Cyberbullying FAQs

What is cyberbullying?

A cyberbully is someone who uses online technology repeatedly 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 phones. Kids who bully online may act more harshly than they would in a face-to-face confrontation. Cyberbullying is most common among middle-school-age children but can happen at any age.

How common is cyberbullying?

One well-regarded study by the Cyberbullying Research Center found that in 2010, 20 percent of students ages 11-18 reported being repeatedly made fun of by another person online, and about the same percentage admitted to bullying someone else online. About 10 percent said they had both bullied others and been bullied themselves.

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

How can I protect my child against being bullied online?

Make sure your child knows:

- Treat everyone with respect, online or off. If you wouldn't say something in person, don't say it online.
- 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 or receiving a text message.
- 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.
- Appearing uneasy about going to school.

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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 and not overreact. Tell your child that by talking it over, you can work out a plan to deal with it. You might:

- Help them be resilient. While they cannot necessarily control the actions of others, they can choose how to respond. Resilience is a good skill to help them weather tough situations even beyond bullying.

- Advise them to ignore the bully.

- Contact school officials. Make them aware of the problem and ask them about their policy to deal with cyberbullying. Hopefully, the school has strategies or programs in place for handling bullying at school. (Many schools are required by law to investigate and mediate bullying. Check with your state attorney general's office if you're not sure.) If not, work with school officials to come up with a solution to the problem.

- 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.

- Help your child save evidence of the bullying online. This may be needed if an investigation is made.

- 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.

What should I tell my child to do if he witnesses cyberbullying?

Children most often find themselves in the role of bystander. They're not the bully and they're not being bullied, but they see the bullying occur. What they do at this point has a significant effect on whether the bullying continues. By reporting an incident, kids help create an atmosphere where bullying isn't tolerated. By ignoring it, they allow it to continue. If your child sees bullying occur, tell him to:

- Tell a trusted adult. Doing nothing enables the bully.

- If you feel comfortable doing so, you can stand up for the person being bullied. (Some children are not comfortable with this because they fear becoming a target themselves.)

- Let your child know that bullying isn't cool so they shouldn't be afraid to report it to someone.

To stay informed about cyberbullying, visit the Cyberbullying Research Center at **www.cyberbullying.us**.