

Dealing with Cyberbullying

Tips for Kids and Parents to Prevent and Stop Cyberbullying

Technology means that bullying is no longer limited to schoolyards or street corners. Cyberbullying can occur anywhere, even at home, via email, texts, cell phones, and social media websites 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with potentially hundreds of people involved. For those who suffer cyberbullying, the effects can be devastating, leaving you feeling hurt, humiliated, angry, depressed, or even suicidal. But no type of bullying should ever be tolerated. These tips can help you protect yourself or your child online and deal with the growing problem of cyberbullying.

What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying occurs when a child or teen uses the Internet, emails, text messages, instant messaging, social media websites, online forums, chat rooms, or other digital technology to harass, threaten, or humiliate another child or teen. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying doesn't require physical strength or face-to-face contact and isn't limited to just a handful of witnesses at a time. Cyberbullies come in all shapes and sizes—almost anyone with an Internet connection or mobile phone can cyberbully someone else, often without having to reveal their true identity. Cyberbullies can torment their victims 24 hours a day and the bullying can follow the victim anywhere so that no place, not even home, ever feels safe, and with a few clicks the humiliation can be witnessed by hundreds or even thousands of people online.

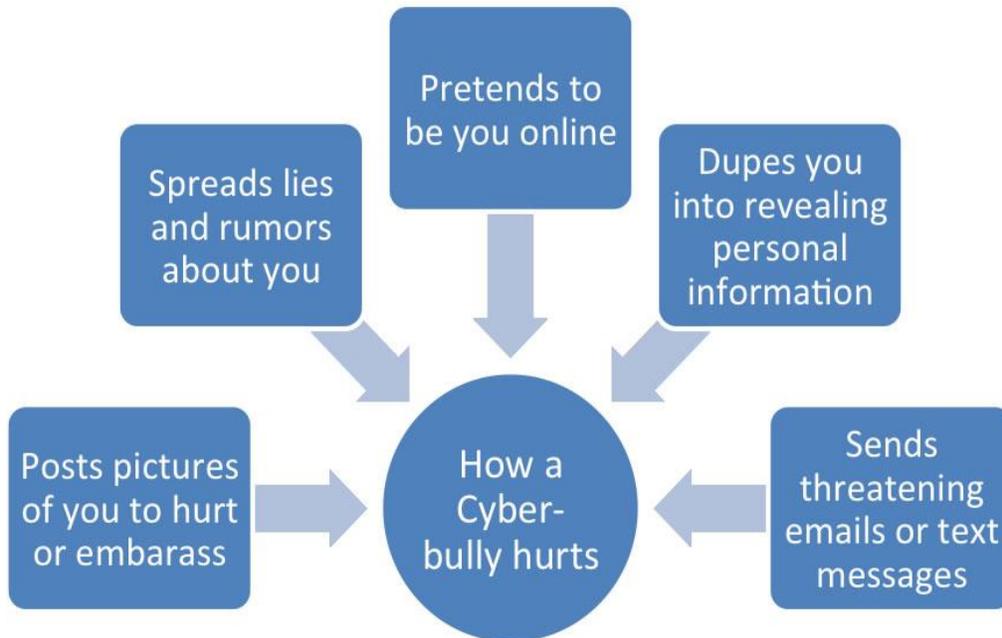
If you or a loved one is currently the victim of cyberbullying, it's important to remember that you're not alone. As many as one third of teenagers have suffered from cyberbullying at some time in their lives.

How cyberbullying harms

The methods kids and teens use to cyberbully can be as varied and imaginative as the technology they have access to. It ranges from sending threatening or taunting messages via email, text, or IM to breaking into your email account or stealing your online identity to hurt and humiliate you. Some cyberbullies may even create a website or social media page to target you.

As with traditional bullying, both boys and girls cyberbully, but tend to do so in different ways. Boys tend to bully by "sexting" (sending messages of a sexual nature) or with messages that threaten physical harm. Girls, on the other hand, more commonly cyberbully by spreading lies and rumors, exposing your secrets, or by excluding you from emails, buddy lists, or other electronic communication. Because cyberbullying is so easy to perpetrate, a child or teen can

easily change roles, going from cyberbullying victim at one point to cyberbully the next, and then back again.



