

CyberbullyNOT

Student Guide to Cyberbullying

WHAT IS CYBERBULLYING?

Cyberbullies use the Internet or cell phones to send hurtful messages or post information to damage people's reputation and friendships. Here are some examples of kinds of cyberbullying:

Flaming. Online fights using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language.

Joe and Alec's online fight got angrier and angrier. Insults were flying. Joe warned Alec to watch his back in school the next day.

Harassment. Repeatedly sending nasty, mean, and insulting messages.

Sara reported to the principal that Kayla was bullying another student. When Sara got home, she had 35 angry messages—some from total strangers.

Denigration. "Dissing" someone online. Sending or posting gossip or rumors about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships.

Some boys created a "We Hate Joe" Web site where they posted jokes, cartoons, gossip, and rumors, all dissing Joe.

Impersonation. Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material to get that person in trouble or danger or to damage that person's reputation or friendships.

Laura watched closely as Emma logged on to her account and discovered her password. Later, Laura logged on to Emma's account and sent a hurtful message to Emma's boyfriend, Adam.

Outing. Sharing someone's secrets or embarrassing information or images online.

Greg was changing in the locker room. Matt took a picture of him with his cell phone camera. Within seconds, the picture was flying around phones at school.

Trickery. Tricking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information, then sharing it online.

Katie sent a message to Jessica pretending to be her friend and asking lots of questions. Jessica responded, sharing really personal information. Katie forwarded the message to others with her own comment, "Jessica is a loser."

Exclusion. Intentionally and cruelly excluding someone from an online group.

Millie tries hard to fit in with a group of girls at school. She recently got on the “outs” with a leader in this group. Now Millie has been blocked from the friendship links of all the girls.

Cyberstalking. Repeated, intense harassment and denigration that includes threats or creates significant fear.

When Annie broke up with Sam, he sent her many angry, threatening, pleading messages. He spread nasty rumors about her to her friends and posted a sexually suggestive picture she had given him in a sex-oriented discussion group, along with her e-mail address and cell phone number.

PREVENTING CYBERBULLYING

There are several important things that you can do to avoid being a target of cyberbullying:

- Protect yourself. Never provide any information or images in electronic form that could be used against you.
- Examine how you are communicating. If you find that people are frequently attacking you, look closely at how you are communicating with them. You might be communicating in a way that is irritating others or hurting their feelings.
- Find some new friends. If you are trying to fit into a group of people who are treating you badly, it might be easier to simply find some nicer friends. Life’s too short to waste time trying to be friends with mean people.

DON’T GIVE POWER TO BULLIES

Bullies want to achieve power and be seen by others as stronger and better. If you lose your cool or respond in another way that shows lack of strength, a bully can boast about it to others—and will probably keep bullying you. So the key to handling bullies is to stay calm and not make it fun to harass you.

The Internet can actually help you if you are the target of bullying. If you are bullied online, you have several advantages:

- No one can see your initial reaction. If you do lose your cool, which is natural and normal, no one will ever know—as long as you keep your hands off the keyboard until you calm down.

- Internet communications are delayed. If you choose to respond, you can take the time to write a calm, strong, assertive response.
- You can even show your response to others to get feedback before you send it.
- You might not feel as strong and powerful as the person bullying you. But you can act like you are stronger and more powerful when you are online. Just pretend you are creating a character in an online game—a character who is stronger than you currently think you are.

*A Very Important Rule: **Never Retaliate!***

A bully wants you to get upset. If you get mad and strike back in an attempt to hurt the bully as badly as you were hurt, it just won't work. All it does is give the bully a "win."

Retaliating can also make you look bad. You could also set yourself up for trouble. People who see your post may think you are the one who is causing the problem, not the bully. If someone shows your message to an adult, you could be the one who gets into trouble.

DON'T BE A CYBERBULLY

People lose their temper from time to time. Many people have sent a message on the Internet that was angry—and wrong. This does not make you a bully. If you have sent an angry or hurtful message, apologize. If you have posted angry or hurtful material, remove it and apologize. Try to make things right.

