What do I do if I'm being harassed online?

RECORD

- Screenshot the offending content or download videos and report to the platform directly Important. Do this prior to blocking.

- Note the date, time, platform and username(s).

- If abuse is via email, save the email and do not forward it. Forwarded emails may not contain important information called internet or email headers that can help to obtain IP addresses if needed. You can display and send full headers in various email programs.

- If it is too distressing to collect the material yourself, ask someone to do this for you.

ASSESS

Is it debate or harassment?
It is important to differentiate between negative comments and harassment.

- Is it repeated and unrelenting?

- Is it coordinated?

- Does it include personal attacks, or hate speech?

- Is it menacing or offensive, or does it make you feel unsafe?

- Is it intended to harm your physical or mental health?

What type of abuse is this? Is it intended to cause harm? Who might have sent it? Red flags might include:

- Do I know the person? Do they have a history of erratic or violent behaviour?

- Is the threat directed and specific?

- Is the abuse coming from a real person?

- Has it followed you across platforms or offline?

WELLBEING

Online abuse is a traumatic experience. Prioritise your mental health and seek help if you feel that you need help.

- Acknowledge your feelings – you are allowed to be upset.

- Be kind to yourself – it's not your fault that you have been abused.

- Remember your strengths. Don't let the opinions of others define your self-worth.

- Remind yourself of your best qualities and attributes.

- Regularly practise self-care by making time for leisure, exercise, good nutrition and adequate sleep.

- Try meditation or other relaxation techniques.

- Surround yourself with positive people.

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✍ SUPPORT

If you are concerned about harassment, seek support and don't suffer on your own. Many people have had similar experiences and can offer advice and help.

- **Your institution** - Does your line manager or head of department know what is going on? Making them aware allows them to help and if complaints are made against you they will already know the background. Your institution may be able to help you access support give you support in dealing with social media criticism, OIA requests, engaging with the media and security advice.

- **Your peers** - Do your peers know you are going through this? They may be able to jump online and become your digital allies.

- **The Science Media Centre** - We can offer support for researchers engaging with the news media. We may be able to help by contacting media outlets on your behalf or helping to coordinate activities with other researchers and institutions.

- **The media outlet** - If the harassment and abuse follow a media appearance, the media outlet may be able to turn off comments on the story, moderate social media channels more closely or offer direct support. Some media outlets have staff dedicated to social media well-being.

- **Netsafe** - helps prevent and deal with adult cyber abuse and its impacts. They can investigate online abuse and provide information, education and resources. Your institution may be able to assist you in filing a report.

1 REPORT

- Report it to your employer – This could include your direct manager, your media/ communication team, your IT, security or HR departments, or a dedicated point of contact.

- Report it to the social media platform. If they don't remove the content within 48 hours, the report to <u>Netsafe</u>.

- Report it to the police if you fear for your safety.

- If the abuse follows a media appearance contact your media/communications team, the journalist and media outlet involved and/or the SMC.

- If it is too distressing to report yourself, ask someone to do this for you.

⊘ DON'T FEED THE TROLLS

It is rarely worth your time to engage with trolls. Stay calm and take some time before you consider responding. Is responding going to be empowering or more traumatising?

- Block or mute/restrict the individual on your personal platforms. If you block someone they will know they have been blocked. If you mute someone, you will not be notifed of their activity but they will not know this. This may prevent them from creating more accounts to harass you.

- If someone gets access to your mobile number or email you can block them.

- Engage strategically. If people begin to contact you about your work, you may choose not to engage with anyone, or to engage only with select individuals.

- If you do wish to respond, try 'counterspeech'. Counterspeech is any direct response to hateful or harmful speech which seeks to undermine it. This can include reminding the speaker of the harm that their abuse can do and the consequences of that online abuse. Research has suggested that empathy-based messages can reduce some types of hate speech. For more info: dangerousspeech.org/counterspeech/

⊕ REDUCE

- Reduce notifications to only those you follow until the incident passes (which it will, often quickly).

- Mute keywords and hashtags being used to harass you

- Limit who can tag you, mention you, comment on your posts and DMyou

- Limit how people can find you on social media platforms

⊙⊙ REVIEW

- Understand where you are most vulnerable – is one platform eg X (Twitter), Facebook? Consider taking a break from this platform.

- Make sure your personal and professional accounts are separate. Consider using a different name on your personal and professional accounts.

- Do a privacy and security checkup on social media accounts. Complete a privacy checkup and security checkup on Facebook. Step through the safety guides for X, Instagram, Linkedin and TikTok. The eSafety Guide has information on many platforms.

- Look yourself up online. Google your name, your phone number and address to see where they are listed online. Request your contact details be removed.

- Review location settings

- Review password security

- Discuss the incident with your institution and make a plan with them if you are concerned about future harassment.

This advice has been adapted from the Australian Broadcasting Company's Guide for Supporting External Talent and eSafety's What to do if you experience online abuse.