

## How Does Cyberbullying Differ From Other Traditional Forms of Bullying?

Available research and experience suggest that cyberbullying may differ from more “traditional” forms of bullying in a number of ways (Willard, 2005), including:

- Cyberbullying can occur any time of the day or night.
- Cyberbullying messages and images can be distributed quickly to a very wide audience.
- Children and youth can be anonymous when cyberbullying, which makes it difficult (and sometimes impossible) to trace them.

## What Can Adults Do To Prevent and Address Cyberbullying?

Adults may not always be present in the online environments frequented by children and youth. Therefore, it is extremely important that adults pay close attention to cyberbullying and the activities of children and youth when using these newer technologies.

### **Suggestions for Parents: Tips To Help Prevent Cyberbullying:**

- Keep your home computer(s) in easily viewable places, such as a family room or kitchen.
- Talk regularly with your child about online activities that he or she is involved in.
  - Talk specifically about cyberbullying and encourage your child to tell you immediately if he or she is the victim of cyberbullying, cyberstalking, or other illegal or troublesome online behavior.
  - Encourage your child to tell you if he or she is aware of others who may be the victims of such behavior.
  - Explain that cyberbullying is harmful and unacceptable behavior. Outline your expectations for responsible online behavior and make it clear that there will be consequences for inappropriate behavior.
- Although adults must respect the privacy of children and youth, concerns for your child’s safety may sometimes override these privacy concerns. Tell your child that you may review his or her online communications if you think there is reason for concern.
- Consider installing parental control filtering software and/or tracking programs, but don’t rely solely on these tools.

### **Tips For Dealing With Cyberbullying That Your Child Has Experienced:**

Because cyberbullying can range from rude comments to lies, impersonations, and threats, your responses may depend on the nature and severity of the cyberbullying. Here are some actions that you may want to take after-the-fact.

- Strongly encourage your child not to respond to the cyberbullying.
- Do not erase the messages or pictures. Save these as evidence.

- Try to identify the individual doing the cyberbullying. Even if the cyberbully is anonymous (e.g., is using a fake name or someone else's identity) there may be a way to track them through your Internet Service Provider. If the cyberbullying is criminal (or if you suspect that it may be), contact the police and ask them to do the tracking.
- Sending inappropriate language may violate the "Terms and Conditions" of email services, Internet Service Providers, Web sites, and cell phone companies. Consider contacting these providers and filing a complaint.
- If the cyberbullying is coming through email or a cell phone, it may be possible to block future contact from the cyberbully. Of course, the cyberbully may assume a different identity and continue the bullying.
- Contact your school. If the cyberbullying is occurring through your school district's Internet system, school administrators have an obligation to intervene. Even if the cyberbullying is occurring off campus, make your school administrators aware of the problem. They may be able to help you resolve the cyberbullying or be watchful for face-to-face bullying.
- Consider contacting the cyberbully's parents. These parents may be very concerned to learn that their child has been cyberbullying others, and they may effectively put a stop to the bullying. On the other hand, these parents may react very badly to your contacting them. So, proceed cautiously. If you decide to contact a cyberbully's parents, communicate with them in writing — not face-to-face. Present proof of the cyberbullying (e.g., copies of an email message) and ask them to make sure the cyberbullying stops.
- Consider contacting an attorney in cases of serious cyberbullying. In some circumstances, civil law permits victims to sue a bully or his or her parents in order to recover damages.
- Contact the police if cyberbullying involves acts such as:
  - Threats of violence
  - Extortion
  - Obscene or harassing phone calls or text messages
  - Harassment, stalking, or hate crimes

If you are uncertain if cyberbullying violates your jurisdiction's criminal laws, contact your local police, who will advise you.

## References

- **Kowalski, R. et al** (August, 2005). *Electronic Bullying Among School-Aged Children and Youth*. Poster presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association. Washington, DC.
- **Opinion Research Corporation** (2006). *Cyber bully pre-teen*. Available at: [www.fightcrime.org/cyberbullying/cyberbullyingpreteen.pdf](http://www.fightcrime.org/cyberbullying/cyberbullyingpreteen.pdf).

- **Opinion Research Corporation** (2006). *Cyber bully teen*. Available at: [www.fightcrime.org/cyberbullying/cyberbullyingteen.pdf](http://www.fightcrime.org/cyberbullying/cyberbullyingteen.pdf).
- **Wolak, J., Mitchell, K., & Finkelhor, D.** (2006). *Online victimization of youth: Five years later*. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.
- **Ybarra, M. L., & Mitchell, K. J.** (2004). Youth engaging in online harassment: Associations with caregiver-child relationships, Internet use, and personal characteristics. *Journal of Adolescence*, 27, 319-336.

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