



CYBERBULLYING: WHAT TO KNOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD OR TEEN

Online bullying is common these days. Studies show cyberbullying is increasing, with most teens now having access to tablets, computers, and smartphones. One study by the Pew Research Center found that around six in 10 teens have been bullied or harassed online.

A GLANCE AT CYBERBULLYING

See more at stopbullying.gov

Forms of cyberbullying can include:

- Offensive name calling
- Spreading false rumors
- Receiving explicit images they did not ask for
- Constantly asking where they are, what they are doing, who they're with by someone other than a parent
- Physical threats
- Having explicit images of them shared without their consent.
- Catfishing (making a fake online identity in order to trick or harm someone)

Places cyberbullying can happen:

- Text/SMS messaging
- Messaging apps (e.g. WhatsApp, Kik)
- Social media (e.g. Snapchat, TikTok, Instagram)
- Online forums/message boards (e.g. Reddit, Discord)
- Online video games/gaming communities
- Email
- Live video apps (e.g. Periscope, YouNow)

There is concern that [cyberbullying has increased during the pandemic](#). We know more children have been using digital media, and there has also been a significant increase in teenage anger, anxiety, depression, stress, and loneliness. However, there is no research yet on whether cyberbullying has increased or decreased during this time.

Regardless of research, the most important way to learn if your child is being impacted by cyberbullying is to ask them. Ask them if they have noticed any changes in cyberbullying during the pandemic, or if they or their friends noticed any changes. Ask with genuine interest about what apps or social networks they use. The conversation can build connection and understanding, and there is evidence that teens are increasingly talking about bullying to peers and parents.

HOW IS CYBERBULLYING DIFFERENT FROM FACE-TO-FACE BULLYING?

- **It can be viewed by large numbers.** Many things that are posted online can be seen by peers, friends of friends, adults, and even strangers, depending on the platform and its privacy settings.
- **It can be persistent and permanent.** Once something is posted online, you can't take it back. Even temporary posts can be saved or reposted, and accessible 24 hours a day. This makes it hard for a cyberbullying victim to escape its impact.
- **It can escalate.** Once something is posted online, it can get the attention of other groups who may make the situation worse by resharing the message or adding to the bullying in other ways.

WHO IS AT RISK FOR CYBERBULLYING?

All children and teens are at risk for cyberbullying.

Some children may be at even higher risk, including those who:

- Experience behavioral and emotional challenges
- Live with Autism Spectrum disorders
- Experience learning challenges
- Live with intellectual or developmental disabilities
- Live with speech and language disorders
- Identify as LGBTQ
- Are newly arrived immigrants or whose primary language is not English
- Are not skilled in the use of social media.

WHAT IS THE SHORT AND LONG-TERM IMPACT OF CYBERBULLYING?

Children and teens who are bullied may immediately experience:

- Shock
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Suicidal thoughts*
- Shame
- Fear
- Low self-esteem
- Helplessness
- Frustration or anger
- Physical symptoms, like stomach aches, headaches, even panic attacks
- Distractedness (which can impact academic or athletic performance)

All bullying may have a lasting impact, though we don't know how long these effects last. Children who are cyberbullied are at risk for:

- [Depression](#)
- [Anxiety](#)
- Loneliness
- Suicidal thinking*
- [Post-Traumatic Stress](#)

*[The CDC](#) notes that the vast majority of young people do not make suicide attempts. However, children who have depression, substance use disorder, violent behavior, previous suicide attempts, and access to firearms are at higher risk of dying by suicide.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

Crisis Text Line: Text Got5 to 741741

HOW CAN WE HELP PREVENT CYBERBULLYING AND SUPPORT CHILDREN?

Provide Emotional Support. This is perhaps the most important. First, find out what happened in as much detail as possible. Let them know that you and others will help keep them safe. Getting support from peers, parents, caregivers, teachers and other adults can be incredibly helpful to children.

Talk With Others. Talk with your child's teachers, other caregivers, coaches, and all those who are in contact with your child about what happened, and what they are doing to manage cyberbullying.

Tip for the Grown Ups: Bullying can only be stopped when the entire community makes an effort to create rules against bullying and guidelines for appropriate use of online media. It takes a village – and anti-bullying efforts need to take place everywhere your child is – at home, in school, on the sports field, in community groups, and in places of worship.

Find Group Support and Action. Help your child or teen find friends to join them to safely stand up to children who bully, and reinforce that this is unacceptable. Try to avoid letting children be bystanders.

Be Thoughtful About Online Media. Children (and adults) are attached to online media, or for fear of missing out (FOMO). But parents, teachers, and other caregivers can set limits around, or encourage breaks from, their phones; teach teens to use privacy controls; and support them avoiding social drama, when possible.

If Necessary, Seek Professional Help. If your child is so emotionally affected that it has a significant negative impact on academic, social, recreational, or family life, [talk with your pediatrician](#) as a first line of support for any mental health concerns.

We are all immersed in a digital age, and we cannot escape it. But we can learn to harness social and digital media to promote healthy behavior, social and emotional well-being, and appropriate communication. This will take time, but we can all join in the effort.

To learn more about mental health concerns by child age group, visit the Project TEACH Parent and Family Page: <http://bitly.com/PTEACH-Family>

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