ESSENTIAL THINGS PARENTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CYBERBULLYING



10 Essential Things Parents Need to Know About



"One million children were victims of cyberbullying in 2011 on Facebook alone."



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..... Introduction

21 percent of teens have been victims of cyberbullying at least once in their life.

Month after month the high-tech cruelty of cyberbullying is in the news, from courts considering defamation and libel lawsuits against kids who impersonate others on Facebook, to state legislatures amending child pornography laws to deal with sexting kids. The issue is pervasive. But lawmakers can do only so much, and the legislative process moves slowly by design.



This is where parenting comes in.

Although it is an important national issue, cyberbullying solutions start at home. With open communication we can prevent cyberbullying by teaching our children good citizenship, instilling self-confidence and showing them how to use privacy settings. If they're attacked, we can help minimize the damage by saving evidence and reporting threatening behavior. In tandem, uKnowKids can help parents monitor the communications barrage engulfing their children every day so they can head off problems before it's too late.



In this guide uKnowKids has assembled 10 essential tips for parents so that you have the knowledge you need to understand the problem and the consequences, see the signs, and know how to deal with and even prevent cyberbullying before it devastates a child in your household.

Cyberbullying: Where & How

One huge difference between traditional bullying and cyberbullying is with the proliferation of technology cyberbullying can go on all day and night, anywhere the child is; and it's not just a few bumps and bruises that parents can kiss and make better. Cyberbullies can torment their victims anonymously on a very public forum and others can even join in, if they feel so inclined.

The problem with cyberbullying is that it can spread like wildfire.

- Tim Woda, an Internet and child safety expert and co-founder of uKnow.com

"An embarrassing photo or video can be spread to thousands in a matter of minutes. We equip our kids with this powerful technology, but we don't teach them the ramifications of using it inappropriately. And the worst part is, most parents don't even know it is happening."



Cyberbullying: Where & How



Worse than just some whispered gossip in the hallway, cyberbullying can be in online chat rooms, on "burnbook" websites dedicated to trashing others anonymously, in multiplayer games, on Facebook or other social media hangouts, via instant messages, e-mail or text—basically anywhere bullies can reach their victim's heart through his or her eyes. And all those mean messages are so easy to copy and paste and share with the world that being victimized can happen on a more massive scale than ever before.



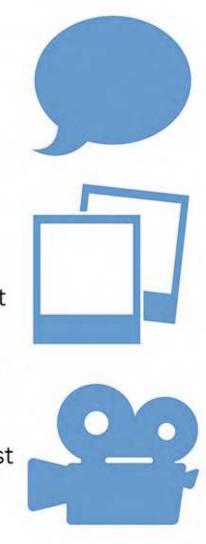
Cyberbullying: Where & How

88% of social media-using teens have seen someone be mean or cruel on a social networking site.

Cyberbullying lives forever. Every word and picture is recorded online, and the victim may never be able to erase it from the Internet. Even if he or she can find a way to delete the original harassing post, who knows how many people have downloaded those hurtful things onto their own phone or computer? Cyberbullying has a long, long life.

Cyberbullying: Where & How

Words, photos and video are all fair game for bullies. Teen cyberbullies can easily take a covert photo or video of their victim in the locker room and send it around secretly. Or they can find a nude picture on the Internet and use a photo editing program to put the victim's face on the image. Cyberbullies even torment their victims by sending unwanted rude images of themselves designed to disgust or embarrass. Discuss with your kids how "obscene" is sometimes even criminal, and the best way to stop it is to ignore it, save it and report it.



For parents, being able to spot the problem puts you one step closer to being able to stop it.

Cyberbullying Warning Signs

Parents want to think that their kids are safe and that they won't be the victim of cyberbullying. But even parents who know their children's friends, or feel they communicate well with their teenagers, still must be aware of the world kids live in. Kids may try to hide problems from their parents, thinking they can deal with it on their own, and be reluctant to confide in anyone.



