



Being harassed online can cause emotional grief. Learn how you can nip it in the bud. **Sheryl Quek** reports

A growing problem affects people from eight to 18 years old – and it is not about to go away. This issue is cyberbullying, the act of harassing someone via online and electronic means.

Belonging to a generation of digital natives who are always online, you should learn how to deal with cyberbullying when you encounter it, regardless of whether you are a bystander or victim.

It may not be physical, but cyberbullying can and does cause emotional and mental damage. Little Red Dot raises three common cyberbullying scenarios and asks Dr Carol Balhetchet, a member of the Media Literacy Council and director of youth services at the Singapore Children's Society, how to deal with them.

Scenario 1

Your classmates Annie and Brenda do not get along. One day, someone forwards you a WhatsApp message from Annie about Brenda. The message contains a picture of Brenda, which has been doctored to make her look unflattering. Accompanying the picture are nasty names for Brenda.

What would you do if you were a bystander?

Dr Balhetchet says: Delete the message. Let the gossip stop with you. As long as it is malicious, regardless of whether it is true or not, it should end.

How do you tell what the intention of the message is? Ask yourself if someone will be hurt if you forward the message. Better yet, ask yourself – would you be hurt if you were Brenda?

Do not: Save the message or show it to someone else. If you want to help Brenda, ask a teacher or counsellor to help resolve the issue.



ST PHOTO ILLUSTRATION In most cyberbullying cases, asking an adult to help can prevent the situation from getting out of hand.

Scenario 2

Christie has a crush on a boy and is upset that he is on good terms with Denise, a girl from another class. Jealous, Christie creates rumours about Denise, and spreads them via Facebook.

The rumours spread quickly and people from other classes get wind of them. Denise soon hears them herself and gets upset and embarrassed.

What would you do if you were Denise?

Dr Balhetchet says: Before you confront Christie, bring up the situation to a trusted adult, such as a teacher or school counsellor. Having an adult around can help keep the

situation in check.

Emotions may run high during such an encounter and only an adult can prevent things from escalating.

Do not: Retaliate by spreading rumours about Christie. This will only make matters worse.

Most of all, do not confront the other party when you are emotional and upset.

Your first reaction will be to attack Christie and that can lead to a fight.

If you are a bystander who knows the situation, do not question Denise about it.

By doing so, you are acknowledging what Christie made up is true.

Call Singapore Children's Society on 6276-5077 for counselling or advice on cyberbullying. You can also call Touch Cyber Wellness on 1800-377-2252.



Scenario 3

Shortly after a recent maths test, a WhatsApp message starts circulating in class that Gaby did well because she copied the answers from Faith, who was sitting next to her.

When Gaby receives the message from a classmate, she is angry and upset.

Even though maths is Gaby's weakest subject, she studied hard for the recent test.

It turns out that the rumour was started by Faith, who was jealous that Gaby was starting to improve in the subject because she had always outshone Gaby.

What would you do if you were Gaby?

Dr Balhetchet says: Gaby can tell the teacher what happened. Rather than confront Faith on her own, Gaby should get the teacher involved.

When you are attacked, your immediate reaction is to confront your attacker.

The best way to deal with the situation is to handle it without emotion.

Do not: Confront Faith on your own, especially when you are emotionally charged.