

What Parents Need to Know About

CYBERBULLYING



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WHAT IS CYBERBULLYING?

Cyberbullying is similar to other forms of bullying; it is a type of aggressive behaviour that happens between two or more individuals. The youth who bullies has more power than the youth who is being victimized and, over time, individuals who are bullied become trapped in relationships in which they are being abused.

Unlike other forms of bullying, cyberbullying involves harassing, humiliating, intimidating, and/or threatening other youth through electronic mediums, including the Internet, cell phones, pagers, and other wireless communication devices.

Youth try really hard to make cyberbullying stop but they can't do it on their own. They need you, their parents, to help them!

THE CHALLENGE OF CYBERBULLYING

- Youth who bully are able to remain anonymous. Therefore, it's difficult for adults to identify them and offer the necessary support to help them stop bullying others.
- Anonymity makes it more acceptable for youth to engage in bullying who might not otherwise bully a child face-to-face.
- Children who cyberbully are not able to see the hurt they have inflicted and are less likely to feel remorse or empathy for the individual being victimized.
- Youth who are victimized through cyberbullying never feel safe. As long as a computer or cell phone is nearby, they are vulnerable to being bullied, even within their own home.
- Incidents of cyberbullying can be visible to thousands of people within seconds...all with the click of a mouse.

10 THINGS PARENTS CAN DO TO ADDRESS CYBERBULLYING. . .

BE A ROLE MODEL ON & OFFLINE

Think about how you use power in your life. Model the use of positive power by respecting and supporting others. Avoid the use of negative power, such as bullying, yelling, and manipulating. Parents set the tone for family relationships and youth learn relationship skills by watching their parents' behaviour. These skills will also transfer to online relationships. Show them how to resolve conflicts and settle disputes in productive ways.

LEARN ABOUT ONLINE ACTIVITIES

Most adults lack the knowledge and computer proficiency to accurately monitor and supervise online activities. Parents need to familiarize themselves with the websites, blogs, chat rooms, email accounts, and IM programs their children use. As well, parents will be better able to identify and support youth involved in cyberbullying if they know frequently used online terminology and abbreviations (e.g., PAW = parents are watching)

THINK PREVENTION

Parents can do a lot to prevent cyberbullying. For example, keep the computer in a common area so you can monitor activities and reactions to online communication. Set up email, chat accounts, and blogs with your children so you know the type of information they are posting online. Ask to see their email and IM contact lists so you can verify who each person is and how your child knows them. Repeatedly checking in with your child will alert you of activities may place him/her at risk for involvement in cyberbullying.

START TALKING ABOUT CYBERBULLYING

Youth may be reluctant to come forward to tell you about their cyberbullying experiences, likely due to fears that their online activities will be restricted. Therefore, it's up to you to start the conversation. Talk to your teen about the importance of healthy relationships, both on and offline. Offer your own experiences with bullying as a starting point. These conversations let your teen know that you care about what they're going through and that you're a source of support for them.

ENCOURAGE EMPATHY

Because cyberbullying is usually anonymous, children who bully may not realize the harm and distress their actions are causing. Talk with your child about what is considered acceptable behaviour both on- and offline. Encourage them to think about how they might feel if they were the target of online bullying. Help them understand that what may seem like fun to them is causing harm to another individual. If your child bullies others online, ensure the consequences help them understand the hurt they've caused.

Is your child the victim of cyberbullying?

Sharing these tips with him/her may help

- ◆ Talk to someone you trust, like a parent or teacher. They can offer support and develop a plan to end the harassment.
- ◆ Only open emails and messages from people you know. If you're not sure, check with an adult first.
- ◆ Give your cell phone number and email address only to those people you know and trust.
- ◆ Resist the urge to reply to hurtful messages...make them think you just don't care.
- ◆ Keep your personal information private...don't give out information in chatrooms or IM conversations.
- ◆ Save copies of hurtful and abusive messages...you might need them later as proof.
- ◆ If you are being bullied, leave the area or stop the message activity (e.g., chat room, IM)
- ◆ Avoid putting information online that you wouldn't want other classmates to read, even in an email.

Does your child participate in cyberbullying?

Sharing these tips with him/her may help

- ◆ Talk to someone you trust, like a parent or a teacher. They can offer support and help you find ways of getting along with others better.
- ◆ Put yourself in other teens' shoes...think about what it must feel like to be bullied online. Would you want to be treated that way?
- ◆ If you think you might bully someone online, stop the message activity and walk away
- ◆ Resist peer pressure to participate in cyberbullying...do what's right
- ◆ Think before you click...take a moment to decide if you want to be the kind of person who is hurtful rather than kind to others.
- ◆ Apologize to the people you've hurt online.
- ◆ Hang out with friends who will keep you in check.
- ◆ Remember: everyone is unique and different...different doesn't mean worse or better than you.
- ◆ Know that if other teens laugh and encourage you, it doesn't mean they like it when you bully

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO UNPLUG

Online communication among teens has become a central part of their social world. Despite the importance of this form of peer interaction, parents should encourage their teens to limit their time online, to "unplug", and participate in relationships offline as well as online. Fostering a wide range of friendships will not only help to reduce the risk of cyberbullying but will provide a source of support.