Cyberbullying Warning Signs

- Depression
- Suddenly stopping using computers, phones, video games or social media
- Stressful or anxious reactions to text messages, e-mails or instant messages
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Reluctance to attend school and social events
- Avoidance of conversations about computer use
- Low self-esteem
- Declining grades
- Lack of hunger
- Trouble sleeping
- Social isolation
- Stomachaches or headaches (real or fake)
- Anger, moodiness or sulking after using social media
- Abruptly shutting off or walking away from the computer mid-use
- Unexplained weight loss or gain
- Suicidal thoughts or suicide attempts

Cyberbullying Warning Signs

If you notice some of these signs in your child, it's time to talk with your kid about what's going on. Being the victim of cyberbullying can be miserable, so don't minimize the problem or ignore it. Kids and teens are particularly susceptible to cyberbullying because they resist confiding in their parents and care deeply what their peers think of them. At a minimum these are signals that something is happening in their world, so keep your eyes open. If you think your child is suffering from any type of depression, whether induced by social networking or not, don't hesitate to get help.

This is the time for your children to know that you are on his or her side, no matter what.





Teach Your Kids What to Do

As all parents know, cyberbullying is a widespread problem that most kids today will unfortunately be exposed to at some point in their lives. Many people brush it off as "kids will be kids," but for some tween and teen victims, the bullying becomes the source of anxiety, depression and other emotional and behavioral problems. Some have even taken their own lives in response to unrelenting cyberbullying.

The main advice that has always applied to traditional bullies also applies to cyberbullies: Ignore them. If that doesn't work, report them. Both can be tough for child to do, but for the behavior to stop, it takes strength. Arm your kids with the know-how to block other users, to make use of privacy settings and to know that there are places to turn.





Teach Your Kids What to Do







- Ignore mean or threatening messages.
- Block the sender.
- Save the evidence.
- > Turn off the computer and walk away.
- Tell a parent or trusted adult.
- Flag inappropriate or threatening posts.
- File a report with the website, cell phone service, cybertipline.com or police.
- Change e-mail addresses, numbers or user IDs.
- Take a break from social networking and enjoy your true friends in person.









Cyberbullying: How Parents Should Respond

If you hear your child has been a victim of cyberbullying even just a hint of it—quell your rage, put your parenting pants on and contain the problem. Cyberbullying can have a lasting, negative impact on your child, so you want to end it swiftly and decisively. Even though the effects can be more far-reaching than "traditional" schoolyard bullying, cyberbullying is sometimes easier to deal with. For one, there is a trail. Cyberbullying leaves hard proof to show parents, teachers or even police if it gets out of control.

First, don't overreact. Get all the details before assuming the worst. Even if your child is partly responsible (for instance, your child is now being cyberbullied in response to something cruel he or she previously said or did online), take the time to listen first, without interrupting. Resist the urge to immediately punish if your child shares culpability, as this could discourage your child from coming to you in the future.

Cyberbullying: How Parents Should Respond



Meet with school administrators to discuss a plan of action and to learn about the school's bullying/cyberbullying policy.



Talk about the situation with the bully's parents. A school guidance counselor can act as a mediator for this type of meeting. Nude photos in particular should be reported immediately to the parents/guardians of the originator, as well as school counselors, so that they can manage the situation.



Report the bullying incidents to your Internet Service Provider, mobile telephone company or the website operator. Each will take this matter seriously.



Set up new accounts. If many people are involved, it may be necessary to change your child's mobile number, e-mail address, screen names and user names.



If you feel like your child is in danger, contact your local police.

If your child is living in two households due to a divorce, it is important to speak with your child's other parent about cyberbullying and to develop a consolidated plan to avoid or address the issue. It may also be wise to consider the use of a parental intelligence system so you can stay better connected to their digital world.

Prevention Through Communication

Cyberbullying might be fairly new, but the prevention method sure isn't. It comes down to the same thing with any big issue or relationship: communication, communication. Good communication will ensure that your teen doesn't feel the need to lie about his or her Internet activity—or at least to lie about it as often. Kids need to feel comfortable approaching parents, teachers and trusted adults if and when they experience cyberbullying, as well as any other online incident that might bother them.