The effects of cyberbullying

Any type of bullying can make you feel hurt, angry, helpless, isolated, even suicidal, or lead to problems such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. In many cases, cyberbullying can be even more painful than face-to-face bullying because:

- Cyberbullying can happen anywhere at any time, even in places where you normally feel safe, such as your home, and at times you'd least expect, such as at the weekend in the company of your family. It can seem like there's no escape from the taunting and humiliation.
- A lot of cyberbullying can be done anonymously, so you may not be sure who is targeting you. This can make you feel even more threatened and can embolden bullies, as they believe online anonymity means they're less likely to get caught. Since cyberbullies can't see your reaction, they will often go much further in their harassment or ridicule than they would do face-to-face with you.
- Cyberbullying can be witnessed by potentially thousands of people. Emails can be forwarded to hundreds of people while social media posts or website comments can often be seen by anyone. The more far-reaching the bullying, the more humiliating it can become.

Tips for kids or teens dealing with cyberbullying

If you are targeted by cyberbullies, it's important not to respond to any messages or posts written about you, no matter how hurtful or untrue. Responding will only make the situation worse and provoking a reaction from you is exactly what the cyberbullies want, so don't give them the satisfaction.

It's also very important that you don't seek revenge on a cyberbully by becoming a cyberbully yourself. Again, it will only make the problem worse and could result in serious legal consequences for you. If you wouldn't say it in person, don't say it online.

Instead, respond to cyberbullying by:

- **Saving the evidence of the cyberbullying**, keep abusive text messages or a screenshot of a webpage, for example, and then report them to a trusted adult, such as a family member, teacher, or school counselor. If you don't report incidents, the cyberbully will often become more aggressive.
- **Reporting threats of harm** and inappropriate sexual messages to the police. In many cases, the cyberbully's actions can be prosecuted by law.
- **Being relentless**. Cyberbullying is rarely limited to one or two incidents. It's far more likely to be a sustained attack on you over a period of time. So, like the cyberbully, you may have to be relentless and keep reporting each and every bullying incident until it stops. There is no reason for you to ever put up with cyberbullying.
- **Preventing communication from the cyberbully**, by blocking their email address, cell phone number, and deleting them from social media contacts. Report their activities to their internet service provider (ISP) or to any social media or other web sites they use to target you. The cyberbully's actions may constitute a violation of the website's terms of service or, depending on the laws in your area, may even warrant criminal charges.

If you are being cyberbullied, remember:

- **Don't blame yourself**. It is not your fault. No matter what a cyberbully says or does, you should not be ashamed of who you are or what you feel. The cyberbully is the person with the problem, not you.
- **Try to view cyberbullying from a different perspective**. The cyberbully is an unhappy, frustrated person who wants to have control over your feelings so that you feel as badly as they do. Don't give them the satisfaction.
- **Don't beat yourself up**. Don't make a cyberbullying incident worse by dwelling on it or reading the message over and over. Instead, delete any cyberbullying messages and focus on positive experiences. There are many wonderful things about you so be proud of who you are.
- **Get help**. Talk to a parent, teacher, counselor, or other trusted adult. Seeing a counselor does not mean there is something wrong with you.

- **Learn to deal with stress.** Finding ways to relieve stress can make you more resilient so you won't feel overwhelmed by cyberbullying. Exercise, meditation, positive self-talk, muscle relaxation, and breathing exercises are all good ways to manage the stress from cyberbullying.
- **Spend time doing things you enjoy.** The more time you spend with activities that bring you pleasure—sports, hobbies, hanging out with friends who don't participate in cyberbullying, for example—the less significance cyberbullying will have on your life.

Tips for parents dealing with a cyberbullying child

- **Educate your child about cyberbullying.** Your child may not understand how hurtful and damaging their behavior can be. Foster empathy and awareness by encouraging your child to look at their actions from the victim's perspective. Remind your child that cyberbullying can have very serious legal consequences.
- **Manage stress.** Teach your child positive ways to manage stress. Your child's cyberbullying may be an attempt at relieving stress. Or your own stress, anxiety, or worry may be creating an unstable home environment. Exercise, spending time in nature, or playing with a pet are great ways for both kids and adults to let off steam and relieve stress.
- **Set limits with technology.** Let your child know you'll be monitoring his or her use of computers, tablets, smartphones, email, and text messaging. If necessary, remove access to technology until behavior improves.
- **Establish consistent rules of behavior.** Make sure your child understands your rules and the punishment for breaking them. Children may not think they need discipline, but a lack of boundaries sends a signal that the child is unworthy of the parents' time, care, and attention.

Reference: <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/cyberbullying.htm>