PROBLEM-SOLVE WITH YOUR ADOLESCENT

Let your adolescent come up with solutions to their cyberbullying problem and help them to evaluate whether various solutions will make the problem bigger or smaller. Help youth who are cyberbullied to experience positive relationships offline. Adolescents who bully need help with learning alternative ways to solve conflicts, manage frustration, and resist peer pressure to bully online.

BUILD ON YOUR CHILD'S STRENGTHS

Adolescents who are cyberbullied often have low self-esteem. Encourage them to participate in offline activities they enjoy so they can start to feel good about themselves. For teens who cyberbully, provide opportunities for them to use their power and natural leadership skills in a positive way (e.g., teaching siblings and younger children a new sport or skill).

BE READY TO LISTEN

If your adolescent reports being bullied online, be ready to listen right away. Don't put it off. Thank your child for being brave enough to come forward and explain that it is his/her right to feel safe, both online and off. Ask for details about the incident and convey your concern. Be willing to respond to all reports, even the seemingly trivial ones such as name-calling. Consistency matters!

BE YOUR CHILD'S ADVOCATE

Once your teen has come forward, it's your turn to take action. This may involve setting up new email, cell phone, and pager accounts for your child. Try to save copies of harassing emails and print screenshots of offensive websites/IM conversations. Contact your internet service provider about their policies regarding harassment online and what can be done. Also, encourage your child to talk to you about continuing problems with cyberbullying.

CYBERBULLYING CAN TAKE MANY DIFFERENT FORMS

- Sending mean and sometimes threatening emails or text messages
- Breaking into an email account and sending hurtful materials to others under an assumed identity
- Creating blogs or websites that have stories, cartoons, pictures, or jokes ridiculing others
- Creating polling websites where visitors are asked to rate individuals' attributes in a negative manner
- Taking an embarrassing photo of someone with a digital camera and emailing that photo to others
- Engaging someone in instant messaging, tricking them into revealing personal information, and then forwarding that information to others
- Using another's password in order to change his/her profile to reflect sexual, racist, and other content that may offend others
- Posting false or hurtful messages on online bulletin boards or in chat rooms
- Deliberately excluding others from instant messaging and email contact lists

HOW DO PARENTS KNOW IF THEIR CHILD IS INVOLVED IN CYBERBULLYING?

Cyberbullying is a covert behaviour and is usually hidden from adults. Look for the following clues:

SIGNS OF BEING CYBERBULLIED

- Appears anxious or fearful
- Low self-esteem and make negative comments
- Complains of feeling unwell
- Lower interest in activities and performance
- Avoids discussions about their online activities
- Appears unhappy, irritable, particularly after using the computer
- Trouble sleeping, nightmares
- Threats to hurt themselves or others
- May appear isolated from the peer group
- Appears distressed when online
- Changes their pattern of computer usage

SIGNS OF PARTICIPATING IN CYBERBULLYING

- Aggressive with parents, siblings, pets, and friends; holds a positive view of aggression
- Low concern for others' feelings
- Has friends who bully and are aggressive
- Does not recognize impact of his/her behaviour
- Secretive about online activities and switches screens or programs when others walk by
- Long hours spent online
- Becomes upset if he/she cannot use computer
- Using multiple online accounts, or an account that is not their own
- Avoids discussions about their online activities
- Appears agitated or aroused when online

WHY PARENTS SHOULD CARE ABOUT CYBERBULLYING

Many people feel that cyberbullying isn't as serious as other forms of bullying. After all, the child who is being bullied is often alone when the cyberbullying occurs. However, the negative impact of cyberbullying is the same as for other types of bullying.

RISKS FOR YOUTH WHO ARE THE VICTIMS OF CYBERBULLYING

- Depression (low mood, a sense of hopelessness)
- Social anxiety, loneliness, isolation
- Poor health (e.g., headaches, stomachaches)
- Low self esteem
- School absenteeism and academic problems
- Aggressive behaviours
- Contemplating, attempting, or committing suicide

RISKS FOR YOUTH WHO PARTICIPATE IN CYBERBULLYING

- Not knowing the difference between right and wrong
- Delinquency and substance use
- Academic problems and school drop out
- Adult criminality
- Difficulties in their relationships with others
- Being bullied at the hands of others