

# Help Protect Your Kids from Cyberbullying



Bullies are notorious for tormenting their victims face to face—at school, on the playground, in sports. But now, *cyberbullying* (or online bullying) opens the door to 24-hour harassment through computers, cell phones, gaming consoles, or other Internet-enabled means.

The full scope of cyberbullying—repeated, unwanted, or cruel behavior against someone—is difficult to measure. However, we do know that nearly one in six U.S. children grades six to 10 (that's 3.2 million students) report being a victim of online bullying each year.\*

## How cyberbullying works

Unlike physical bullying, where the victim can often walk away, the Internet is always "on." Cyberbullies can be anonymous—the victim may never know who the bully is. And, cyberbullying can be virtually invisible to parents and other adults. A cyberbully may:

- **Deliberately shut someone out of an online group**—an instant messaging (IM) buddy list, for example.
- **Send hurtful or threatening messages** to a victim's cell phone, harass a person in an online game, post embarrassing pictures on a social Web site (like MySpace or MSN Spaces), or share a humiliating video on a site such as YouTube.
- **Disclose secrets or private information**—for example, by forwarding a confidential e-mail or text message.
- **Impersonate the victim** and then post hateful comments or belittle the victim's friends on a blog.
- **Pretend to befriend a victim**, gain his trust, and then turn on him.



### More helpful info

- For advice from Microsoft about how to help protect your family online, go to [microsoft.com/protect/family](http://microsoft.com/protect/family)
- For more background on cyberbullying, visit [look-both-ways.com/stayingsafe/bullying.htm](http://look-both-ways.com/stayingsafe/bullying.htm)

## Cyberbullying hurts

Cyberbullying methods may be virtual, but the pain is real—anger, embarrassment, fear, confusion. Cyberbullying can be particularly devastating because the social lives of many tweens and teens are completely dependent on their online connections with others.

Victims of cyberbullying may withdraw from friends, skip school, experience depression, consider—or even commit—suicide. And, the bully's abuse can echo forever—college administrators, employers, friends, and others who search the Internet for a name years later may find the lies and insults.

Cyberbullying is bad for bullies, too. They may be disliked by teachers, find it hard to make or keep friends, and face a future with higher rates of unsuccessful relationships, failure at work, substance abuse, or imprisonment.

Bullying is not "a phase," nor is it a normal part of growing up. The repercussions of cyberbullying can be so grave that 14 U.S. states have passed or are proposing laws to make it a crime.

\* Source: National Council of Juvenile Court Judges



## Help kids avoid cyberbullying

**Encourage your children to make friends** and to help friends look out for each other. Cyberbullies are less likely to target those whom they perceive have strong friendships. If a victim has friends who rally around him or her, the bullying usually stops.

### Watch over your kids.

- Ask your children what they're doing online. What may have started as a simple argument with one friend can slide into repeated online assaults with others joining in.
- For the youngest ones, it's still a good idea to put the family computer and Internet-connected game consoles in a central location.
- Look for signs of online bullying—for example, getting upset when online or a reluctance to go to school.

### Talk with your kids about cyberbullying.

- Teenagers have so many ways to access the Internet that putting the computer in a central spot isn't always effective. With older kids, it's especially important to have frank discussions.
- Encourage your children to report bullying to you. Promise that you will take action on their behalf and explain what you will do. Reassure them that you won't curtail their phone or computer privileges.
- Let your children know they should never, under any circumstances, bully someone. Make the consequences clear.

**Urge your kids not to share passwords** or other information that could be used to bully them, or to loan their cell phones or laptops.

### Get help from technology.

- Turn on the safety features available in most programs and services such as those in Windows Vista®, Xbox LIVE®, and the Zune® digital media player. Get the details at [microsoft.com/protect/family/safetysettings/default.msp](http://microsoft.com/protect/family/safetysettings/default.msp)
- Explore the comprehensive list of popular tools at [kids.getnetwise.org/tools](http://kids.getnetwise.org/tools)

## What to do if someone is cyberbullying your child

The best support for a child being cyberbullied is positive, active, knowledgeable, and predictable support.

**Act immediately.** Your child needs to know that you can and will help. Don't wait to see if the abuse will stop. If you feel that your child is physically at risk, call the police at once.

**Acknowledge your child's pain.** It's important for him or her to hear that what happened wasn't fair or right. Make sure your child understands:

- The myth that only "weaklings tattle." In reality, those who tell are the ones who are not willing to be bullied.
- He or she is not at fault. The bully is not attacking because of some flaw—"I'm fat, a nerd, wear glasses..." The bully is simply justifying his or her actions.

**Tell your kids not to respond to the cyberbully** or retaliate because bullies are looking for a reaction. Don't answer phone calls, or reply to (or even read) text messages or comments. Do save the material in case the authorities need it.

**Block anyone whose behavior is inappropriate or threatening in any way.** Check with the service—social networking, IM, cell phone—to find out how.

**Report the problem.** Every effort should be made to find the cyberbully and hold him or her accountable.

- If the bully is a student consider reporting it to the school, which can take disciplinary action.
- Report bullying to the Web site where the bullying is happening. Many services have moderators and places to report abuse—for example, [abuse@microsoft.com](mailto:abuse@microsoft.com). Ask cell phone companies to track calls and take action.

