

Social media and the school community

This guide offers some information to parents and caregivers about how to use social media in relation to comments or posts about their school community.

The internet, mobile phones and social media provide wonderful opportunities for you to network and socialise online. While these technologies provide positive platforms for sharing ideas, they also have the potential to cause pain and suffering to individuals, groups or even whole communities.

Just as you would discourage your child from behaving inappropriately online, it's important to remember that sometimes negative comments that parents and caregivers post about their school community have a greater impact than expected.

Reputations of teachers, schools, principals and even parents can be permanently damaged — and in some cases, serious instances of inappropriate online behaviour are dealt with by police and the court system.



General tips

Being aware of a few simple strategies can help keep the use of social media positive and constructive:

- Before you post something online, ask yourself if the community or individual really need to know. Is it relevant, positive and helpful?
- Remember that what you post online is a direct reflection of who you are. People will potentially form lasting opinions of you based on what you post online.
- Be a good role model. If things get heated online consider logging out and taking a few moments to relax and think. Hasty, emotive responses could inflame situations unnecessarily.
- Be mindful when commenting, try to keep general and avoid posting anything that could identify individuals.
- A few years ago parents may have discussed concerns or issues with their friends at the school gate. Today with the use of social media, online discussions between you and your close friends can very quickly be shared with a much wider audience, potentially far larger than intended.
- Taking a few moments to think about the content you are about to post could save upset, embarrassment, and possible legal action.
- As a parent you have a role in supervising and regulating your child's online activities at home and its impact on the reputation and privacy of others. Parents are their child's first teachers — so they will learn online behaviours from you.

Is it appropriate to comment or post about schools, staff or students?

- Parental and community feedback is important for schools and the department. If you have a compliment, complaint or enquiry about an issue at school, the best approach is to speak directly to the school about the matter, rather than discussing it in a public forum.
- While many schools use social media to update parents of school notices, the department prefers that parents contact schools directly with a compliment, complaint or enquiry due to privacy considerations. Imagine if your doctor, accountant or banking institution tried to contact you to discuss important matters via Facebook.
- If you have raised an issue with a school or know that another person has, consider refraining from discussing those details on social media, particularly the names of anyone involved.
- Keep comments calm and polite, just as you would over the telephone or by email.
- If you encounter negative or derogatory content online which involves the school, hinders a child's learning and/or affects the school community at large, contact the school principal.

Possible civil or criminal ramifications of online commentary

A serious instance of inappropriate online behaviour may constitute a criminal offence and become a police matter. For example, online content may substantiate the offence of 'using a carriage service to menace, harass or cause offence' (*Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth) s. 474.17*).

School staff may contact their union or obtain personal legal advice if they feel that online content seriously impacts their reputation. Defamatory online content may give rise to litigation under the *Defamation Act 2005 (Qld)*.

What about other people's privacy?

If you upload photos of your children, be mindful of who might be in the background. You might be happy to share your child's successes with your friends and family via social media, but some parents are not.

If you are tagging or naming students, consider that other parents may not want their child's name attached to images online.

Get to know social media

Take some time to research online networks and mobile apps, in particular the:

- terms of use
- common features and terminology
- policies for the removal of content
- privacy settings.

Search online networks for useful links such as safety centres, forms for reporting inappropriate content and terms and conditions. It may be helpful to bookmark these pages.

What if I encounter problem content?

Taking the following steps may help resolve the issue in a constructive way:

- refrain from responding
- take a screen capture or print a copy of the concerning online content
- if you consider problem content to be explicit, pornographic or exploitative of minors, you should keep a record of the URL of the page containing that content but NOT print or share it. The URL can be provided to the school principal, or police, as needed for escalation of serious concerns
- block the offending user
- report the content to the social media provider.

How do I report inappropriate content?



Social media providers may remove content that contravenes their terms of service and/or acceptable use policies. Most websites and apps have a 'report/block this person' or 'report/flag content' function.

Common links

for reporting social media content



Facebook

www.facebook.com/safety



Instagram

www.help.instagram.com



Google including YouTube

www.google.com/support/go/legal



Tumblr

www.tumblr.com/help



Twitter

www.support.twitter.com



Further information

Australian Communications Media Authority (ACMA) Cybersmart program

www.cybersmart.gov.au/Parents.aspx

Bullying No Way!

www.bullyingnoway.com.au/parents

Google

www.google.com/goodtoknow

Parentline

www.parentline.com.au/parenting-information/tip-sheets

Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre

www.youngandwellcrc.org.au



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