

Parents' Role in preventing cyberbullying

Dirty names. Repeated harassment. Extreme embarrassment. Most adults know the signs of bullying when they see it, but today's parents must be especially vigilant to know when and if their children are involved in an incident of bullying. The Internet and widespread use of mobile devices have contributed to the rise of cyberbullying, the repeated use of digital media to pick on another person. Cyberbullying takes place over the Internet and mobile devices in ways that could be completely hidden from the knowledge of parents, guardians and school staff.

MySecureCyberspace - Carnegie Mellon University

**'Sticks and stones
may break my bones,
but words
will never hurt me.'**

Don't you believe it.

Words – particularly through a cyberattack – can wound a child easily and have long-term effects. They can follow your child into your home, an otherwise safe place, and wherever he or she goes online. When millions of online accomplices can be recruited to help target and humiliate your child, the risk of serious harm is very real.

Victims of cyberbullying suffer many of the same effects as children who are bullied in person, such as falling grades, lower self-esteem, a change in interests, or depression. However, cyberbullying can seem more extreme to its victims because:

- **It occurs in the child's home**, taking away the place children feel most safe.
- **It can be more harsh.** Often kids say things online that they wouldn't say in person, mainly because they can't see the other person's reaction.
- **It can be far reaching.** Kids can send messages to their entire class or school instantly, or post them for the whole world to see.
- **It can be anonymous.** Cyberbullies often hide behind fake screen names that don't identify who they are. Not knowing who is responsible for bullying messages can add to a victim's insecurity.
- **It may seem inescapable.** It may seem easy to get away by just getting offline, but for some kids not going online takes away one of the major places they socialize.

Source: National Crime Prevention Council

What is a parent to do?

Focus on your relationship with your children. Parents need to be the one trusted place kids can go when things go wrong—online and offline. Yet they often are the one place kids avoid when they have a problem. It is crucial that your child knows you are there to provide the necessary support and love.



You can help stop cyberbullying. Start by talking to your kids about the issue and teaching them the rules below that will help prevent cyberbullying from happening to them or someone they know.

It is interesting to note that cyberbullying is not always intentional. At times, children may not even realize that they are involved in a case of bullying and may be unaware of the consequences of their actions.

Parents, know when to address a child's problems with their peers. Playful teasing over instant messenger and a one-time argument over email are not forms of bullying. However, when teasing, humiliation, and embarrassment are repeated again and again, it is time to step in. When it does happen, work with your child and your community to find a quick and safe resolution.

- Talk "netiquette" with your child, how to behave and communicate politely over the Internet and mobile devices. Teach children to never say something about someone online that they wouldn't say to that person face-to-face. Bullying others, online or in person, is never appropriate.
- Make sure your child understands that comments and images posted on the Internet can be long-lasting and have a global audience.
- Teach your child to keep passwords to their online accounts private. Create passwords that are a combination of letters and numbers and are difficult to guess. Passwords should not be shared with friends, not even a best friend.
- Talk about how to handle strong emotions, such as anger. Never send a message or post a comment on the Internet when you are angry or emotional.
- If your child receives an angry or taunting message, teach them to refrain from responding and to tell a responsible adult. Responding to these types of messages could encourage a bully to continue to pick on the victim.
- Know how much time your child is spending on the Internet and mobile devices.
- Enjoy the Internet with your children. If you are unable to sit down together at the computer, at least know what activities they are doing online. Consider installing parental control software to monitor your child's activities and limit the websites that are available.

Source: MySecureCyberspace - Carnegie Mellon University

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More help for parents in preventing cyberbullying

Signs your child may be cyberbullying:

- Displays intolerance towards others
- Becomes excited by conflicts between others
- Seems to derive satisfaction from other people's fears, discomfort or pain
- Frequently uses the computer or a mobile device
- May use a number of different online accounts
- Doesn't want to talk about what he or she is doing on the computer/mobile device
- Immediately closes a window on the computer when someone approaches

If your child is a cyberbully:

- Come up with a fair and consistent punishment.
- Help your child learn to deal with anger and frustration in ways that do not hurt others.
- Work with your child to find ways to make amends with the victim.
- Ask for help from the school or a counselor if the bullying continues.
- If contacted by a school employee or parent, remain calm. Do not become angry or defensive. Listen and make sure you fully understand the problem, so you can work to help your child and any of the children involved in the situation.



Signs your child may be a victim of cyberbullying:

- Suddenly stops using the computer or keeps a mobile device turned off
- Becomes nervous when an instant message, text message or email message arrives
- Looks angry, upset or depressed after using the computer or mobile device
- Doesn't want to talk about what he or she is doing on the computer
- Immediately closes a window on the computer when someone approaches
- Talks about revenge
- Frequently complains of illness (headache, stomach ache, etc.) which may have psychological causes
- Becomes withdrawn from friends and family

If your child has been cyberbullied:

Who to notify:

Let the school know so the guidance counselor and teacher can keep an eye out for in-school bullying and how your child is handling things. Consider calling your pediatrician or family physician, a family counselor or clergy for support if problems progress.

- Teach your child to ignore teasing that is merely annoying. Bullies are less likely to repeat the bullying if they do not get a reaction.
- Save any evidence of the cyberbullying.
- Do not punish your child if he or she is the target of a cyberbullying incident. Reassure your child that he or she is not the cause of the problem.
- Do not overreact. Cutting off your

child's Internet access will not solve the problem and may make your child feel as if he or she is being punished for the incident. Partner with your child to come up with a solution.

- Try to identify the cyberbully. Bullies may reveal their identities to others offline, even if they committed the cyberbullying anonymously.
- If confronted by a bully, teach your child to make assertive statements, such as "No" and "Stop teasing me." Assertive statements can be effective, but aggressive statements that seek revenge, such as "I'll get you back" can make the situation worse. Make sure your child knows the difference between these two responses.
- If your child's classmates are involved, work with the school to enlist the help of school administrators and all the families involved to stop the bully.
- Contact police if there are threats of violence, extortion, hate crimes or sexual exploitation.
- Contact an attorney or file a claim in small-claims court. The parents of a bully can be sued for defamation, invasion of privacy and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

Report to School

Although most cases of cyberbullying occur off school grounds and outside of school hours, the effects are easily felt in the school environment. New York State's cyberbullying law (enacted July 2012) empowers and requires schools to act in cases of cyberbullying which may occur on or off campus, when they create a substantial risk to the school environment, substantially interfere with a student's educational performance or mental, emotional or physical well-being, or cause a student to fear for his or her physical safety. Schools are required to provide educational and awareness programs to help stop bullying, harassment and discrimination, and school personnel are trained to help resolve cases of bullying.

Learn more about NYS Dignity Act, visit <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/dignityact/>

What does the Internet have to say about you? About your child? It's a good idea to occasionally "Google" yourself. If your child becomes a victim of cyberbullying, make sure that the cyberbully isn't posting attacks online. It is essential that you keep an eye on the Internet for your child's screen name, nicknames, full name, address, telephone and cell numbers and websites. You can also set up an "alert" on Google to notify you whenever anything about your child is posted online.

To learn more how to manage your online reputation, visit Google support here: <http://bit.ly/1efAVJP>

We are grateful to the following sources for the information in this flier.

My Secure Cyberspace <http://bit.ly/MrqcAG>
National Crime Prevention Council <http://bit.ly/1mwbHc1>
Wired Safety Group stopcyberbullying.org
Education Development Center <http://bit.ly/1ck1EQU>
stopbullying.gov