THINK BEFORE YOU POST

This is really the golden rule of online communication.

Online communication is instant, wide-reaching and difficult to retract, so you need to be sure you want it out there before you put it out there.

A couple of seconds re-reading your post, thinking about the photo, or running the worst-case scenario through your head can save you a lot of real-life pain.

The only person you can trust to keep your private photos private is you. Once you send them to someone else, they're out of your control and you're relying on the discretion and good judgment of other people to stop them ending up on every phone at school or on a public site.

If you don't want everyone to know about it, don't post it. Once it's out there, it could be there for life.

Things to Think About Before You Post

Before you hit Send or Upload or Post, stop for a minute and consider the following:

Think: If you wouldn't say it to someone's face, don't post it on their wall.

Think: Emoticons are everywhere for a reason. It's hard to convey your tone of voice – how you are saying something – online. Comments that are meant to be sarcastic, witty, tongue-in-cheek, funny, even constructively critical, all rely a lot on context and can be easily misinterpreted online. Read it back before you post it and if it's not really clear, try again or hit delete and consider speaking to the person on the phone or in person instead.

Think: If you think your friend might be embarrassed by that photo from your party, check with them first before you post it.

Think: Just to briefly take it to the next level, if police see evidence of illegal activity in a film or in photos on a website or a mobile phone they can use it in court as evidence.

Think: It's important to think about how much information you're sharing with strangers. You wouldn't stand in the street and hand out cards to everyone with your name, your photo, your address, school or university and favourite band on it – don't do the same thing online.

Think: You need to be especially careful if you have several sites on the go, particularly if you have a profile on an online dating site – people who spend their time stealing identities can put your information together and get a very clear picture of who you are, where you live, how to contact you and the sorts of things you like to do. That's great if it's Liam Hemsworth or Beyonce - not so great if that's Weird Guy You Don't Know.

Picture This...

The bus ride into uni is long and boring. You've been passing the time making up stories about your fellow passengers. Once you'd come up with a few funny stories you started posting online them online. You've even made your own facebook page - Bus Boy - with daily updates.

You've got over a thousand followers. You've started including photos too, especially of the regulars. It's like they're characters in 3D.

Turns out, more than 3D. Seems including the actual bus and describing the route in detail wasn't such a bright idea. Apparently, someone who Liked your site knows Fat Charlie on the bus and showed him the site.

Turns out his name isn't Fat Charlie. Turns out he's called Peter. Turns out he's been following you for a while and printing out your posts. Turns out he's not so happy about the site. Turns out neither are all the other people on the bus.

Now you've had to find a different - longer - way to get into town because you don't dare show your face on your regular bus.

Peter's threatening to show the posts to the ombudsman at Melbourne Uni, too, and is talking get you suspended from your law degree (who knew it was illegal to take photos and videos on public transport without permission?). He's even talking about a class action (you so should have not posted all those fat jokes).

And to top it off, someone's gone and set up a page called Busted Boy. All your friends know about it. That saying about all publicity is good publicity? Turns out that's not so true for the Internet.

Links

Below the Belt: Sex, Selfies & Cyberbullying
A free Android app with info about laws on sex and consent, sexting and cyberbullying.

eSafety
The Australian Government's Esafety site is designed to help empower you to be safe online.

ThinkUKnow
Helpful site full of tips on how to stay in control on the web.

eHeadspace
eheadspace is a confidential, free and secure space where young people 12 - 25 or their family can chat, email or speak on the phone with a qualified youth mental health professional.

Lifeline
If you or someone you know need someone to talk to, for any reason, about anything, you can call Lifeline on 13 11 14 - 24 hours a day.

Kids Helpline - 1800 55 1800
Kids Helpline is a free, 24-hour counselling service for young people aged 5-25 years. Counselling is offered by phone, email and over the web.

Tagged
An Australian film about a group of high-school friends who post a rumour about a rival and spark a chain reaction