



# Three Steps to Navigate Online Nastiness

In an age where young people's social lives are increasingly intertwined with the digital realm, online conflicts among peers are almost inevitable. Such conflicts are sometimes labeled as "cyberbullying," but as digital wellbeing experts, we argue that for children, this kind of nastiness is often an extension of developmentally normal (albeit unpleasant) teenage conflicts.

# Online nastiness can be a difficult digital behaviour to navigate for schools, educators and parents alike.

It helps to remember that online nastiness does not make a child “bad.” It simply means they are learning important skills to deal with relational conflict. The main difference between online and face-to-face conflict is that children will often say more extreme things online. So, if a young person is caught up in a spiral of online nastiness, here are the three steps to address and remedy the issue.



## Stop the spread

The first crucial step is to address the nastiness head-on, so delete the offensive content to limit further exposure. The content should be reported to the social media platform to ensure it’s taken down, including messages from group chats.

Limiting a child’s contact with the individuals involved is often tough (especially if they go to school together) but is essential for providing the breathing space necessary to halt the creation of more damaging content.

## Problem-solve together

The next step involves collaborative problem-solving. Instead of dictating solutions, explore possible options and outcomes together, including whether amends need to be made, if it’s best to avoid the person from now on, or whether other people need to be consulted for help. The key is to foster responsibility and ensure that young people have the skills they need to handle similar situations independently in the future.

## Debrief and gain relief

After the storm has passed, it's essential to have a debrief. This phase aids emotional processing and allows for examination into what happened and what could be done better next time. Here are some questions to use as a guide for your post-conflict reflection:

### What was happening before the conflict ended up online?

Conflict rarely starts out of thin air. Understanding the circumstances surrounding it is vital for reflecting on alternate actions.

### What did you do that was helpful? What did you do that wasn't helpful?

Balancing reflection on both positive and negative behaviours fosters open self-examination without creating defensiveness.

### How were you feeling when the conflict was unfolding?

Given that children approaching the teen years are emotive rather than logical thinkers, having them reflect on their feelings is important. Acknowledging and validating their normal emotions of frustration and anger helps them feel understood and lays the foundation for them to process and learn to manage their feelings.

### If you were a third person looking at the situation, what advice would you give to de-escalate the conflict?

Remember that conflict (online or otherwise) doesn't define who a young child is as a person and that navigating through disagreements and negative emotions is a skill all young people need to learn. Children can be guided toward more responsible digital citizenship by approaching nastiness online with understanding, collaborative problem-solving, and thoughtful reflection.

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Linewize is a unique response to the challenge of today's connected learning environments, supporting the integration of technology, education and engagement to create cyber safe communities where students thrive.

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