NATIONAL CYBERSECURITY ALLIANCE

Parents and Educators:
What to Do About Cyberbullying

Have you ever texted or posted something online that you would never say to someone in person? You've probably experienced how the internet's anonymous nature can sometimes bring out the worst in people. For bullies, the web's faceless environment appeals to their desire to intimidate, and this creates unsafe situations for their victims. Unfortunately, technology has enabled bullying on a scale today that didn't exist generations ago.

Even more than a few years ago, children today are online more every day, and they start their online lives earlier and earlier. Cyberbullying is a growing problem across the world – the internet's anonymous nature is appealing to bullies' desire to intimidate. There is also a speed factor – rumors, threats and photos can move around the digital world in an instant.

All of us, parents, teachers, and school administrators, can work together to identify, prevent, and stop cyberbullying. Here are our tips for working toward making the internet a kinder place for kids.

Help protect kids against cyberbullying with these tips:

Keep some secrets

Be careful who can access contact information or details about your children's interests, habits or employment to reduce their exposure to bullies that they do not know. Limiting the information about them online may also limit their risk of becoming a victim and may make it easier to identify the bully if they are victimized.

Avoid escalating the situation

Depending on the circumstances, consider ignoring the issue. Bullies commonly thrive on the reaction of their victims. Responding with hostility often provokes bullies. If you or your child receives unwanted email messages, consider blocking the sender or even changing your email address. The problem may stop. If you continue to get messages at the new account, you may have a compelling case for legal action.

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Help protect kids against cyberbullying with these tips:

Block and report on social media

If the bullying occurs on social media, block the person on all online platforms and email. Report the incident to the social media platform.

Document cyberbullying

Keep a record of any online activity (e.g., emails, web pages, social media posts), including relevant dates and times. Keep both an electronic version and a printed copy of each document.

Report cyberbullying to the school

If you've taken reasonable measures to stop the bully and, despite that, it's continuing or even escalating, it might be time to report it to the authorities. Reach out to the victim's school or whoever heads the organization where the victim interacts with the cyberbullies, which might be a club, sports team, place of worship, or extracurricular group. Nowadays, many school districts have online reporting options for cyberbullying where you can make an anonymous complaint.

When to call the police…

If reaching out to the victim's school or youth organization doesn't help, or if you fear for the victim's safety, contact your local police department. Your local FBI office can also be a good starting point. Note that there is a distinction between free speech and punishable offenses. Law enforcement officials and prosecutors can help sort out legal implications.

How to tell if a cyberbullying incident is a crime? Listen to your gut. If the communications become more frequent, the threats more severe, the methods more dangerous and if third-parties – such as hate groups and sexually deviant groups – become involved, the more likely law enforcement needs to be contacted and a legal process initiated.