

Carnegie Mellon University Guidance on Social Media Online Harassment (for Students)

Introduction

The online spaces you use every day are part of the CMU experience, and each person plays a role in shaping them. We want those spaces to reflect a community where people feel respected, welcomed, and connected.

This guidance is designed to help you recognize behaviors that you might experience as bullying or harassment, understand your options if you encounter it, and access support. It also reflects an important expectation: online behavior has real impact.

Purpose of This Guidance

This document provides guidance for students who experience or witness bullying, harassing, or abusive behaviors on any social media platform, including legacy apps such as LinkedIn and Facebook, as well as anonymous and semi-anonymous apps, including but not limited to Sidechat, Discord, Fizz, etc. It explains what these behaviors are, what steps students can take, what support CMU can provide, and the practical limits of the university's authority.

General social media guidelines

Ways to protect yourself

- Be mindful that your contributions (comments, shares, etc.) can be seen by a wide audience.
- Remember that your posts, even on personal accounts, may reflect on your affiliation with CMU.
- Monitor your social media privacy settings and adjust them as needed for your comfort and safety.
- Protect your personal information; avoid sharing details like your address, student ID or phone number publicly.
- Ensure that any content you post to a social media platform is in compliance with the terms of service of that platform.
- Understand that posts may be permanent and searchable, even after deletion: think before you post.

- Consider how you want to be perceived in personal and professional settings—Use appropriate language and tone—these can be difficult to interpret online. Social media accounts reflect your personality, but it's still important to maintain professionalism.
- Be aware of copyright and intellectual property laws when posting media or content.

Ways to engage respectfully

- Respect [community standards and CMU values](#) in your interactions.
 - Consider the impact of your posts on fellow students, faculty, staff and the broader university community.
 - Engage in constructive dialogue; be open to different perspectives and avoid personal attacks.
 - Avoid posting content that could be considered offensive, harassing or discriminatory.
 - When representing a student organization or club, coordinate with your advisor (if you have one) and follow university branding and community standards.
-

Guidelines when using anonymous or semi-anonymous platforms (Sidechat, Discord, Fizz, Reddit, etc.)

- Remember that anonymous posts still have real impact. Even if names are hidden, the harm to individuals and the campus climate is very real.
 - Avoid participating in conversations that pile on, gossip, or call out specific individuals or groups, even if you are not the original poster.
 - If you see bullying behaviors, harassment, hate speech or doxxing, do not amplify it (by replying, upvoting, screenshotting to share further) unless you are documenting it for a report.
 - Document harmful content by taking screenshots that clearly show the post, username/handle if available, timestamps, and context before it disappears.
 - When possible, use in-app tools (report, block, mute, downvote) to limit your exposure and flag content that violates platform rules.
 - Understand that “anonymous” does not mean “consequence-free.” Platforms collect data and may cooperate with law enforcement or other investigations when the platform deems them warranted.
 - Set personal boundaries around what spaces you join and how long you spend on them. It is okay to leave a server, mute a channel, or delete an app that is harming your well-being.
 - Be a supportive bystander: check in on classmates who may be targeted, encourage them to seek help, and, when safe, use platform tools to report abusive content.
-

Guidelines when using non-anonymous platforms (Instagram, X, Facebook, LinkedIn, Bluesky, Threads, YouTube, TikTok, etc.)

Instagram

- Use privacy settings to limit who can comment on posts, send messages, or mention/tag you.
 - Review and manage followers regularly; remove or block accounts that engage in harassment or make you uncomfortable.
 - Be cautious when sharing Stories or Reels publicly, especially if they reveal location, routines, or personal details.
 - Use comment filtering tools to automatically hide offensive or abusive language.
 - If harassment occurs, document the content and use Instagram's reporting tools before blocking the account.
 - Remember that screenshots and reposts can extend the life of harmful content; avoid resharing except for documentation.
-

X (formerly Twitter)

- Limit who can reply to your posts using reply controls, especially during sensitive or high-visibility conversations.
 - Mute or block accounts that engage in harassment rather than responding publicly.
 - Be mindful that quote-posting can amplify harmful content, even when criticizing it.
 - Document abusive posts promptly, as content may be deleted or accounts suspended.
 - Use X's reporting tools for harassment, threats, impersonation, or hateful conduct.
 - Consider keeping your account protected (private) if you are experiencing repeated targeting.
-

