

Common Sense on Cyberbullying

What is cyberbullying?

Bullying is not new. But today's kids use cell phones and computers to bully others. They send mean comments, photos, videos, and text messages to hurt and embarrass one another. Much of this type of information is posted on social networking sites like Facebook so it is very public. Millions of people can see it.

Cyberbullying can be done by one person or a group. Kids don't think they can be identified online, so they think it is okay to be mean. They do it any time, 24/7, and it is very difficult for teachers and parents to discover. And once something is digital, it is very hard to get rid of.

How does cyberbullying affect the victim?

The intent of cyberbullying is to make someone unhappy or to make someone suffer. It often makes victims miserable. It hurts their self-confidence and embarrasses and shames them. This emotional damage can last forever.

What can parents do?

- » **Give your children a Code of Conduct.** "If you can't say it to their face, don't text, IM, post it."
- » **Ask your children for information.** Do they know anybody who has been bullied? Talk about it; open the door for them to tell you about cyberbullying.
- » **Explain what will happen to your kids if they engage in bullying.** Tell them exactly what you would do if you were to learn that they had done this.

Tips for parents of elementary school kids:

- » **Don't let your kids spend too much time socializing online.** Choose sites with chat that is already screened. Also explain the rules of cyber behavior. Tell them that the rules are just like all others and that lies and secrets can hurt.
- » **Tell them not to share passwords even with friends.**

Tips for parents of middle school kids:

- » **Watch their use.** Check to see what they are posting online and on cell phones.
- » **Tell your children what to do if they are bullied.** Tell them not to answer, to tell an adult they trust right away, and NOT to delete the message (this is evidence and can be reported).
- » **Explain what will happen if they bully.** Just like with a younger child, create a consequence and stick with it.
- » **Remind your children that there is no privacy on the Internet.** When they post something on a social networking site, add a photo, or send a text, this can all be made public. If they don't want everyone to see it, they shouldn't write/post it.
- » **Tell them not to start something they don't want to finish.** Gossip and game chat can become very ugly in minutes. Remind them to be careful with what they say.

Tips for parents of high school teens:

- » **Tell them to think first.** Even though they like to take risks, this is not the place to do it. Anything they post can be misused by someone else.
- » **Remind them that they can still ask for your help.** Let them know that you will not judge them but help them to handle the situation.

