

CYBER-BULLYING: WHAT EVERY PARENT NEEDS TO KNOW

What is cyber-bullying?

Cyber-bullying is bullying (making threats, spreading rumors, harassing others, intentionally excluding others) that occurs through the use of electronic technology such as cell phones, computers, and tablets. It often takes place via text, e-mail, internet messaging, and social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr.

How can you help your child who has been cyber-bullied?

1. Encourage your child to be honest with you about the ways in which he/she has been threatened, harassed, or mistreated. Tell him/her that any kind of bullying or harassment is wrong and that you are there to help and offer support.
2. When children are cyber-bullied, they often feel like there is no safe haven because they can be bullied at any time, day or night. Limit your child's use of the internet, phones, and other devices, not as a punishment, but as a way of temporarily protecting your child from mistreatment.
3. Instruct your child not to respond to or forward to their peers harassing or threatening messages.
4. Save and print all harassing or threatening messages so that you can show these messages to school personnel or law enforcement officials if necessary.
5. Bring the evidence of cyber-bullying to school administrators or counselors as a way of advocating for your child. Review the Student Handbook or Code of Conduct published by your child's school, so that you can highlight how the bully's behavior has been a violation of school policy. If the school official you speak to does not take action to protect your child, insist on meeting with an administrator at a higher level (e.g. principal, vice principal, superintendent).

How can you promote safe use of electronic technology among children and teenagers?

1. Be aware of your child's use of the internet (e.g. websites visited, friends or peers with whom they are communicating) and use of smart devices (e.g. smart phones, tablets/iPads). Ask your child what friends he/she is communicating with and what the interactions are like. The goal should be to ask questions in a curious and non-judgmental way so that your child feels comfortable showing you his/her Facebook profile or group text messages.
2. When it comes to websites such as Facebook, insist that your child set strict security settings so that only close friends and family members can view his/her profile, pictures, etc.
3. Instruct your child to be cautious when posting pictures or messages online and to avoid posting information or pictures that could hurt or embarrass him/her or others.
4. Instruct your child **NOT** to share phone or internet passwords with friends or peers.
5. Encourage your child to use phones, computers, and tablets in "public" family spaces such as the living room, dining room, or kitchen.
6. Establish times of the day (e.g. dinner time, bedtime) when your child's technological devices must be turned off.

For more information on cyber-bullying or to obtain help for your child who has been cyber-bullied, please contact:

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