

CYBERBULLYING: Stop Online Social Cruelty



What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is being cruel to others by sending or posting harmful material using the Internet or a cell phone. Examples of cyberbullying include mean text messages or emails, rumors sent by email or posted on social networking sites such as Facebook, and embarrassing pictures, videos, websites, or fake profiles. Cyberbullying may extend into excluding others from online groups and cyberstalking.

Why is cyberbullying different?

- Cyberbullying can happen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and can occur even when someone is alone. Youth who are cyberbullied have a harder time getting away from the behavior.
- Cyberbullying messages and images can be posted anonymously and distributed quickly to a very wide audience. It can be difficult and sometimes impossible to trace the source.
- Deleting inappropriate messages, texts, and pictures is extremely difficult after they have been posted or sent.

Who are the cyberbullies?

- A cyberbully may be a person whom the target knows or an online stranger. A cyberbully may be anonymous and may enlist the aid of others, including online “friends.”
- Cyberbullying may be a continuation of, or in retaliation for, in-school bullying. It may be related to fights about relationships or be based on hate or bias. Some teens think cyberbullying is entertaining – a fun game.
- Teens may not be concerned about the consequences of harmful online behavior because they think they are invisible online. Thus, they think they can’t be punished. There is no tangible feedback about the harm they cause. Online social norms that promote unmoderated content contribute to the freedom to post harmful information.

What harm is caused from cyberbullying?

The 2011 [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey](#) finds that 16% of high school students were cyberbullied in the past year. Cyberbullying can cause great emotional harm to the target. Youth who are cyberbullied are more likely to use alcohol and drugs, skip school, receive poor grades, have lower self-esteem, and have more health problems. Teens are reluctant to tell adults, for fear of restriction from online activities, and possible retaliation by the bully.

Warning Signs that Your Child Might be the Target

- Expression of sadness or anger during or after Internet use.
- Withdrawal from friends and activities, school avoidance, and decline of grades, signs of depression and sadness.
- Having any other difficulties with peers or experiencing bullying at school.

Prevent Your Child from Being a Cyberbully

- Make it clear that all Internet use must be in accord with family values of kindness and respect for others and any violation of this expectation will result in monitoring of all online activities using Internet use monitoring software.
- If your child is being bullied at school, work with the school to stop the bullying and make sure your child knows that he/she should not to retaliate online.

Preventing Your Child from Becoming a Target of Cyberbullying

- Frequently discuss the concerns of public disclosure of intimate personal information and the value of modesty.
- Visit and discuss the values demonstrated by others in your child’s favorite online communities.
- Insist that the school intervene effectively to address any in-school bullying.
- Seek to “bully-proof” your child by reinforcing your child’s unique individual strengths and fostering healthy friendships with teens you can trust to be kind.

Responsible Management of Children’s Internet Use

Parents have a moral and legal obligation to ensure their children engage in safe and responsible behavior online.

- Keep the computer in a public place and supervise its use.
- Find out what online sites/communities your child uses and periodically review what your child is posting. Emphasize that these sites are public and that your child should never post personal contact information, intimate personal information, or provocative sexually oriented material. (Your child may argue that you are invading his/her privacy. These are PUBLIC places!)
- Tell your child that you will investigate his/her private online communications if you have reason to believe that he/she has engaged in unsafe or irresponsible behavior. You can install monitoring software to do this.
- Make joint Internet use management agreements with the parents of your child’s friends – addressing the time they can spend online, approved activities, and a mutual parental agreement to monitor and report.

Action Steps and Options to Respond to Cyberbullying

- Save the evidence.
- Identify the cyberbully(s). Ask your ISP for help.
- Clearly tell the cyberbully to stop.
- Ignore the cyberbully by leaving the online environment and/or blocking communications.
- File a complaint with the Internet or cell phone company.
- Seek assistance from the school. (But because of free speech protections, if the cyberbullying is occurring totally off-campus, your school may only be able to provide informal assistance, not formal discipline.)
- Send the cyberbully’s parents a certified letter that includes the evidence of cyberbullying. Demand that the actions stop and harmful material be removed.
- Contact an attorney to send a letter or file a lawsuit against the parents based on defamation, invasion of privacy, or intentional infliction of emotional distress.
- Call the police, if the cyberbullying involves threats of violence, coercion, intimidation based on hate or bias, and any form of sexual exploitation.

Reporting other concerns ...

If you have suspicions that your child is involved with an online sexual predator, call the police. Do not talk to your child, as he/she could warn the predator. If you see any online threats of school-related violence, call both the school and the police. If you see any material that raises concern that a child is emotionally distressed and may be contemplating suicide, self-harm, or other violence, contact Wake County Crisis and Assessment at 919-250-1260 or Holly Hill Hospital at 919-250-7000, or ask your child’s counselor for help with resources.