Cyberbullying: An Overview for Parents, Teachers and Students + Resource Guide

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What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is a form of harassment and bullying that includes sending hurtful or threatening e-mails, text messages, or instant messages, spreading rumors or posting embarrassing photos of others. Cyberbullying can be an extension of bullying in physical spaces or only take place through technology.

How has the growth of social media, such as Facebook and Instagram and other apps affected bullying?

Technology has definitely impacted bullying. What used to be a face-to-face encounter that occurred in specific locations is now able to occur 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Technology—computers, cell phones, tablets, and social networking sites—create conditions that allow bullying to occur. One way to protect our children is to limit and/or monitor their use of this technology, or "screen time."

I ask parents, "Would you let your 12-year-old daughter walk alone down a dark alley?" Obviously, the answer is "No." Thus, the follow-up question is, "Then why would you let your 12-year-old daughter be on the world wide web or be texting unmonitored?" Parents and kids don't fully realize the negative side to technology and social networking sites.

What can teachers and educators do to address bullying?

Parents and teachers must work together and intervene when they see bullying take place. First, they must tell the student(s) who are doing the bullying to stop. They need to document what they saw and keep records of the bullying behaviors. Victims need to feel that they have a support network of kids and adults. Help the student who is being bullied feel connected to school and home. Students who are also being bullied might benefit from individual or group therapy in order to create a place where they can express their feelings openly and safely.

Be knowledgeable and observant

Teachers, educators, and administrators need to be aware that although bullying generally happens in areas such as the bathroom, playground, crowded hallways, and school buses it can also occur via cell phones and computers, where supervision is limited or absent. It must be taken seriously. Teachers and administrators should emphasize that telling is not tattling. If a teacher observes bullying in a classroom, he/she needs to immediately intervene to stop it, record the incident and inform the appropriate school administrators so the incident can be investigated. Having a joint meeting with the bullied student and the student who is bullying is not recommended — it is embarrassing and very intimidating for the student that is being bullied and may not address the needs of both parties adequately.

Involve students and parents

Students and parents need to be a part of the solution and involved in safety teams and anti-bullying task forces. Students can inform adults about what is really going on and also teach adults about new technologies that kids are using to bully. Parents, teachers, and school

administrators can help students engage in positive behavior and teach them skills so that they know how to intervene when bullying occurs and be "Upstanders" instead of bystanders. Older students can serve as mentors for younger students and encourage a culture of kindness in their learning environments. Parents can help by modeling consistent and positive discipline at home and at school functions.

Set positive expectations about behavior for students and adults

Schools and classrooms must offer students a safe learning environment. Teachers and coaches need to explicitly remind students that bullying is not accepted in school and such behaviors will have consequences. Creating an anti-bullying document and having both the student and the parents/guardians sign and return it to the school office helps students understand the seriousness of bullying. Also, for students who have a hard time adjusting or finding friends, teachers and administrators can facilitate student interactions and meetings or provide "jobs" for the student to do during lunch and recess so that children do not feel isolated or in danger of becoming targets for bullying.

What can parents do if their child is being bullied?

Observe your child for signs of bullying

Children may not always be vocal about being bullied. Signs include: withdrawn attitudes, hesitation about going to school, frequent stomach and head aches, decreased appetite, nightmares, crying, ripped clothing, or general depression and anxiety. If you discover your child is being bullied, don't tell them to "let it go" or "suck it up." Instead, have open-ended conversations where you can learn what is really going on at school so that you can take the appropriate steps to rectify the situation. Most importantly, let your child know you will help him or her resolve the situation and that he or she should try not to fight back.

Teach your child how to handle being bullied

Until something can be done on an administrative level, work with your child to handle bullying without being crushed or defeated. Practice scenarios at home where your child learns how to ignore a bully and develop assertive strategies for coping with bullying. Help your child identify teachers and friends that can help them if they're worried about being bullied.

Ensure that as a parent you model calm, confident, compassionate behavior. Do not demonize the bully, rather take the stance that the behavior is not tolerated. Understand and relay to your child that bullies are often victims of abuse or trauma themselves and that while their behavior will not be tolerated, it is helpful to understand the motivation is not your child's fault.