Facebook

- Review privacy settings to control who can see posts, comment, or message you.
 - Be cautious when participating in public groups or comment threads, where moderation may be limited.
 - If harassment occurs in a group, report both the content and the group to Facebook when appropriate.
 - Avoid engaging in arguments that escalate or attract additional attention.
 - Save evidence before reporting or blocking, especially if the behavior is ongoing or repeated.
-

LinkedIn

- Maintain professional boundaries; harassment can still occur even on career-focused platforms.
 - Report inappropriate messages, impersonation, or targeted harassment using LinkedIn's reporting tools.
 - Be cautious when accepting connection requests from unknown accounts.
 - Avoid public back-and-forth in comment threads that become hostile or personal.
 - Document abusive or threatening messages before blocking or reporting the sender.
-

Bluesky

- Use moderation tools, including muting words, labels, or accounts, to reduce exposure to harmful content.
 - Be aware that decentralized platforms may have varying moderation standards across servers.
 - Document harmful posts and account details, especially if content appears across multiple feeds or instances.
 - Avoid engaging in pile-ons or reposting harmful content, even to criticize it.
 - Use available reporting mechanisms and seek support if harassment persists.
-

Threads

- Control who can reply to or mention you, especially on posts that may attract wide attention.
 - Avoid responding to accounts that appear to be baiting or provoking conflict.
 - Document harmful replies or messages before reporting or blocking.
 - Use reporting tools for harassment, hate speech, or impersonation.
 - Consider limiting visibility of posts during periods of heightened attention or stress.
-

YouTube

- Be cautious when posting or commenting publicly, especially on videos with large or highly active audiences.
- Use comment moderation tools to block, filter, or hide abusive language.
- Avoid engaging directly with harassing commenters, which can increase visibility.
- Document threatening or abusive comments before reporting them.
- Report content or comments that violate YouTube's harassment or hate policies.

TikTok

- Adjust privacy settings to limit who can comment, duet, stitch, or message you.
 - Be mindful that videos can spread quickly beyond your intended audience.
 - Avoid responding to harassing comments, as engagement can increase visibility.
 - Document abusive comments or videos before reporting or blocking.
 - Use TikTok's reporting tools for harassment, hate speech, impersonation, or threats.
-

Frequently Asked Questions

What is online bullying or harassment?

Individuals may experience online bullying behaviors or harassment in a variety of ways. Generally, online bullying or harassment refers to behavior conducted through digital or online platforms that is intended to intimidate, threaten, demean, or harm another person. Examples may include repeated insults, threats, spreading false information, sharing private information without consent (sometimes called “doxxing”), impersonation, stalking, or encouraging others to target an individual.

Standards for inappropriate conduct vary based on the terms of the social media platform and location. Please consult the [Carnegie Mellon Student Handbook](#) for student related policy information or contact CMU Police at 412-268-2323 to discuss options if you generally are concerned about the safety of yourself or someone else.

Who is this guidance intended for?

This guidance is intended to serve as a reference for members of the university community who are affected by online behavior, regardless of platform. This includes:

- Public social media platforms
- Anonymous or semi-anonymous apps
- Group chats and messaging platforms (such as Discord or similar services)
- Student-run online spaces

Does the university's Freedom of Expression Policy apply to speech on social media platforms?

Yes, the university's Freedom of Expression Policy applies to speech on the internet and social media platforms. According to the university's [Freedom of Expression Guidance](#):

Members of the university community generally will not be subject to disciplinary action by the university for statements — including on social media — that are made outside of the university, when the speaker has made clear that they are not speaking in an official capacity, and when the statements are not directed at members of the university community and do not constitute harassment or threats directed at specific university-affiliated individuals or organizations. The same principle and limitations apply to the expression of opinions contrary to the university's values or official positions.

I saw a hurtful post about me or experienced bullying behaviors on social media. What should I do?

If you encounter content that feels threatening, harassing, or abusive:

Prioritize your safety. If there is an immediate threat of harm, contact CMU Police at 412-268-2323.

Do not engage or escalate. Responding publicly can sometimes increase visibility or intensity.

Document the content. Save screenshots, URLs, usernames, timestamps, and any relevant context.

Use platform tools. Many platforms allow users to report content, block accounts, or limit interactions.

Seek support. You may contact the [Office of Community Responsibility](#) for support, even if you are unsure whether the behavior violates policy.

What information should I save or document?

