Cyberbullying
On-line Harrassment

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Supporting Your Child

Talk to children about cyberbullying.
Explain that it is wrong to cyberbully and it can have serious consequences. Make a rule that youth may not send mean or damaging messages, even if someone else started it, or suggestive pictures or messages, or they will lose their cell phone and computer privileges for a time.

■ Encourage children to report incidents of cyberbullying to an adult; be sure to reassure victims they will not be punished.

■ Reassure the bullying victim that he/she is not at fault for these attacks.

■ Encourage youth to save cyberbullying messages as proof that the cyberbullying is occurring. This is especially important if the incidents are eventually reported to the police, to parents, school officials, or to the bully's cellular provider.

Since much of the cyberbullying attacks happen via cell phones, victims should start by changing their cell phone numbers and/or email addresses. Cell phone providers can also be contacted to block the bully from contact.

Educate children on the importance of privacy.

Kids have embraced and freely use social media sites as a public forum to express how they feel, how they look, what they're thinking to a level that past generations would have kept in a personal written diary or scrapbook. This sharing can be positive and affirming. But, kids often don't have a context or grasp of the potential implications of their openness and self expression in the short and long term. It is vital that you educate and inform your children as to what is appropriate content to post and share, not only of themselves, but also of others and to keep his or her personal information private.

■ Keep all passwords private.

■ Don’t use the same password for all logins.

■ When using public computers in libraries or school, make sure the “remember password” options are turned off when logging in and be sure to logout at the end of a session.

■ Never pass out passwords or PIN numbers.

■ Don’t share personal information online like email addresses, home addresses, and cell phone numbers with people they don’t know.

■ Don’t accept invites for chat, friend requests on social networks, nor emails from people they don’t know.

■ Don’t open links in suspicious emails or text messages including video and photo links.

■ Don’t publicly post suggestive or provocative photos or videos of themselves.
Cyberbullying is harming, or attempting to harm someone or someone’s reputation or friendships through the use of text messages, phone calls, blogs, chat rooms, emails, social media, photos, or any other electronic means.

As a parent you may be totally unaware of the cyberbullying your child is experiencing. The bullying can be emotionally devastating to the child given the viral ability to share and distribute electronic content via the Internet. The following do and don’t tips provide parents with guidance on how to deal with cyberbullying.

DON’T . . .

- respond to cyberbullies;
- assume the cyberbully’s online identity is true;
- forget to contact your school;
- allow the child to spend excessive time online;
- leave a computer in your child’s bedroom.

DO . . .

Explain what cyberbullying is:

It is surprising how many kids actually don’t know when harmless teasing crosses over to more serious cyberbullying. Unfortunately, once that line is crossed the bullying can be emotionally devastating to the victim. Talk frequently to your child about his or her online activities.

Explain to a child that cyberbullying means using email, instant messaging, social network sites, cell phones, and the Internet to . . .

- Send and receive mean, vulgar, or threatening messages or images.
Keep the computer in the family room or another place where you can be aware of your child’s online activity.

Check chat rooms commonly visited by your child’s social network and group of friends.

Keep copies of all cyberbullying communication. If your child is a victim of cyberbullying make sure you keep electronic and printed copies (when possible) of all the communication. This will be important when you contact the school, police, and even an attorney.

If your child is experiencing cyberbullying he or she may be bullied offline as well. You will need to investigate what is going on and address all forms of bullying your child is experiencing.

Report cyberbullying to the service used for harassment. Many services will shut down an offensive account and even block the source computer from being able to use their service. Also, if you have to involve the police they will use this information to find the bully even if they are using a fake name and profile.

Consider contacting an attorney. Also, contact the police if the cyberbullying includes any of the following:

- Threats of violence
- Extortion
- Obscene or harassing phone calls or text messages
- Harassment, stalking, or hate crimes
- Child pornography
- Sexual exploitation
- Taking a photo image of someone in a place where he or she would expect privacy.
- Post sensitive, private information and/or lies about another person.
- Pretend to be someone else in order to make that person look bad.
- Intentionally exclude someone from an online group.

Encourage your child to tell you if he or she is a victim of cyberbullying or are receiving or being exposed to inappropriate content about others. Be sure to tell your child that you will not take away her or his electronic privileges if you are told about a concern. Let your child know that you are simply concerned about her or his well-being.

Closely monitor your child’s use of computers.

A child’s computer and cell phone are often a black hole of communication for a parent. It can be a place where the child lives a second life and where communication among a social group can escalate very quickly to cause emotional and psychological damage with respect to a child’s self-esteem and social well-being.

Some parental tips for monitoring include:

- Join your child’s social network sites and be a “friend.” You will then be able to see your child’s social activity in real time. Don’t participate in his or her social page unless invited. Simply be an observer.
- Search your child’s name on search engines (including image and video search).
- Require your child to provide you with login and passwords to social and email programs.
- Don’t give administrative privileges to your child, which means you will need to approve all upgrades to programs. When upgrading, check the history file in the Internet browsers on the device, which will show you the websites he or she has been visiting. Check the bookmarks, too.
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Educate children on the importance of privacy

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Adapted from material by Actions Parents Can Take to Stop Cyberbullying by Jules Polonetsky, Future of Privacy Forum.