18 Tips to Stop Cyberbullying

Parents, children, and school administrators can take steps to prevent cyberbullying before it starts or becomes worse. Here are practical steps to stop cyberbullying.

By Pattie Fitzgerald

It's hard to protect your child if you don't understand the problem with cyberbullying or see it happen. Parents need to be the ones their kids go to when something is wrong. However, parents are often the last ones to know about problems because their kids fear getting into more trouble. Here are practical tips to help parents, children, and schools prevent and stop cyberbullying.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

1. Keep the computer in a common area of the home. Do not allow it in your children's bedrooms. Monitor their online usage.

2. Learn how various social networking websites work. Become familiar with Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter. Ask your children if they will show you their profile pages.

3. Talk regularly and specifically with your children about online issues. Let them know they can come to you for help if anything is inappropriate, upsetting, or dangerous.

4. Build trust with your children. Set time limits, explain your reasons for them, and discuss rules for online safety and Internet use. Ask your children to contribute to establishing the rules; then they'll be more inclined to follow them.

5. Tell your children not to respond to any cyberbullying threats or comments online. However, do not delete any of the messages. Instead, print out all the messages, including the e-mail addresses or online screen names of the cyberbully. You will need the messages to verify and prove there is cyberbullying.

6. Don't overreact by blaming your children. If they are being bullied, be supportive and understanding. Find out how long the bullying has been going on and ensure that you'll work together to find a solution. Let your children know they are not to blame for being bullied.

7. Don't underreact by telling your children to "shrug it off" or just deal with the bullying. The emotional pain of being bullied is very real and can have long-lasting effects. Don't tease them about it or respond with a "kids will be kids" attitude.

8. Don't threaten to take away your children's computers if they come to you with a problem. This only forces kids to be more secretive.

9. Talk to your school's guidance counselors so they can keep an eye out for bullying during the school day.

10. If there are threats of physical violence or the bullying continues to escalate, get law enforcement involved.

More Safety Tips for Parents, Kids, and Schools

WHAT CAN KIDS DO?

1. Don't respond to any online or text messages sent by cyberbullies.

2. Don't be an accomplice by forwarding any of the messages to others kids.

3. Save and print out all the messages as proof and evidence of cyberbullying.

4. If you are being bullied, tell an adult immediately to get help solving the problem.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?

1. Adopt a zero-tolerance policy for all types of bullying. Make it clear that any intimidation, harassment, or threatening behavior will be dealt with swiftly and seriously.

2. School districts should have antibullying policies in place and everyone (school administrators, teachers, parents, and students) should be aware of the policies at the start of every school year.

3. Incorporate Internet Safety Awareness classes into the curriculum.

4. Engage students, parents, and teachers in discussions about bullying prevention. Have student councils or student panels address the issue to their peers at school-wide assemblies, PTA meetings, and other school-wide events. Get everyone involved!

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