Here are seven things parents can do to encourage their kids to connect with them:



Have an open relationship.

Before you introduce your kids to the Internet, cultivate a relationship in which communication flows openly. Kids who talk to their parents openly are more likely to seek help or advice when an event occurs that makes them feel uncomfortable. Make it a point to ask about their day at school, their friends and their interests. Start open-ended conversations. Kids and teens love to talk. Be there to listen.

Talk about cyberbullying.

If your child is involved in MySpace or Twitter, participates in social gaming, has a camera phone with texting capabilities or uses photo-sharing sites, then you need to have a conversation about the importance of refusing to contribute to cyberbullying in any form. Talk about it before it happens.







Stay informed.

Ask your child:

Has anyone ever been mean to you online? How did you respond?

Have you ever been mean to anyone online? Why? Is it OK to forward a text message making fun of someone? Why or why not?

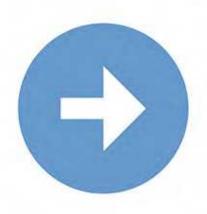
Do you know your school's policy on bullying? Which teacher would you talk to if you were being bullied?

Prepare your child.

Make sure your child is prepared to identify cyberbullying and knows how to deal with an incident should it occur. Whether it's happening to them or they see it happening to others, it's the same rule of three: ignore, save, report. Kids should never, ever respond to a cyberbully, especially by trying to retaliate by doing something similar. Becoming a cyberbully will not solve the problem.







Provide direction.

Ask your teens to think about how their actions affect others and how those actions will affect their or someone else's future, both personally and professionally. As a parent, you can help provide direction to your children in a time when they may not have the necessary foresight to think about the long-term effects before they press "send," whether it's a hateful sentence or a defamatory photo of someone.

Know what's going on at school.

Cyberbullying rarely happens in a vacuum. It usually happens in combination with in-person bullying at school. Establish a good rapport with your child's teachers, principals and guidance counselor. Talk with your child about who is on your children's social networking buddy list and how they know each person. Are they really friends with each of these people?







Reinforce availability.

Unfortunately, some kids avoid talking to their parents when they are victims of cyberbullying. Victims are often afraid that being a tattletale will just make the bullying worse. Keep reinforcing that your kids can talk to you when the going gets tough, that you've got their back and will help rather than "freak out on them," which is what they fear. Along with these practical tips, help them to see the big picture: this won't last forever, and life gets better after high school.

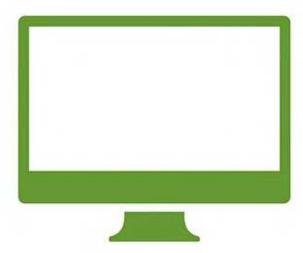
www.uKnowKids.com

Prevention Through Privacy

It's never too early to start the online safety conversation with children.

"Just imagine teaching your child how to ride a bike for the first time and thinking you can skip training wheels; they will get hurt," said Tyler O'Rourke, uKnowKids community outreach manager.

Equipping kids with basic online skills can help them prevent cyberbullying or at least minimize the damage if cyberbullying happens to them.



Prevention Through Privacy

Teach them,

HOW

- > to use privacy settings.
- to request the removal of offensive information.
- > to block unfriendly users.
- to save the evidence, whether it's a text message, screen shot, web page address or chat window.

NOT

- to accept just anyone as a friend.
- to share their passwords.
- to share contact information online.

THAT

- they should report cyberbullying to you, a trusted adult, the police, the website www.cybertipline.com and/or the Internet service provider, whether it happens to them or others.
- > anything they say online is there forever.
- "private" messages might not be kept private—it's easy to forward and repost, or a friend's wall might be set as "public."
- spreading rumors and gossip makes them a bully, too.

Prevention Through Life Skills

School groups and celebrities have taken up the anti-bullying crusade, but that's not enough. There is no magic formula, but if you can help your child master these skills, he or she will be less likely to become a victim and be better equipped to successfully deal with cyberbullying if it happens.



