ConnectSafely

QUICK-GUIDE TO
Cyberbullying

What is cyberbullying?

For the most part, cyberbullying is bullying, only it happens on phones and other connected devices. Most experts agree that it involves repeated harassment and some type of power imbalance—and, when young people are involved, it usually has something to do with what's happening with peers at school. It's important to remember that not every mean comment or unpleasant interaction rises to the level of bullying.

How likely is it?

Centers for Disease Control reports that 15% of high school students were electronically bullied in 2017. Cyberbullying Research Center estimates about 25% of all teens experience cyberbullying. Either way, it's too many, but it's important to note that most teens don't bully others. We point this out not to minimize a serious problem, but to emphasize that bullying is not a norm. Kindness, not cruelty, is the norm.

> ## Parents Ask: What if my child cyberbullies others?
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> Get them to stop the bullying but try not to overreact. Talk with your child, get all the facts and consider probing further in their devices and accounts. Look for underlying issues and problems that might be affecting your child. Even though your child may be engaged in bullying, she is not "a bully." Education, communication and caring—not labels—are the best ways to help her improve.

What are the signs?

Often there are no signs, but you might notice that your child has difficulty sleeping, a change in online habits (such as checking social media constantly), declining grades, not wanting to go to school, feelings of helplessness or decreased self-esteem. In the case of physical bullying, there could be broken or missing items or injuries.

What do I do if my child is cyberbullied?

If your child does experience cyberbullying, as a target or a bystander, supportive parenting can go a long way toward minimizing the impact. It's usually best for your child to not react or retaliate but to block the person who is bullying and save the evidence in case it's needed. But the most important thing to do is talk with your kids about what's going on, help them think through what happened, how they feel about it, and what they're going to do about it. It's important to involve your child in the process, not just take over yourself.

More Advice About Cyberbullying

It's good if your child asks for help. Children who are bullied don't always tell their parents so if your kids do, that's a good thing. Your first task is to listen—find out not only what happened but how your child feels about it and is dealing with it. Never panic or retaliate. Gather the facts and assure your child that you're there for support.

Work with your child. There are two reasons why you'll want to keep your child involved. Bullying and cyberbullying usually involve a loss of dignity or control over a social situation—involving your child in finding solutions helps him or her regain that.

Respond thoughtfully, not fast. What parents don't always know is that they can make things worse for their kids if they act rashly. A lot of cyberbullying involves somebody getting marginalized (put down and excluded), which people who bully may think increases their power or status. If you respond publicly or if your child's peers find out about even a discreet meeting with school authorities, the marginalization can get worse, which is why any response needs to be well thought out.

Remember the ultimate goal is restored self-respect. What your child needs most is to regain a sense of dignity. Sometimes that means standing up to the bully, sometimes not. Together, you and your child can figure out how to get there. It's about healing your child more than punishing those who bully.

The power of resilience. One positive outcome we don't think about (or hear in the news) enough is resilience. We know the human race will never completely eradicate meanness or cruelty, and we also know that bullying is not, as heard in past generations, "normal" or a rite of passage. We need to keep working to eradicate it. But when it does happen and we overcome it—our resilience grows. Resilience isn't something that can be "downloaded" or taught. We grow it through exposure to challenges and figuring out how to deal with them. So sometimes it's important to give our kids space to do that and let them know we have their back.

About ConnectSafely

ConnectSafely is a Silicon Valley, California-based nonprofit organization dedicated to educating users of connected technology about safety, privacy and security. We publish research-based safety tips, parents' guidebooks, advice, news and commentary on all aspects of tech use and policy.

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For more info, visit ConnectSafely.org/ cyberbullying

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