When documenting concerning content, try to preserve:

- Screenshots showing the full post or message
- The username or account name involved
- The date and time the content was posted
- Links or invitation details (for group chats or servers)
- Any repeated or related behavior

Preserving evidence can be helpful if you choose to report the behavior to the platform, the university, or other authorities.

Does CMU have authority over anonymous apps or platforms?

CMU does not control external platforms, including anonymous or semi-anonymous apps. Decisions about content removal, account suspension, or identification of users are made by the platform providers.

However, behavior that occurs on these platforms may still impact members of the university community. In some circumstances, online conduct may be reviewed under [existing university policies](#), such as the Discriminatory and Sexual Misconduct Policy or the [Community Standards Section](#) of the Carnegie Mellon Student Handbook, even when it occurs off campus or on third-party platforms.

Are anonymous apps really anonymous?

Many platforms describe themselves as anonymous, but anonymity varies by service. Platform providers may still collect information such as device data, IP addresses, or account history. CMU does not have access to this information and cannot identify anonymous users on its own.

What if the online harassment is happening in a Discord server or group chat run by students?

Student-run online spaces, including group chats and servers, may affect the learning or living environment. While CMU does not monitor private spaces, reports may be reviewed when behavior has a significant impact on students or the broader community.

Each situation is evaluated based on the nature of the behavior, its impact, and applicable policies.

We strongly recommend using the reporting tools and features mentioned in the sections below.

How do I report online harassment to CMU?

Students may report concerning online behavior through designated university reporting channels. Reporting allows the university to assess the situation, offer support, and determine appropriate next steps. Students may reach out to the resource that feels most appropriate to

them knowing that the university resources, including those listed below, will work together as warranted to support a student and understand a concern.

Students can direct a report to the [Office of Community Responsibility](#) for review of potential violations of CMU policy or file a report with CMU Police by calling (412) 268-2323.

You may report even if:

- The behavior occurred off campus
- The person responsible is anonymous
- You are unsure whether it violates a specific policy

Suspected violations of the Discriminatory and Sexual Misconduct Policy may be reported to the [Office for Institutional Equity and Title IX](#).

If you want to talk with someone concerning content in a student organization's online space, outreach directly to the Office of Student Involvement and Traditions (sitoffice@andrew.cmu.edu) for a consultation.

How can I support a friend who is experiencing bullying behaviors online?

If a friend is experiencing online harassment or bullying behaviors:

- Encourage them to document the behavior
- Avoid responding on their behalf in ways that could escalate the situation
- Help them connect with campus support resources
- Offer to accompany them if they choose to make a report

You may also report concerning behavior yourself if you are worried about someone's safety or well-being.

Additionally, [here is a list](#) of mental and emotional health resources from CMU Counseling & Psychological Services (CaPS).

Requests To Take Down Abusive, Harassing, or Threatening Posts/Web Content

If a user account has posted abusive, harassing, or threatening statements about you or directed at you on a social media or other publishing platform, you may submit a takedown request to the platform, in accordance with the platform's rules and requirements, many of which we have linked [here](#):

- **Discord:** [Reporting content or behavior to the platform](#).
- **Facebook:** [Community Standards](#), [Report Something](#).
- **Instagram/ Threads:** [Community Guidelines](#), [How to Report Things](#).
- **LinkedIn:** [Community Policy](#), [Report Harassment or a Safety Concern](#).
- **Reddit:** [What should I do if I'm being harassed?](#)
- **Sidechat:** [Community Guidelines](#). Users may report a post for removal by emailing support@sidechat.lol.
- **TikTok:** [Community Guidelines](#), [Report a Problem](#).
- **Truth Social:** [Terms of Use](#) § 7 ("Prohibited Activities"). We were unable to find a reporting function on Truth Social, but § 33 of the Terms of Use document states as follows: "In order to resolve a complaint regarding the Service or any Content or to receive further information regarding use of the Service or Content, please contact us at support@truthsocial.com. Users may report 'hateful conduct,' as defined by New York law, to legal@tmediatech.com."
- **X (formerly Twitter):** [The X Rules](#), [Report Violations](#).
- **YouTube:** [Community Guidelines](#). To report content on YouTube, you can click the "Report" button underneath the video frame on each video's webpage. To reveal the "Report" button, click the icon with three dots on it, just under the right-bottom corner of the video.