Promote self-esteem and confidence.

Encourage them to find activities they enjoy and develop skills and talents. Allow them to be proud of their accomplishments. It will give them the kind of confidence that Internet bullies can't take away. Confident kids are less likely to be picked on, and they're also better able to shrug off bullying if it does happen.

Prevention Through Life Skills

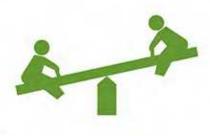


Teach restraint and thinking before they act.

As soon as an image leaves a phone or computer, all control over it is lost. Phones get lost, computers get stolen and social networking accounts get hacked. Kids should never take an image that they wouldn't want everyone—family, friends and teachers—to see. No matter how difficult it may seem, they need to ignore bullying. Bullies want a reaction. Retaliating could also mean that your child could be punished too. If a reaction is warranted, kids should report it to adults instead.

Enable social skills.

Even if your child is shy, initiate playdates or hangouts with peers to let them practice social skills and friend-making. Some kids have a large group of friends; others just like to have one or two. How many isn't important, but every child needs at least one good friend who is always on their side.





Prevention Through Life Skills



Require good hygiene.

Make sure your child regularly bathes, washes his or her face, brushes teeth, combs hair and wears clean clothes. Provide deodorant for kids who've hit puberty. Practicing good hygiene will help prevent teens from getting picked on.

Teach them how to cope with failure or disappointment.

Self-affirmations, journaling and exercise are all good ways to deal with let-downs.





Teach empathy.

If kids can imagine how the recipient of an angry text will respond, they'll be less likely to send the mean words. There is a difference between what's funny and what's mean. Sometimes it's only the reaction of the recipient that separates the two. Sometimes intent comes into play as well.



Prevention Through Life Skills



Teach assertiveness.

It can be a formal self-defense or martial arts class or just talking at home about how to stand up for yourself with a firm "stop it," but modeling and practicing being assertive can help prepare kids for when they have to do it for real.

Encourage involvement.

Whether it's a sport, a club, or a church youth group, your child should be involved in something and feel like part of a team. Your child should also feel like a valuable part of the family "team" as well.



What if My Child Is the Bully?

19% of teens have **cyberbullied others** at least once in their life.

It's easier to believe that your tween or teen could be a victim of cyberbullying than to believe that he or she could actually be engaging in cyberbullying behavior. But, for some, it's easy to be mean when you can hide behind a secret identity and screen.

Cyberbullies don't always fit the traditional "bully" mold. They are sometimes quiet or shy kids who wouldn't dare to bully someone in person, and they might be the victims of cyberbullying themselves. Often, if you remove the anonymity of the Internet and confront them, they'll stop.

What if My Child Is the Bully?

After you get over the initial shock of finding out your child's actions, take these steps:



Stay calm.

It can be very disturbing to read what your child has been saying to others, but remember that kids often type things they would never say and often act more aggressively online than they really are.

Ask questions first.

Don't assume you know what your child's motivations are. Ask first why he or she said it, and listen without interrupting. Ask how your child feels about it now and how it might have affected the person on the receiving end.





Reinstate online privileges gradually.

Grounding the child from the Internet might be an appropriate consequence for the behavior, but it isn't a permanent solution. After talking about online rules, start gradually allowing access to the Internet (with increased parental monitoring), increasing privileges as the child uses it responsibly.



What if My Child Is the Bully?



Try to make reparations.

If you know who your child has been cyberbullying, contact the family to apologize. Doing so in a letter is least awkward for everyone involved, but don't make excuses for your child or expect instant forgiveness. The fact that your child was bullying others online isn't necessarily a reflection on your parenting. The important thing now is to talk to your child and to stop the inappropriate behavior.

Doesn't Apply? Be Proactive

Parents, even if this doesn't apply to you now, think about the following: Would you consider an amnesty policy for encouraging your child to tell you when something is wrong? Think about your "house rules" and discuss them with your family. Have your children pledge that they will not post anything rude, offensive, or threatening; send or forward images and information that might embarrass, hurt, or harass someone; or take anyone's personal information and use it to damage or her reputation.

