



## Dealing with Cyberbullying

### Protecting Your Child from Online Bullies



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?

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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 face-to-face 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

### Cyberbullying and Suicide

If cyberbullying means you, or someone you know, feels suicidal, please **call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) in the U.S., or visit IASP ([http://www.iasp.info/resources/Crisis\\_Centres/](http://www.iasp.info/resources/Crisis_Centres/)) or [Suicide.org](http://www.suicide.org/international-suicide-hotlines.html) (<http://www.suicide.org/international-suicide-hotlines.html>) to find a helpline in your country.**

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

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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.

### Find support from those who don't cyberbully

Having trusted people you can turn to for encouragement and support will boost your resilience when being cyberbullied. Reach out to connect with family and real friends or explore ways of [making new friends](#). (/articles/relationships-communication/making-good-friends.htm) There are plenty of people who will love and appreciate you for who you are.

- **Unplug from technology.** Taking a break from your computer, tablet, iPod, video games, and cell phone can open you up to meeting new people.
- **Find others who share your same values and interests.** You may be able to make friends at a youth group, book club, or religious organization. Learn a new sport, join a team, or take up a new hobby such as chess, art, or music.
- **Share your feelings about bullying.** Talk to a parent, counselor, coach,

religious leader, or trusted friend. Expressing what you're going through can make a huge difference to the way you feel, even if it doesn't change the situation.

- **Boost your confidence.** Exercise is a great way to help you feel good about yourself, as well as reduce stress. Punch a mattress or take a kick boxing class to work off your anger.

### Gay and lesbian youths are particularly at risk of cyberbullying.

Other kids and teens may harass, exclude, or try to out you. If you need help, call:

- In the U.S.: **1-866-4-U-TREVOR (488-7386)**
- In Canada: **1-877-OUT-IS-OK (688-1765)**
- In the UK: **0207 837 7324**
- In Australia: **1800 184 527**
- In New Zealand: **(04) 473 7878**

## Tips for parents and teachers to stop cyberbullying

No matter how much pain it causes, kids are often reluctant to tell parents or teachers about cyberbullying because they fear that doing so may result in losing their computer or cell phone privileges. While parents should always monitor a child's use of technology, it's important not to threaten to withdraw access or otherwise punish a child who's been the victim of cyberbullying.

### Spot the warning signs of cyberbullying

Your child may be the victim of cyberbullying if he or she:

- ▶ Becomes sad, angry, or distressed during or after using the Internet or cell phone.
- ▶ Appears anxious when receiving a text, IM, or email.
- ▶ Avoids discussions or is secretive about computer or cell phone activities.
- ▶ Withdraws from family, friends, and activities they previously enjoyed.
- ▶ Suffers an unexplained drop in grades.
- ▶ Refuses to go to school or to specific classes, or avoids group activities.

- ▶ Shows changes in mood, behavior, sleep, appetite, or shows signs of [depression](#) (/articles/depression/parents-guide-to-teen-depression.htm) or anxiety.

## Prevent cyberbullying before it starts

- To stay safe with technology, teach your kids to:
- Refuse to pass along cyberbullying messages.
- Tell their friends to stop cyberbullying.
- Block communication with cyberbullies; delete messages without reading them.
- Never post or share their personal information online (including full name, address, telephone number, school name, parents' names, credit card number, or Social Security number) or their friends' personal information.
- Never share their Internet passwords with anyone, except you.
- Talk to you about their life online.
- Not put anything online that they wouldn't want their classmates to see, even in email.
- Not send messages when they're angry or upset.
- Always be as polite online as they are in person.

Source: *National Crime Prevention Council*

## Monitor your child's technology use

Regardless of how much your child resents it, you can only protect him or her by monitoring what they do online.

- ▶ Keep the computer in a busy area of your house so you can easily monitor its use, rather than allowing your child use a laptop or tablet in his or her bedroom, for example.
- ▶ Limit data access to your child's smart phone if he or she uses it to surf the web. Some wireless providers allow you to turn off text messaging services during certain hours.
- ▶ Set up filters on your child's computer. Tracking software can block inappropriate web content and help you check up on your child's online activities.
- ▶ Insist on knowing your child's passwords and learn the common acronyms kids use online and in text messages.

- ▶ Know who your child communicates with online. Go over your child's address book and instant messenger "buddy list" with them. Ask who each person is and how your child knows them.
- ▶ Encourage your child to tell you or another trusted adult if they receive threatening messages or are otherwise targeted by cyberbullies, while reassuring them that doing so will not result in their loss of computer or cell phone privileges.

## Deal with incidents of cyberbullying

- Don't reply to any incidents of cyberbullying but do save and document the threats (harassing messages, sexually explicit pictures, or threatening texts, for example) and report them to the police. Seek appropriate legal advice.
- Report incidents of cyberbullying to the ISP, the cell phone company, and to any web site used in the cyberbullying.
- Block the cyberbully's email address or cell phone number, or change your child's email address or phone number.
- If you are able to identify the cyberbully, you could contact his or her parents or notify your child's school if the cyberbully is also a student there. Many schools have established protocols for handling cyberbullying but check with your child first as he or she may prefer to resolve the problem privately.

## If your child is a cyberbully

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It can be difficult for any parent to learn that their child is bullying others but it's important to take steps to end the negative behavior before it has serious and long-term consequences for your child.

If your child has responded to being cyberbullied by employing their own cyberbullying tactics, you can help your child find better ways to deal with the problem. If your child has trouble managing strong emotions such as anger, hurt, or frustration, talk to a therapist about helping your child learn to cope with these feelings in a healthy way.

## Bullying is often a learned behavior

Some cyberbullies can learn aggressive behavior from their experiences at home, so it's important to set a good example with your own Internet and messaging habits. As a parent, you may be setting a bad example for your kids by spanking or otherwise striking them, verbally or physically abusing your spouse, or by displaying bullying behavior such as:

- ▶ Sending or forwarding abusive emails or text messages that target coworkers or acquaintances.
- ▶ Communicating with people online in ways that you wouldn't do face-to-face.
- ▶ Abusing your child's sports coach, umpires and referees, or members of the opposing team.
- ▶ Swearing at other drivers on the road.
- ▶ Humiliating a waitress, shop assistant, or cab driver who makes a mistake.
- ▶ Talking negatively or writing abuse messages about other students, parents, or teachers so that your child thinks it's acceptable to use verbal abuse or cyberbullying to intimidate others.

## 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.



## Cyberbullying and the law

- Certain types of cyberbullying may violate school codes or breach anti-discrimination and sexual harassment laws.
- While laws differ around the world, in the U.S., cyberbullying can warrant a misdemeanor cyber-harassment charge or result in a charge of juvenile delinquency. It typically can result in a child losing their ISP or IM accounts as a “terms of service” violation.
- In some cases, if hacking or password and identity theft is involved, it can be considered a serious criminal matter under state and federal law.
- In many states “sexting” or forwarding a “sext” (sexual messages) is punishable as distributing or possessing child pornography, and requires even minors to be registered as sex offenders.
- If an adult becomes involved, cyberbullying becomes cyber-harassment or cyber-stalking, serious criminal offenses.

### More help for abuse

[Teenagers' Guide to Depression: \(/articles/depression/teenagers-guide-to-depression.htm\)](/articles/depression/teenagers-guide-to-depression.htm) Tips and Tools for Helping Yourself or a Friend

[Help for Parents of Troubled Teens: \(/articles/parenting-family/helping-troubled-teens.htm\)](/articles/parenting-family/helping-troubled-teens.htm) Dealing with Anger, Violence, Delinquency, and Other Teen Behavior Problems

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