

Stop Cyberbullying Before it Starts

Today's teens use technology more than ever. Most have high-speed Internet access, which they use to send instant messages to their friends, create blogs and online videos, keep personal profiles on social networking websites, share photos, and more. Many teens also have cell phones and spend hours text-messaging friends. Technology, especially the Internet, allows all of us immediate access to information, which can greatly benefit our lives. However, it has also provided some people with the means to exploit the innocent, commit crimes, and inflict injury on others. This technology has allowed some teens to take the bullying that thrives in school hallways into cyberspace.

Forty-three percent of teens have been victims of cyberbullying in the last year.

Cyberbullying is using the Internet, cell phones, video game systems, or other technology to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person. Cyberbullies victimize teens in a variety of ways:

- Nearly 20 percent of teens had a cyberbully pretend to be someone else in order to trick them online, getting them to reveal personal information.
- Seventeen percent of teens were victimized by someone lying about them online.
- Thirteen percent of teens learned that a cyberbully was pretending to be them while communicating with someone else.

- Ten percent of teens were victimized because someone posted unflattering pictures of them online, without permission.

Youth give many reasons for bullying; as adults, you can help stop cyberbullying by learning why youth cyberbully and by teaching youth how to interact positively in cyberspace. An

Eighty-one percent of youth said that others cyberbully because they think it's funny.

overwhelming majority of teens believe that youth cyberbully because they think it's a joke, not realizing the negative impact it may have on the victim. Many teens also think that youth cyberbully because they are encouraged by friends or because they believe that everyone else cyberbullies. Dealing with cyberbullying can be difficult, but there are steps parents, educators, and other caregivers can take to prevent it.

Parents and caregivers have a responsibility to help keep youth safe online. In order to do this, parents have to be aware

Almost 80 percent of teens said that they either did not have parental rules about Internet use or found ways around the rules.

of the types of activities youth are engaged in online and teach teens about cyber-ethics, responsibility, and Internet safety.

Parents can

- Talk with teens about some of the risks and benefits posed by the Internet
- Share examples of inappropriate incidents that can happen online, which teens may view as harmless or normal (e.g., a stranger initiating a conversation with a teen regarding pictures the teen has posted of him- or herself online)
- Learn what their teens are doing online and keep track of their online behavior
- Visit websites that teens frequent (such as social networking sites) to see what teens encounter online
- Tell teens never to give out personal information online (including their names, addresses, phone numbers, school names, or credit card numbers)
- Let teens know that they should never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they meet online
- Communicate online rules and responsibilities to teens and enforce rules with tangible consequences
- Keep computers in a highly trafficked room in the house where online activities are hard for teens to hide
- Teach youth about cyberbullying and let them know that engaging in cyberbullying is unacceptable
- Explain that youth who cyberbully sometimes bully because they have a feeling of anonymity and a lack of accountability; however, cyberbullying is harmful and can have negative consequences
- Explain that youth who cyberbully aren't always anonymous; they can be traced, located, and punished if the bullying becomes harassment
- Speak to teens about how to react if they are cyberbullied

What if Teens Are Bullied?

Despite our collective efforts to teach teens about cybersafety, they can still be victimized by youth who cyberbully. Moreover, cyberbullying can be an extension of bullying that teens are experiencing in school, and it may be more emotionally destructive. Threats and taunts posted on websites are visible throughout the world, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Youth who cyberbully often create websites that encourage friends and classmates to make disparaging comments about another youth. Thus, teens who are cyberbullied can face constant victimization and do not have a safe retreat. Because of

this, cyberbullying can elicit a strong emotional response from teens. Some teens change their daily online and offline behaviors. Over 50 percent of teens felt angry after they were cyberbullied. Roughly one-third of teens felt hurt, and almost 15 percent of teens felt scared by cyberbullying experiences.

Nearly 30 percent of teens wanted to seek revenge on those who cyberbullied them.

Teens currently use their own methods to counter cyberbullying, and many teens respond with a variety of reactions:

- Thirty-six percent asked the bully to stop.
- Thirty-four percent blocked communication.
- Thirty-four percent talked to friends about the bullying.
- Twenty-nine percent did nothing about the bullying.
- Twenty-eight percent signed offline.

