

Internet SafetyNight

Cyberbullying

What is cyberbullying?

A cyberbully is someone who uses online technology to act cruelly toward another person. Unlike traditional bullying, which is limited to a time and a place, cyberbullying can be particularly hurtful because the bullying can spread quickly among classmates and reach children at any time of day or night through the Internet or their cell phone. Kids who bully online also tend to act more harshly than they would in a face-to-face confrontation. Cyberbullying is most common among middle-school-age children.

What are the different forms of cyberbullying?

A cyberbully may:

- Use a cell phone to make repeated prank phone calls or send unwanted text messages to the victim.
- Post cruel comments to the victim's social networking site or send unkind or rude emails or instant messages (IMs) to the victim.
- Create a fake social networking profile to embarrass the victim.
- Use a victim's password to break into the victim's account, change the settings, lock the victim out, and impersonate the victim.
- Steal or borrow the victim's cell phone and use it to pose as the victim in order to send text messages to other people.
- Forward the victim's private messages or photos to classmates and others. Sometimes the bully will trick the victim into revealing personal information for this purpose.
- Forward or post embarrassing or unflattering photos or videos of the victim.
- Spread malicious rumors through IM, text messages, social networking sites, or other public forums.
- Gang up on or humiliate the victim in virtual online worlds or online games.

How can I protect my child against being bullied online?

Make sure your child knows:

- Never share passwords or lend a cell phone, even to close friends.
- Don't respond to hurtful online comments. Fighting back will only escalate the situation.
- Use Internet and cell phone preferences and privacy settings to block the bully.

How can I know whether my child is being cyberbullied?

Some signs that your child is being cyberbullied are:

- Seeming upset after being online.
- Spending either more time than usual or less time than usual online.
- Showing physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomachaches.
- Having problems sleeping or eating.
- Having trouble focusing on schoolwork.

What can I do if my child is being cyberbullied?

Children tend to be reluctant to tell their parents they are being harassed because they're afraid their parents will take away Internet or cell phone privileges or will call the other child's parents. So it's important to stay calm. Tell your child that by talking it over, you can work out a plan to deal with it. You might:

- Contact school officials. Make them aware of the problem and ask them to be on the lookout for signs that your child is being bullied at school. The school counselor or principal may have some strategies or even programs in place for handling bullying at school.
- If the bullying persists, look into filing a complaint against the bully. Most Internet service providers, websites, and cell phone companies have policies against harassment. You may be able to have the bully's account revoked.
- Contact the police if you fear for your child's safety. Cyberbullying can cross into criminal behavior if it includes threats of violence, extortion, child pornography, obscenity, stalking, extreme harassment, or hate crimes.

How can I make sure my child doesn't bully anyone online?

Limit the amount of time your child spends online. Research shows that children who spend a lot of time online are more likely to be involved with cyberbullying, either as victim or perpetrator. Also, tell your child:

- Treat others as you want to be treated.
- Never say something online that you wouldn't say to someone in person.
- Never respond to a mean message. If you retaliate, you not only make the situation worse but also can easily find yourself in the role of bully.
- Do your part to end acts of cyberbullying. If someone sends you a mean-spirited photo or message about another classmate, delete it. Don't forward it.

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