

## Types of cyberbullying

Two common types are abusive Web pages and abusive instant or text messages. IMs are especially common in schools that permit cell phone use during the school day. While policies of social networking sites forbid abusive postings, they often have them.

The Internet is a WRITTEN RECORD and can be more permanent than publishing an article in a newspaper because words can be forwarded, re-posted, blogged, listed anywhere, a million times over – even after the original posting has been deleted.

## What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is repeated, electronic-based bullying via computers or cell phones among children and teens. Cyberbullying usually involves abusive or cruel messages or comments posted on Web sites or online profiles that are derogatory or even threatening.

Many adults are aware that there are online threats from other adults (sexual predators) but less aware that children also victimize each other online. All threats should be taken seriously because they can have grave consequences.

Cyberbullying is common. Studies, including those done by the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center, have found that a third to almost half of teens have been victimized online. Many have issued threats electronically, but fully 60 percent have not told an adult.

Parents should never assume that because their children are not “typical” bullies it is impossible for them to become involved in cyberbullying, either as a victim or as a bully. MARC research shows the most common motives for cyberbullying are anger and the belief that cyberbullying is a “joke.” Any child might become involved in these behaviors, especially if they believe it is harmless.

# How to avoid cyberbullying

## 1. Discuss social networking sites.

Does your child have an account on MySpace or Facebook? You can search for it if necessary. If your child is under age, remove their site. Talk to your kids about how something FUN can also be dangerous. Monitor the site regularly.

## 2. Review the facts about these sites with your child.

It's easy to fake an age or photo. These entries are forbidden and illegal because they are fraudulent, often abusive and sometimes pornographic. Report them immediately. Your page is not private. Anything posted online is public and you are responsible for whatever you write. Even a profile or Web page set to "private" is not truly private – some information is always visible and hackers can easily access anyone's profile or page. Nothing on an online social networking site is truly secure. There may be consequences for postings, such as school discipline, problems getting into jobs, colleges, etc. At least 25 percent of colleges regularly check for prospective students online. There are many cases of people who are denied college admission or jobs because of their online profile or Web page.

## 3. Review cell phone rules with your child.

Know and enforce the cell phone rules in your child's school. Enforce your own rules. Educate your children about cell phone abuse before it happens. Bullying and cheating happen via cell phones, and they are not OK. Review how to react to abusive or scary messages – save and report them, but do not respond. With your child, consider in advance what the consequences will be if rules are broken. Consider blocking all messaging for any child under age 15. Most parents get their child a cell phone for contact and safety reasons; messaging is usually an unnecessary extra, and it causes many problems and expenses. Your cell phone provider can help set up your child's phone.

## 4. Discuss values and general principles with your child regarding all electronic communications.

Electronic communications count. Don't try to claim later that you were "only joking" or "didn't mean it." If you can't say it aloud to someone's face, then you can't message or e-mail it. Make sure that your child understands that you expect civil and polite behavior at all times – both online and offline.



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## **How to respond to cyberbullying if it has already happened**

### **Web page bullying**

- Encourage your child to spend less time online, but consider carefully before forbidding him or her from using the computer.
- Look up and review the hosting site's policy. Send them a copy of the Web page and a copy of their own policy. Demand that they remove the page.
- If it's spilling over into school, notify the school immediately.
- Give others time to react before you consider legal action.

### **Cell phone cheating or bullying**

- If you know the perpetrator, report it. Threats of violence should be reported to police.
- Keep the evidence.
- Have your child block screen names.
- Consider removing messaging from your child's cell phone account. Your child may be upset, but in the long run, he or she may feel better and will be less susceptible to abuse.
- Teach your child to cope with cell phone bullying. Remind them: Don't delete evidence.
- Never give out proprietary information (about yourself or your friends).
- Limit your buddy list, and ask your friends not to forward your screen name to others.
- Never respond to abusive messages.
- As with most things, prevention is easier than reaction! Just talking about these issues will help your child.

# Cyberbullying



## A guide for parents

**What is cyberbullying?**

**How can my child avoid it?**

**How do we respond?**