling services can provide support and advice to tackle and resolve cyber abuse.

Since August 2017, universities have collectively implemented over 800 initiatives linked to Respect. Now. Always.

These initiatives include:

- bespoke training on respectful relationships and being an active bystander
- developing safety apps and online anonymous reporting tools
- organising regular dialogue with students about issues on campus and in communities
- undertaking independent reviews of institutions as well as colleges
- extending first-responder training and creating manuals for responding to sexual harm
- supporting student-led campaigns on tackling violence against women
- reviewing policies, procedures and data collection methods
- appointing staff dedicated to working on Respect. Now. Always. initiatives.

eSafety help for cyber abuse

- [Cyber abuse targeting women](#)
- [Dealing with cyber abuse](#)
- [Protecting and promoting women's voices online](#)
- [Life admin, connecting and socialising safely](#)
- [Privacy and security settings, collecting evidence and screenshots](#)
- [Legal help and counselling support](#)

University support

- [Respect. Now. Always. initiative](#)
- Universities also offer a range of wellbeing and counselling services. Learn more at [Universities Australia](#) and on your institution's website.