Set boundaries with technology

Educate your children and yourself about cyberbullying and teach your children not to respond or forward threatening emails. "Friend" your child on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. and set up proper filters on your child's computer. Make the family computer the only computer for children, and have it in a public place in the home where it is visible and can be monitored. If you decide to give your child a cell phone think carefully before allowing them to have a camera option. Let them know you will be monitoring their text messages. As a parent, you can insist that phones are stored in a public area, such as the kitchen, by a certain time at night to eliminate nighttime bullying and inappropriate messaging. Parents should report cyberbullying to the school, even when it occurs after hours or on weekends, and follow up with a letter that is copied to the school superintendent if their initial inquiry receives no response.

Parents should report all threatening messages to the police and should document any text messages, emails, or posts on websites. Detailed record keeping is crucial.

What can parents do if their child is bullying others?

Make your home "bully free"

Children learn behavior through their parents. Being exposed to aggressive behavior, inconsistent discipline, family instability, or an overly strict environment at home makes kids more prone to bully at school. Parents and caregivers should model positive examples of healthy relationships with other people and with their children. It is important to proactively model and teach empathy and kindness.

Stop bullying before it starts

Educate your children about bullying. It is possible that your child is having trouble reading social signs and does not know what they are doing is hurtful. Remind your child that bullying others can have legal consequences.

Look for self esteem issues

Children with low self-esteem often bully to feel better about themselves. Even children who seem popular and well-liked can have mean tendencies. Mean and aggressive behavior should be explored and addressed by parents. Often new routines, individual, group, or family counseling, and creative outlets will boost a child's self-esteem and self-worth.

What can students do to stop bullying?

Report bullying and cyberbullying

It is important for students to report any bullying to a parent or an adult they trust. Often kids don't report cyberbullying because they fear their parents will take away their phone or computer. Parents should proactively communicate that they will support their child's reports of bullying and not

take away their technology as a consequence. It is important for kids to remember that bullying is wrong and should be handled by an adult.

Don't bully back

It may be difficult to not bully back, but as the saying goes, two wrongs don't make a right. Try not to show anger or tears. Either calmly tell the bully to stop bullying or walk away. Train using further resources, like the ones listed below, to become more than a bystander… Instead, be an "Upstander" who models and promotes kind behavior.

Use the Buddy System

Whenever possible, avoid situations where there are no other students or teachers. Try to go to the bathroom with a friend or eat lunch in a group. When riding the bus, sit near the front. If you know a student who likes to bully others is in an area where you normally walk to lunch or class, try to use alternative hallway routes. Remember, report bullying of yourself or other students to your teacher, coach, principal and/or parent and align with students who are kind and compassionate.

Cyberbullying: Resource Guide

Free Online Resources

1. 10 Steps to Stop and Prevent Bullying from the National Education Association

   http://www.nea.org/home/51629.htm

2. Bullying Prevention and Intervention from the American Humane Association

   http://www.americanhumane.org/children/stop-child-abuse/fact-sheets/bullying-prevention-and-intervention.html

3. Cyberbullying Prevention and Intervention from the American Humane Association

   http://www.americanhumane.org/children/stop-child-abuse/fact-sheets/cyber-bullying-prevention-and-intervention.html

4. Developing a Positive School Climate: Top 10 Tips to Prevent Bullying and Cyberbullying

   http://cyberbullying.us/School-Climate-Top-Ten-Tips-To-Prevent-Cyberbullying.pdf

5. Responding to Cyberbullying: Top 10 Tips for Eductors

   http://www.cyberbullying.us/Top-Ten-Tips-Educators-Cyberbullying-Response.pdf

6. Help, My Child is a Bully! 5 Strategies to Handle a Child who Bullies Others

   http://www.urbandojo.com/2010/07/13/my-child-is-a-bully/

7. Why Do Bullies Bully? The Top 5 Reasons People Bully Others

   http://www.urbandojo.com/2010/06/16/bullying-reasons-why-do-people-bully-others-why-do-bullies-bully/

Three Top-Rated Programs Schools Can Implement

1. Second Step from the Committee for Children
   http://www.cfchildren.org/bullying-prevention

2. Positive Action

   https://www.positiveaction.net/applications/bullying-prevention

3. Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

   http://www.clemson.edu/olweus/