See uKnowKids' resources page for a link to a <u>pledge</u> for your kids to follow.



Teach Your Kids What Not to Do

Kids might not even realize that their normal "trash talking" could be interpreted as bullying especially because they can't see the person's reaction on the other end. These behaviors are also actually forms of cyberbullying, not just "joking around":

- Forwarding personal texts or photos.
- Impersonating someone else online.
- Changing someone else's password.
- Falsely reporting others to chat room or forum administrators.
- > Rating people or voting at an online bashing site.
- Reading someone else's e-mails or private information without their permission.
- Signing people up for things online.
- Posting pictures or information about others.
- Changing a profile or away message to embarrass or intimidate someone.
- Gossiping and spreading rumors via text, instant message, e-mail or posts.

Teach Your Kids What Not to Do

Not all cyberbullies are bad kids.

The anonymity of the Internet, combined with the tendency of teens to "join in" when they see their peers doing something, can lead to poor Internet choices that can hurt others. We give teens and tweens an enormous amount of technology to handle, sometimes before they have the maturity and impulse control necessary to use it responsibly.

Impress upon your children that even though it feels like they're "only" typing or texting, some online actions can cause real-world damage. Before saying or doing something online that involves another person, kids should ask themselves:

- Would I be embarrassed if my parent found out I was doing this?
- Would I still do this if an adult was looking over my shoulder?
- Would I show this post to grandma or hang it up on a real wall?
- A How would I feel if I was the subject of this particular e-mail, text or picture?
- A Is this violating someone's privacy?
- If I retaliate, will it just get worse?

Teach Your Kids What Not to Do

No innocent bystanders.

If your child is aware of cyberbullying at school, he or she should help stop it. Staying silent just contributes to the abuse. Kids can report abuse to school administrators or teachers, offer support to the victim and, most important, not contribute to further cyberbullying. As long as cyberbullies feel social approval from others, the abuse will continue. If children show that they are unwilling to support cyberbullying or let it go under the radar, the bullies are more likely to back off.



When Cyberbullying Is a Crime

Saying something hateful to someone might be free speech, but when actions go beyond that and venture into harassment, intimidation, threats, stalking, hacking into another person's computer and sending explicit photos to minors, that's when the law can step in with real charges—and in the case of child pornography or sexual predator laws, cyberbullying can have lifetime ramifications.



Forwarding a sexual picture of someone underage is an even bigger mistake than taking and sending one in the first place (even a child sending one of him or herself). Not only does it open up the person in the image to further humiliation, but it exposes the sender to the double charge of possessing and distributing child pornography.

When Cyberbullying Is a Crime

"There is only a limited number of things a parent can control after a sexting incident, so the best time to engage in this conversation is before you allow them to have a mobile phone or social networking account," said Tim Woda, Internet and child safety expert and co-founder of uKnow.com. "When it comes to sexting, being proactive is being safe."

Nude photos could turn you into a sex offender in the eyes of the law. "

Some states are changing their pornography laws to not include minors sending pictures to minors, but beware if your child is dating someone who turns 18 before she or he does.

When Cyberbullying is a Crime



Remind your kids that there is no "self-defense" argument that will work here. Retaliation also counts as bullying and can share the same consequences.



Schools with "zero tolerance policies" about bullying, cyber or otherwise, may leave no room for any kind of defense, context of the actions or appeal. A student could be suspended or expelled after a first-time offense.



If your school's policy is zero tolerance, you should know it, and you should communicate those consequences to your children.

How uKnowKids Can Help

uKnowKids is a child internet and mobile safety product created by the world's leading parental intelligence company, uKnow.com. We are here to help fight the battle of cyberbullying against children, yours in particular.