Only 11 percent of teens talked to parents about incidents of cyberbullying.

Parents can help teens who are cyberbullied by teaching them methods that can prevent bullying.

- Teach teens not to respond to cyberbullies. Show them how to block the bully's messages or to delete messages without reading them. (Blocking and deleting messages/contacts may be executed differently through websites, instant messengers, or email providers. For help, contact the site/software administrators.)
- Tell teens that they should never try to seek revenge on a bully or cyberbully.
- Let teens know that they can report bullying incidents to Internet service providers (ISPs) and website moderators. These groups may be able to control some of the bully's Internet capabilities. More than half of the teens surveyed thought that moderators of online groups should be used to prevent cyberbullying incidents.

- Remind your teens to keep their passwords a secret from everyone except you.
- Tell your teens that it's not their fault if they become victims of cyberbullying, but it is important for them to tell you if they are victimized. Assure them that you will not revoke their Internet privileges if they are cyberbullied. Some teens don't disclose cyberbullying incidents to parents because they fear that their Internet privileges will be taken from them. Speak openly with your teens about cyberbullying.
- Help teen victims keep a record of bullying incidents. This will be helpful if the actions escalate and law enforcement needs to intervene. If the cyberbullying involves threats and harassment or frequent cyberattacks, call the police to ensure your teen's safety. Remember that cyberbullying incidents sometimes end violently. If you are unable to prevent cyberbullying, it is important to stop it as soon as possible.

Over 70 percent of teens said that being able to block cyberbullies was the most effective method of prevention.

Taking Community Action

Cybersafety is an important, but difficult, topic to address because people have the right to privacy and freedom of speech. Community members such as educators, law enforcement officers, and community leaders can help prevent cyberbullying and promote safe and responsible Internet use throughout their communities by implementing the following tips.

Educators can

- Request that children and youth sign an Internet safety pledge promising that they will not cyberbully or share their personal information
- Establish acceptable Internet use and anti-cyberbullying policies in school; 92 percent of teens who were cyberbullied knew their victimizers—half of those teens knew the cyberbullies from school

- Let parents know that they should establish Internet use rules for their kids, which should include tangible consequences

Law enforcement officers can

- Stay up-to-date on cybersafety issues and laws
- Learn about the technology teens use and the social networking sites that they frequent
- Find out the protocol to follow in order to contact social networking sites to have cyberbullying site profiles removed
- Speak with students, parents, and educators about some of the dangers that are present on the Internet, and promote cybersafety
- Talk to school officials about creating an enforceable anti-cyberbullying policy on school grounds

Community leaders can

- Organize a cybersafety forum or community discussion that involves students, parents, educators, local law enforcement officers, city and school officials, and local technology companies
- Sponsor an Internet safety awareness day for kids to learn about safe Internet use
- Provide information to parents, educators, and law enforcement officers about how teens use the Internet, what websites teens frequent, how to contact site moderators and ISPs if teens are cyberbullied, and when to contact law enforcement regarding a cyberbullying situation
- Work with school technology departments to make sure that teens are being cybersafe

Everyone in your community can help raise awareness about cyberbullying and take preventive action against this ever-growing problem.

For More Information About Preventing Cyberbullying and Promoting Cybersafety

Keeping teens safe in cyberspace becomes even more important as new technology develops. Cyberbullying can be prevented. Talk to your teens about recognizing and preventing cyberbullying. For more information about cyberbullying, check out the following resources:

- National Crime Prevention Council, Cyberbullying Research Report: This research study surveyed 824

teens on aspects of cyberbullying such as reasons for bullying, reactions to bullying, and effective ways to prevent bullying. The teens were middle and high school students, ages 13 to 17.

- National Crime Prevention Council website, www.ncpc.org: This site contains cyberbullying and Internet safety information for parents.
- www.wiredsafety.org: Wired Safety provides Internet safety information for children, teens, and adults. The website also has an important resource for parents—a

downloadable translator for cyber-lingo and acronyms used by teens.

- www.stopcyberbullying.org: Provides relevant cyberbullying prevention and Internet safety information for parents, teachers, and police officers, as well as children and youth.
- www.stopbullying.gov : Includes information for adults regarding cyberbullying and face-to-face bullying. The site also offers information for children ages 10 to 12 regarding bullying.