Bullies don't just lose their temper and make a mistake. Bullies intentionally put other people down so that they can make themselves feel more important. Bullies try to defend their actions in a number of ways. They say or think things like these: "I didn't do anything wrong." "It wasn't my fault." "The stupid kid deserved it." "I was just playing around." "It was just a joke."

If you are acting like a bully, the most important question you need to ask yourself is "Why?" What are you trying to gain by putting others down?

What you should understand about cyberbullying is that whenever you use electronic communications you are leaving traces—"cyber-footprints" that lead right back to you. Eventually, people will be able to figure out who you are and hold you accountable for the harm you have caused.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO IF YOU ARE CYBERBULLIED

Remember the most important rule: Never retaliate! Keep your hands off the keyboard until you have calmed down enough to figure out what to do.

Always save the evidence. Download the harmful material. Save any chats or instant messages. But don't keep looking at it—this will only make you feel worse.

Decide if you need to involve an adult. Sometimes you can resolve these situations on your own—or at least you might want to first try to do so. Some young people think that telling an adult is a sign of weakness. Recognize that even adults sometimes request assistance when a person is doing something that is harming them. Adults may take such actions as calling the police, hiring an attorney, or filing a complaint with their employer. Asking for help from someone who is in a better position to stop the harm is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign that you are not willing to accept harm being done to you and are willing to take the steps necessary to protect yourself.

Tell an adult if:

- You are really upset or are not sure what to do.
- The cyberbully is also bullying you in real life.
- You have been threatened with harm or the cyberbullying appears to be a crime.
- The cyberbullying is sending or posting material that has or could damage your reputation, friendships, or future education and career opportunities.
- The cyberbully is also bullying other students.
- You tried some of the other steps to get the cyberbully to stop, but it didn't work.

Ways to Stop Cyberbullying

There are different ways to respond to cyberbullying. Decide what to do based on who is cyberbullying you and how bad the cyberbullying is. Try to figure out what you think might work best to get the cyberbullying to stop.

Tell the cyberbully to stop. Send the cyberbully a private message stating something like this: "Stop sending me messages" or "Remove the material you posted." Depending on your relationship with this person, you might be able to work out a friendly truce. Make sure your message is not emotional and strong. You could also tell the cyberbully that if the harm does not stop, you will take other steps to stop it.

Ignore the cyberbully. Stop going to any group where you are being cyberbullied. Remove the cyberbully from your buddies or friends list.

Have your parents contact the cyberbully's parents. Your parents might talk with the parents or send them a letter. If they send a letter, it will be helpful if they include the harmful material you have downloaded. This is frequently the best way to get the cyberbullying to stop.

File a complaint with the Web site or service. Most sites and services prohibit bullying behavior. You can generally find an e-mail contact on the home page. Explain what has happened and provide the links to the harmful material or attach any messages. Request that the material be removed and that the account be terminated.

Talk to someone at school. If the cyberbully goes to your school, and especially if the cyberbully is also bullying you at school, tell your principal, school counselor, or school resource officer. Provide the material you have downloaded.

Contact an attorney or the police. You will need your parents to help you with this. Sometimes cyberbullying is so bad your parents could sue the parents of the cyberbully for money. Or the cyberbullying could be a crime. Of course, it's better if things do not get to this point—but it's nice to know these options are there if things get really bad.

BE A FRIEND

Bullies love an audience. Many teens do not like to see others being bullied, but are not sure what to do. Here are some things you can do:

- Speak out against cyberbullying in your online communities.
- Help the target in private. Encourage the target to report the cyberbullying.
- Report the cyberbullying to the school the target attends. You can download this material and report anonymously.
- Tell your parents and ask their guidance.

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. What steps can you take to make it less likely that you will be cyberbullied?
2. Pick one of the stories above and describe what steps you would advise the target of the cyberbullying to take?
3. What should you not do if you are cyberbullied? Why?
4. What can you do if you see someone else being cyberbullied?
5. What are your thoughts on the following statement? "On the Internet, I should have the free-speech right to post whatever I want, even if I might hurt someone else."