There are many ways we can help:

- uKnowKids monitors and aggregates your child's social networks, including Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and Instagram, in one place so you can easily spot any usual and dangerous activity. uKnowKids will also send notifications to your mobile phone via text message or e-mail address if there is any behavior that could be considered cyberbullying.
- Our product makes it easier to monitor activities and trends on all social media platforms. That way, if one person is interacting more with your child, possibly in a negative way, you can easily spot it.

How uKnowKids Can Help

- Tagging embarrasing, photoshopped or inappropriate pictures are very common forms of cyberbullying. uKnowKids allows you to easily see all of the images associated with your child's social network sites which allows you to take appropriate measures before the situtation gets out of hand.
- Mobile phone monitoring also makes it easy to see if your child is cyberbullying someone or becoming the victim of cyberbullying via harrasing or unkind text messages.

There are countless other ways that uKnowKids.com can help combat the problems of cyberbullying before they ruin lives. To learn more and take the first step in protecting your child, visit our website and our resources page.

Contributors ·

Tim Woda

Tim is co-founder and resident Child Safety Advocate at uKnow.com. Tim originally conceived of uKnow.com following his own child's encounter with an Internet child predator. While his son was thankfully unharmed, the incident inspired him to become a passionate advocate for empowering families and helping them to protect their children from today's scariest digital dangers.

Jenny Evans

Jenny Evans is a mother of four and a freelance writer specializing in parenting, childhood, and family issues.

Cathy Jones

Cathy is a freelance writer that has been in publishing for nearly 20 years in positions ranging from small-town newspaper reporter to editor of K-12 nonfiction for educational publishers.

Resources

ACLU-WA: Sexting and the Law - Press Send to Turn Teenagers into Registered Sex Offenders

http://www.aclu-wa.org/blog/sexting-and-law-press-send-turn-teenag ers-registered-sex-offenders

Time Healthland: Teen Sexting Linked to Real-World Risky Sexual Behavior

http://healthland.time.com/2012/09/17/teen-sexting-linked-to-real-w orld-risky-sexual-behavior/

CDC: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System Survey http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm

US Department of Health & Human Services: Stop Bullying.gov http://www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/factors/index.html

Findlaw.com: Can Parents Sue for Cyberbullying?

http://blogs.findlaw.com/injured/2010/11/can-parents-sue-for-cyberb ullying.html

Cyberbullying: The Online Crime of Insecurity, Ignorance, and Cowardice

http://blog.identitytheftcouncil.org/?p=198

State of Connecticut: OLR Research Report: Penalties for Computer Hacking

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www.uKnowKids.com

Resources

Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment and Technology Law: "The Child as Victim and Perpetrator:

Laws Punishing Juvenile 'Sexting'"; Vol. 13:1:129

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The Star: [Canada] Supreme Court rules girl can protect her identity in Facebook defamation suit http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/politics/article/1262984--su preme-court-rules-girl-can-protect-her-identity-in-facebook-defamation-suit

CBS News: Teens Are Sending 60 Texts a Day, Study Says http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-501465_162-57400228-501465/te ens-are-sending-60-texts-a-day-study-says/

Resources

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Computer from The Noun Project Headset designed by Marwa Boukarim from The Noun Project Cursor from The Noun Project Cursor designed by Fernando Vasconcelos from The Noun Project Plug-In designed by Stirling Tschan from The Noun Project Cell Phone designed by Marwa Boukarim from The Noun Project Sad designed by Tobias F. Wolf from The Noun Project Stress designed by Shreya Chakravarty from The Noun Project People designed by Monika Ciapala from The Noun Project Warning designed by Unknown from The Noun Project Caution designed by Sam Ahmed from The Noun Project Newspaper designed by Scott Lewis from The Noun Project Gavel designed by Connie Shu from The Noun Project Handcuffs designed by Stephen West from The Noun Project Globe from The Noun Project School designed by Chris Cole from The Noun Project Video Camera designed by Drew Ellis from The Noun Project Arrow Right designed by P.J. Onori from The Noun Project Like designed by Marwa Boukarim from The Noun Project Comb designed by Randall Barriga from The Noun Project Friends designed by Rob Schill from The Noun Project

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