Tips to Help Stop Cyberbullying

*Guidance for parents and young people on cyberbullying, including advice for ending (or preventing) the cycle of aggression. For a more comprehensive look, see **A Parents' Guide to Cyberbullying**.*

For kids and teens

Know that it's not your fault. What people call "bullying" is sometimes an argument between two people. But if someone is repeatedly cruel to you, that's bullying and you mustn't blame yourself. No one deserves to be treated cruelly.

Don't respond or retaliate. Sometimes a reaction is exactly what aggressors are looking for because they think it gives them power over you, and you don't want to empower a bully. As for retaliating, getting back at a bully turns you into one – and can turn one mean act into a chain reaction. If you can, remove yourself from the situation. If you can't, sometimes humor disarms or distracts a person from bullying.

Save the evidence. The only good news about bullying online or on phones is that it can usually be captured, saved, and shown to someone who can help. You can save that evidence in case things escalate.

Tell the person to stop. This is completely up to you – don't do it if you don't feel totally comfortable doing it, because you need to make your position completely clear that you will not stand for this treatment any more. You may need to practice beforehand with someone you trust, like a parent or good friend.

Reach out for help – *especially* if the behavior's really getting to you. You deserve backup. See if there's someone who can listen, help you process what's going on and work through it – a friend, relative or maybe an adult you trust.

Use available tech tools. Most social media apps and services allow you to block the person. Whether the harassment's in an app, texting, comments or tagged photos, do yourself a favor and block the person. You can also report the problem to the service. That probably won't end it, but you don't need the harassment in your face, and you'll be less tempted to respond. If you're getting threats of physical harm, you should call your local police (with a parent or guardian's help) and consider reporting it to school authorities.

Protect your accounts. Don't share your passwords with anyone – even your closest friends, who may not be close forever – and password-protect your phone so no one can use it to impersonate you. You'll find advice at **passwords.connectsafely.org**.

If someone you know is being bullied, take action. Just standing by can empower an aggressor and does nothing to help. The best thing you can do is try to stop the bullying by taking a stand against it. If you can't stop it, support the person being bullied. If the person's a friend, you can listen and see how to help. Consider together whether you should report the bullying. If you're not already friends, even a kind word can help reduce the pain. At the very least, help by not passing along a mean message and not giving positive attention to the person doing the bullying**.**

Additional advice for parents

Know that you're lucky if your child asks for help. Most young people don't tell their parents about bullying online or offline. So if your child's losing sleep or doesn't want to go to school or seems agitated when on his or her computer or phone, ask why as calmly and open-heartedly as possible. Feel free to ask if it has anything to do with mean behavior or social issues. But even if it does, don't assume it's bullying. You won't know until you get the full story, starting with your child's perspective.

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, and involving your child in finding solutions helps him or her regain that. The second reason is about context. Because the bullying is almost always related to school life and our kids understand the situation and context better than parents ever can, their perspective is key to getting to the bottom of the situation and working out a solution. You may need to have private conversations with others, but let your child know if you do, and report back. This is about your child's life, so your child needs to be part of the solution.

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 the bully thinks increases his or her 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.

More than one perspective needed. Your child's account of what happened is likely completely sincere, but remember that one person's truth isn't necessarily everybody's. You'll need to get other perspectives and be open-minded about what they are. Sometimes kids let themselves get pulled into chain reactions, and often what we see online is only one side of or part of the story.

What victims say helps most is to be heard – really listened to – either by a friend or an adult who cares. That's why, if your kids come to you for help, it's so important to respond thoughtfully and involve them. Just by being heard respectfully, a child is often well on the way to healing.

The ultimate goal is restored self-respect and greater resilience in your child. This, not getting someone punished, is the best focus for resolving the problem and helping your child heal. 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.

One positive outcome we don't often think about (or hear in the news) 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. It's not 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 them space to do that and let them know we have their back.

If you'd like to print these tips out, here's a PDF version. Please contact admin@connectsafely.org for permission to reprint or post.

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For more info:

- **A Parents' Guide to Cyberbullying**
- *Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying*, by Sameer Hinduja and Justin Patchin
- *Cyber Bullying: A Prevention Curriculum for Grades 3-5* and *Cyber Bullying: A Prevention Curriculum for Grades 6-12,* by Susan Limber, Robin Kowalski, and Patricia Agatston