

## What Can Adults Do to Prevent and Address Cyber-Bullying?

Adults seldom are present in the online environments frequented by children and youth. Therefore, it is extremely important that adults pay close attention to cyber-bullying and the activities of children and youth when using these new technologies.

### Suggestions for Parents

#### *Tips to help prevent cyber-bullying:*

- Keep your home computer(s) in easily viewable places, such as a family room or kitchen.
- Talk regularly with your child about online activities he or she is involved in.
  - a. Talk specifically about cyber-bullying and encourage your child to tell you immediately if he or she is the victim of cyber-bullying, cyber-stalking, or other illegal or troublesome online behaviors.
  - b. Encourage your child to tell you if he or she is aware of others who may be the victims of such behavior.
  - c. Explain that cyber-bullying is harmful and unacceptable behavior. Outline your expectations for responsible online behavior and make it clear that there will be consequences for inappropriate behavior.
- Although adults must respect the privacy of children and youth, concerns for your child's safety may sometimes override these privacy concerns. Tell your child that you may review his or her online communications if you think there is reason for concern.
- Consider installing parental control filtering software and/or tracking programs, but don't rely solely on these tools.

#### *Tips for dealing with cyber-bullying that your child has experienced:*

Because cyber-bullying can range from rude comments to lies, impersonations, and threats, your responses may depend on the nature and severity of the cyber-bullying.

*This publication was originally created for "Take a Stand. Lend a Hand. Stop Bullying Now!" a campaign of the Health Resources and Services Administration, the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*

[www.StopBullyingNow.hrsa.gov](http://www.StopBullyingNow.hrsa.gov)

Here are some actions that you may want to take after the fact:

- Strongly encourage your child not to respond to the cyber-bullying.
- Do not erase the messages or pictures. Save these as evidence.
- Try to identify the individual doing the cyber-bullying. Even if the cyber-bully is anonymous (for example, is using a fake name or someone else's identity), there may be a way to track him or her through your Internet service provider. If the cyber-bullying is criminal (or if you suspect that it may be), contact the police and ask them to do the tracking.
- Sending inappropriate language may violate the "terms and conditions" of email services, Internet service providers, Web sites, and cell phone companies. Consider contacting these providers and filing a complaint.
- If the cyber-bullying is coming through email or a cell phone, it may be possible to block future contact from the individual who cyber-bullied. Of course, he or she may assume a different identity and continue the bullying.
- Contact your school. If the cyber-bullying is occurring through your school district's Internet system, school administrators have an obligation to intervene. Even if the cyber-bullying is occurring off campus, make your school administrators aware of the problem. They may be able to help you resolve the cyber-bullying or be watchful for face-to-face bullying.
- Consider contacting the cyber-bully's parents. These parents may be very concerned to learn that their child has been cyber-bullying others, and they may effectively put a stop to the bullying. On the other hand, these parents may react very badly to your contacting them. So, proceed cautiously. If you decide to contact a cyber-bully's parents, communicate with them in writing—not face to face. Present proof of the cyber-bullying (for example, copies of an email message) and ask them to make sure the cyber-bullying stops.
- Consider contacting an attorney in cases of serious cyber-bullying. In some circumstances, civil law permits those who are being bullied to sue a bully or his or her parents in order to recover damages.
- Contact the police if cyber-bullying involves acts such as threats of violence; extortion; obscene or harassing phone calls or text messages; harassment, stalking, or hate crimes; or child pornography.

If you are uncertain if cyber-bullying violates criminal laws, contact your local police, who will advise you.

### Suggestions for Educators

- Educate your students, teachers, and other staff members about cyber-bullying, its dangers, and what to do if someone is cyber-bullied.
- Be sure that your school's anti-bullying rules and policies address cyber-bullying.
- Closely monitor students' use of computers at school.
- Use filtering and tracking software on all school computers, but don't rely solely on this software to screen out cyber-bullying and other problematic online behavior.
- Investigate reports of cyber-bullying immediately. If cyber-bullying occurs through the school district's Internet system, you are obligated to take action. If the cyber-bullying occurs off campus, consider what actions you might take to help address the bullying:
  - a. Notify parents of students who are bullied and parents of students who are known or suspected of cyber-bullying.
  - b. Notify the police if the known or suspected cyber-bullying involves a threat.
  - c. Closely monitor the behavior of the affected students at school for possible bullying.
  - d. Talk with all students about the harms caused by cyber-bullying. Remember, cyber-bullying that occurs off campus can travel like wildfire among your students and can affect how they behave and relate to each other at school.
  - e. Investigate to see if the student or students who have been cyber-bullied could use some support from a school counselor or school-based mental health professional.
- Contact the police immediately if known or suspected cyber-bullying involves acts such as threats of violence, extortion, obscene or harassing phone calls or text messages, or harassment, stalking, or hate crimes.

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