

GIRLS' FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS 2018



In May and October 2018, 46 Year 8 girls from two schools in Southeast Queensland talked about how they managed social media, online safety, and friendship. Here is what they had to say.

MESSAGES FOR OTHER GIRLS



- Don't take things to heart.
- Things get better with time.
- Stand up for yourself.
- Even if you're scared, get help.
- Don't make other people feel worthless.

ONLINE SAFETY ADVICE

- **Know the consequences.** "If you send something to a group chat, people can screenshot it and send it around. That can affect so many things. You need to be prepared for what can happen."
- **Stop and think.** "You might not think you're being mean, but to the other person, they might be going through something and might not take it as a joke." "It might not mean much to you but it could wreck someone else's life."
- **Make good choices.** "You have a choice. You can't be forced to send those kinds of messages or pictures".
- **Be a buddy, not a bully.** "If you see something happening, take control, go to a teacher or the principal."
- **Block them:** "If you don't really know the person, blocking is easy. Just use the little report button on your profile. Once you block them, they are out of your life."
- **Reach out to friends:** "Reach out to your friends but if it gets too out of hand, you need to talk to a parent or at least a teacher."
- **Be responsible:** "Try to handle things in a responsible way instead of bursting and just going crazy."
- **Talk to someone.** "Don't bottle it up and get all stressed out or sad about it. If you feel like you can't talk to anyone else, call an online support service. I did that. They helped me to talk to my parents."

ABOUT GROUP CHATS AND 'PRIVATES'

- **Mute notifications:** "Group chats are not dangerous, but they get annoying. Everyone says good night, hello, how are you? They send love hearts all the time. You should mute notifications, so you can sleep."
- **Remember ...** "everyone in the group can see what you write so don't be mean, like everybody can see it – like they will all know what you said."
- **Keep DMs private:** "Don't bring things from the outside into the group chat. Talk about those DM things in your private chats."
- **Don't join in:** "Sometimes people start an argument in the group chat and then things go downhill. That's when you need to turn off the notifications and go to sleep."
- **Good stuff:** "It's not all drama. We help each other with homework and work together on stuff."
- **Screenshots:** "We all have privates where we only accept best friends. But stuff on privates can be screenshot. If someone reposts it and you care, just tell them to take it down. If they don't, just report them."

THINGS THEY WORRY ABOUT

- **Supporting friends.** "You feel bad for your friends, you want to help them but if they don't listen, what can you do?"
- **Getting blamed.** "You tell your parents and they think you've done the wrong thing so they punish you."
- **Being called a snitch.** "If you get help, other people might find out and call you a snitch. And then other people in the grade will judge you and then you won't have any friends."
- **Getting a reputation.** "She's been throwing her face around the place. Someone screenshotted it and showed the whole world. She should know better."
- **Having devices taken away.** "That's social suicide."
- **Getting bullied more.** "Girls are afraid if they speak out, the bullying will get worse, so they just keep it to themselves."

A message for parents and educators.

We need to talk to girls differently about online safety and social media. Teenage girls' worries are different from our worries. Real solutions for real concerns involves finding a balanced approach that not only supports girls' need for autonomy and privacy but also provides them with workable strategies for getting assistance.