

# What is online abuse?

Online abuse is abuse that is made possible, or made easier, by using technology (also known as technology-facilitated abuse). These behaviours often happen in tandem with other abuse that occurs in-person.

Technology can enable a range of existing abusive behaviours (see: [Sexual assault](#), [Sexual harassment](#); see also [Cyberstalking](#)). However, some forms of abuse have emerged specifically in online environments.

## Using technology to track or control someone

This can include:

- unauthorised access to digital devices,
- gathering information about a person without their knowledge,
- or seeking to restrict them.

In Victoria, it is a criminal act to knowingly install, use or maintain surveillance devices to track a person's location without their consent. Even if consent is initially given to share location or account details, using these details against you is not okay. Learn more about [digital coercive control](#) and [location sharing](#).

## Using technology to coerce someone into sexual acts, or sharing sexual imagery without consent

This can include:

- Image-based abuse such as sharing, or threatening to share, an intimate image or video of you without your consent. 'Revenge porn' is one example of this. Read more about [image-based abuse](#).
- Threatening someone to share intimate images or video of you unless you meet their demands, such as sending them money ('sextortion'). Sometimes explicit images or videos can be digitally altered or generated by AI to look like you. Read more about [dealing with sextortion](#).

The above are criminal acts under the [Summary Offences Act \(1966\)](#).

## Additional forms of abuse where technology may be used:

- [Sexual assault](#)
- [Sexual harassment](#)
- [Bullying](#)
- [Family/intimate partner violence](#)
- [Stalking](#)

### Things to know about online abuse

Research indicates that some people are more likely to experience online abuse than others. This includes women and girls, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women with disability, LGBTIQ+ communities, and women in rural areas. This could look like:

- using your status or identity as an excuse to have access and control over your online accounts.
- threatening to out your identity online before you are ready, or sharing your deadname online.

# What are the impacts?

Online abuse impacts people differently. Common impacts include physical, emotional and mental health harms such as:

- Physical safety concerns: In some cases, online abuse can escalate into offline threats or harassment, putting individuals at risk of physical harm
- The feeling that the abuse is ‘omnipresent’ – as in, there is no limit to when and where it occurs
- Reduced online participation: Fear of online abuse can cause individuals to withdraw from online activities, limiting their access to information, social connections, and opportunities for self-expression
- Social isolation from friends, family and community
- Financial impacts due to not having full access to finances, losing employment, getting into debt, or having to pay for new devices or for support services.
- Emotions such as fear, shame and distress

# How do I protect myself?

The eSafety Commissioner has a range of resources on proactively managing your online presence and safety:

- [Protect your identity](#), such as your personally identifiable information which can be used to scam or harass you.
- [Protect your location](#), and being aware of how your location is tracked by different devices or apps.
- [Being safe while online dating](#). Not everyone you meet online has the best intentions – there are risks to online dating you should be aware of.
- [Being safe while using immersive technologies](#), such as augmented or virtual reality in gaming.
- [What to do if you are receiving unwanted or unsafe contact](#), for example if you are being ‘spammed’ by someone you do or do not know.

# How do I get help?

## Safer Community Program

The Safer Community Program provides support, referrals and information.

Speaking to the Safer Community Program does not automatically result in further action. It may be the first step you take to find out about your options and/or to be guided through making a complaint.

The Safer Community Program respects your agency and decision-making and will be guided by your wishes wherever possible, and where there are no legal requirements or University policies preventing this. The Safer Community Program can connect you with specialist university and external support services and help you navigate complaint processes.

The University has a duty of care to progress some matters where we believe there is an immediate risk to someone’s safety.

## Contact Safer Community Program

✉ [safer-community@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:safer-community@unimelb.edu.au)

📞 (03) 9035 8675

📍 [safercommunity.unimelb.edu.au](http://safercommunity.unimelb.edu.au)

## eSafety Commissioner

The eSafety Commissioner (eSafety) is the Australian Government’s independent online safety regulator. eSafety provides advice and training on online harms, and also provides support by removing harmful content.

- [See what eSafety can help with.](#)
- [Click to view flowchart for reporting different types of online abuse.](#)

## Contact eSafety Commissioner

📍 <https://www.esafety.gov.au/report>

## Victoria Police

Some online abuse is a crime under Australian law. You have the right to seek protection and help. See the eSafety Commissioner’s recommendations on [accessing police and legal help](#).

The University’s Safer Community Program can assist you with this process.