# Cyber-Bullying: What Parents Should Know

## What is Cyber-Bullying?

Cyber-bullying is the bullying of others- a pattern of behavior where one child intends to harm another child- by using electronic means. This may be through texting, emails, social media, or posting on websites.

## Why is it So Harmful?

Unlike bullying that occurs face-to-face, cyber bullying can occur anywhere and at any time, making it always present to someone who is being bullied. It can also be done anonymously, which leaves the victim unsure as to who they can trust or how to seek help from the bully. Cyber-bullying can be spread quickly, as many youth have access to the internet and social media. It is also harder to delete or erase incidents of cyber-bullying from the internet. Simply put, cyber-bullying can feel inescapable and terrifying to a victim.

> Almost half of teenagers report being bullied online. 1 in 4 has had it happen more than once.
>
> 70% of students report seeing frequent bullying online.
>
> 81% of young people think bullying online is easier to get away with than bullying in person.
>
> Source: http://www.dosomething.org

## How can it Affect My Child?

Victims of cyber-bullying display many of the same emotional problems that victims of other bullying do, such as increased risk of depression and anxiety disorders. Victims may also skip school or refuse to attend school, which can lead to truancy and other school problems, such as having their grades drop. Victims may avoid social situations and withdraw from others. In extreme situations, some victims have suffered from such emotional distress that they experienced suicidal ideation and may have attempted, or completed, suicide.

## What can I Do to Prevent It?

Monitor your child's cell phone and internet use, to include which apps are installed and being used. Putting a password on their phone will prevent them from downloading apps without your permission, which gives you time to research the safety of social media apps.

Talk to your child about basic internet safety, like not giving out personal information, not talking to people they do not personally know, and not giving out passwords. Remind them that anything on the internet is public- do not share information that you would not want said over the intercom at school!

If you see any warning signs of bullying in your child- depression, anxiety, truant behavior, withdrawing from others- talk to them about what you see. Ask them about their experience with social media, what programs they're using, and who they are talking to. Talk to their teachers and guidance counselors, especially if they are starting to miss school. Truancy can lead to involvement with the juvenile justice system, so getting help is crucial to avoiding this.

**Talk to your child's school if you have concerns about bullying. Many schools have anonymous reporting systems where your child can identify a bully. Working with the school can help prevent behavioral problems and truancy in the school setting.**

**If your child is being threatened, contact law enforcement immediately.**

# What do I Need to Know about Social Media?

**Social media has grown beyond Facebook and Twitter.** There are many cell phone apps that allow individuals and groups of people to talk through the apps, which means that there is no way to monitor the conversations or track use on a bill from a cell phone company. Some apps are specifically designed to be anonymous so the receiver does not know who sent the message. Other apps are designed to be time-limited, so messages "disappear" after a set period of time. All of these features make cyber-bullying easier, as messages can go undetected and be harder for parents to monitor.

In addition to cyber-bullying, may social media sites encourage youth to converse with strangers and meet in person. They also give easy access to explicit and sexual material. If your child is being bullied or sent inappropriate content, try to contact the company directly. Many of them have a format for reporting incidents and getting assistance in blocking users. Some popular social media platforms that parents should be aware of include:

- Facebook
- Kik Messenger
- ooVoo
- WhatsApp
- Instagram
- Tumblr

- Twitter
- Vine
- Burn Note
- Snapchat
- Whisper
- Yik Yak

- MeetMe
- Omegle
- Skout
- Tinder

# What if My Child is Cyber-Bullying Others?

Unfortunately, cyber-bullying is very prevalent in today's youth culture, and there is a chance that your child will get caught up in cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullies often do not "look" like an all-around bully, as they are not more aggressive or disliked. If you have concerns that your child is bullying others online, ask them about it. Have them consider what it would be like to say those things to someone in person, and how it would make them feel to read negative statements about themselves. Ask your child to develop ways to apologize to the individual and try to fix the situation quickly and effectively. You may want to consider having your child see a counselor, as research shows that people who cyber-bully others may have been bullied, are more likely to feel jealousy, and struggle to fit in. People who cyber-bully can be prosecuted for this harassing behavior- even for an offense as serious as murder if the victim harms himself or herself- so it is important that youth also know the serious consequences of bullying.

> Girls are about twice as likely as boys to be victims and perpetrators of cyber bullying.
>
> About 75% of students admit they have visited a website bashing another student.
>
> Source: http://www.dosomething.org

# Resources for Parents

**www.stopbullying.gov   www.dosomething.org   www.cyberbullying.org   www.commonsensemedia.org**

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