

CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is bullying or harassment that happens online. It can happen in an email, a text message, an online game, or comments on a social networking site. It might involve rumors or images posted on someone's profile or passed around for others to see, or creating a group or page to make a person feel left out.

Talk to your kids about bullying. Tell your kids that they can't hide behind the words they type and the images they post. Hurtful messages not only make the target feel bad, but they also make the sender look bad—and sometimes can bring scorn from peers and punishment from authorities.

Ask your kids to let you know if an online message or image makes them feel threatened or hurt. If you fear for your child's safety, contact the police.

- ▶ **Read the comments.** Cyberbullying often involves mean-spirited comments. Check out your kid's page from time to time to see what you find.
- ▶ **Don't react.** If your child is targeted by a cyberbully, tell them not to respond. Bullies usually are looking for a reaction from their target. Instead, encourage your child to work

with you to save the evidence and talk to you about it. If the bullying persists, share the record with school officials or local law enforcement.

- ▶ **Protect their profile.** If your child finds a profile that was created or altered without his or her permission, contact the company that runs the site to have it taken down.
- ▶ **Block or delete the bully.** If the bullying involves instant messaging or another online service that requires a "friends" or "buddy" list, delete the bully from the lists or block their user name or email address.
- ▶ **Help stop cyberbullying.** If your child sees cyberbullying happening to someone else, encourage him or her to try to stop it by not engaging or forwarding anything and by telling the bully to stop. Researchers say that bullying usually stops pretty quickly when peers intervene on behalf of the victim. One way to help stop bullying online is to report it to the site or network where you see it.
- ▶ **Recognize the signs of a cyberbully.** Could your kid be the bully? Look for signs of bullying behavior, such as creating mean images of another kid.
- ▶ **Keep in mind that you are a model for your children.** Kids learn from adults' gossip and other unkind behavior.