Each social media platform applies its own standards and principles in reviewing and acting on requests to take down content. Platforms are reluctant to referee disputes over whether the content of a particular post is true or false. They are far more likely to take action against communications that are abusive, harassing, or threatening or that impersonate you or seek to mislead or defraud the viewer. You can find more details on each site's rules and reporting pages. Individuals should be aware of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act [see below], which may limit the ability to force a social media platform to remove objectionable content.

We generally do not recommend that you engage directly with a social media account or website that is targeting you with abuse, harassment, or threats. If you see content on a social media platform or website that is directed at you and violates the site's community standards, you should report the content to the platform.

What is Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act?

Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act limits the liability of online platforms by establishing that providers of "interactive computer services" cannot be treated as the publisher or speaker of information provided by third-party users. Section 230 creates a broad legal shield that protects social media companies, websites, and apps from civil lawsuits regarding defamation, negligence, and other torts that would traditionally apply to newspapers or broadcasters. Complementing this, the "Good Samaritan" clause in Section 230(c)(2) ensures that platforms are not penalized for taking an active role in moderating their sites; they remain immune from liability when they voluntarily restrict or remove content they deem objectionable, provided these actions are taken in good faith.

However, this liability shield is not absolute and contains specific statutory and judicial exceptions. The protections of Section 230 do not extend to violations of certain federal criminal laws related to terrorism, child exploitation and sex trafficking, nor do they apply to intellectual property claims, which are separately governed by laws such as the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA).

Individuals who are concerned with content posted by users of social media platforms should be aware that Section 230 may limit the ability to force the social media platform to remove objectionable content.

Can I ask a social media platform or website to remove content that targets or harasses me?

Yes. In many cases, individuals can request that a platform, website, or content host review and remove posts that are abusive, harassing, threatening, or otherwise violate that platform's terms of service. However, individuals should be aware of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act [see FAQ above], which may limit the ability to force a social media platform to remove objectionable content.

Many platforms have online forms for reporting content that violates the platform's terms of service. In general, it is often best to submit reports via the platform's established reporting system – which can often be located via a Google search or linked within the platform's terms of service.

In addition to using in-platform reporting tools, some students may choose to submit a written request.

Below are sample templates you may adapt when contacting a platform, website administrator, or content moderator. These templates are provided for guidance only and should be customized to reflect your specific situation. The list in the previous section has information about reaching out to each platform.

Sample Request to Take Down Abusive, Harassing, or Threatening Posts / Web Content

Dear [Platform/Website Name or Moderator],

My name is [Your Name], and I am a student at [Carnegie Mellon University]. I am writing to request that you review and remove content posted at [URL address] that contains abusive, harassing, or threatening material directed at me.

The content includes statements or imagery that target me personally and have caused harm, including but not limited to [briefly describe the nature of the content, such as threats, repeated

harassment, or derogatory statements]. I believe this content may violate your platform's community guidelines or terms of service related to harassment, abuse, or harmful conduct.

To assist in your review, I have included:

- The direct URL(s) to the content
- Screenshots of the post(s)
- The date and time the content was published

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please let me know if additional information is required.

Sincerely,
[Your Full Name]
[Your Email Address]
[Optional Phone Number]

Sample Request to Take Down False or Misleading Content

Dear [Platform/Website Name or Administrator],

I am [Your Name], a student at [Carnegie Mellon University], writing to request review and removal of content located at [URL address] that contains false or misleading information about me.

The content states or implies that [briefly describe the claim or statement]. This information is inaccurate because [briefly explain why it is incorrect], and it has caused harm, including reputational impact and unwanted attention.

I respectfully request that this content be reviewed and removed or corrected in accordance with your platform's terms of service or community standards.

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,
[Your Full Name]
[Your Email Address]

How can students reduce the risk of online harassment?

While no one is responsible for being targeted, students may choose to:

Review privacy and security settings on social media accounts
Limit who can comment, message, or tag them
Use strong passwords and multi-factor authentication
Be mindful of what personal information is shared publicly

Where can I get support?

Students affected by online bullying behaviors or harassment may find support through:

- [Counseling \(CaPS\)](#) or wellbeing related services
- [Student Support Resources](#) or [Residential Education staff](#)
- Resources for organization advising such as [Fraternity and Sorority Life](#), [Student Involvement and Traditions](#), and [The Center for Student Diversity and Inclusion](#)
- [University Police](#), [Office of Community Responsibility](#), or [Office for Institutional Equity and Title IX](#)
- Technology support for account security

Support is available from [CaPS](#) regardless of whether a formal report is made.

