

## Addressing Cyber-Bullying

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1. **Educate yourself.** Cyberbullying.org is an outstanding website full of information for both youth and adults, including help for the technologically challenged.
2. **Discuss the issue.** Ask children and youth what they already know about cyber-bullying. You might be amazed at how much they can tell you. Ask if this has ever happened to them or anyone they know. Make sure that the young people in your life know that:
  - Cyber-bullying means using computers, cell phones, and other technology to hurt, scare, or embarrass other people. Cyber-bullying gets people in serious trouble at school and also with the law. In a growing number of places, certain forms of cyber-bullying are illegal.
  - Being mean is being mean, no matter how you do it. Don't ask if it's funny. Ask if it will make someone unhappy.
  - Even if you think someone was mean to you, being mean back is not a safe way to handle the problem. Instead, get help from an adult you trust.
  - Have the courage to *speak up* if you notice anyone cyber-bullying. Say that this is wrong and that you are *not* going to keep it a secret.
  - Never post anything on the Internet or send something electronically that you don't want the world to see.
  - If you get an upsetting message or see something that is attacking you: *Do not reply. Do not delete.* Save the message, print it if you can and *get help* from an adult you trust. If one adult does not help you, keep asking until you get the help you need.
3. **Be clear about the rules.** The use of computers for anything except schoolwork is a privilege. The

use of cell phones for anything except for emergencies and communication with parents is also a privilege. These privileges will be lost if they are used for unsafe or hurtful purposes. You expect your children to stay in charge of what they say and do, to tell you about problems, and to get your agreement in advance about any changes.

4. **Be involved.** Spend time with young people so that you know what they are doing.
5. **Be careful.** Unless this is within a secure system of people who know each other, such as a school, do not allow your children to post personal information or photos in an on-line friend's community or chat group.
6. **Give consequences.** If your child cyber-bullies, have the child apologize and make amends. Give an appropriate related consequence, depending on what happened.
7. **Provide help.** If your child is hurt by cyber-bullying, give the child emotional support by saying, "I am so sorry this is happening to you and so proud of you for having the courage to tell me. This is not your fault and we are going to do what we can to make it stop." Ask for help from school authorities, your Internet provider or cell phone company, and, if necessary, the police.
8. **Practice.** Use ideas from the Speaking Up section in this chapter to define what cyber-bullying might look like, how to speak up, what a negative reaction might be, and what an effective response could be. Let children make up their own story to use for the practice. Switch roles with them.

For example, a friend might say, "I can't stand Roger. Look, I got a photo of him going to the bathroom on the field trip. Let's see how many people we can send this to."

One way to speak up could be: "That's cyber-bullying. It's wrong."

A common negative reaction to this boundary is, "But you have to admit that it would be funny."

An effective response might be, "Even though Roger is not my favorite person, I don't think it is funny to embarrass people. Besides, it is illegal."