

## My child's friend blocked them



Tweens and teens blocking each other on chat groups and other social media platforms is a common concern and can be a form of cyberbullying.

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If your child already has their own phone, they're likely using it for messaging friends, joining chat groups, or engaging some other way with social media. Unfortunately, one of the challenges of online device use is the prevalence of cyberbullying (including one of its most common forms – cyberostracism), often amongst their peer group. Cyberbullying can lead to extreme anxiety and causes a feeling of exclusion, not unlike being told: "You can't hang out with us." Teaching your child how to handle situations like this is key to helping them develop a healthy relationship with social media.

### What to do when you first find out

Talk to your child about how they feel and find out if this is happening regularly. Try to determine if it's the same kids blocking them and if there's a ringleader. Ask your child if there are any reasons they know about that could be causing or encouraging this type of behaviour, and empower them to openly communicate their feelings and talk things over with their friends.

### Other considerations

Often these types of negative interactions occur late at night where kids are not as strictly supervised, or have access to devices without their parents' knowledge.

If you have a very close relationship with the parents of some of the kids involved, you may consider asking for their support to set some expectations collectively; however, it is important to understand how involving other parents can sometimes exacerbate the situation. Together, come up with ground rules around switching devices off and ensuring they are kept in a secure location.

Find out if the school has a policy on chat groups outside of school. If the situation becomes more serious or is happening regularly, you should speak to your child's teacher or the wellbeing coordinator as they may be able to help. You may need to put your concerns in writing with evidence.

Friendship navigation within this age group can be particularly tricky. Encourage your child to pursue positive friendships that make them feel valued and foster mutual respect. Your child may not always want to tell you what is happening in their life, but you should regularly talk to them about their interests to help keep communication lines open. Ensure they know they can come to you if they need to and that you will always do your best to help. If your child seems unusually withdrawn or upset, consider seeking help from a psychologist. Sometimes talking to another trusted adult can be very helpful.