

# Cyberbullying

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School officials, parents and students across the country are reporting that more and more young people are engaged in or the targets of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying, like bullying in the physical world, may include:

- ◆ Sending hurtful, hateful, derogatory, harassing or threatening messages to others.
- ◆ Spreading rumors.
- ◆ Sending personal or embarrassing information about or pictures of others – all with the intention of intimidating, frightening, ridiculing, or harming someone else.

According to the [National Crime Prevention Council](#), 43 percent of teens have been victims of cyberbullying in the last year. Cyberbullying can be as damaging as bullying “in person.” According to the [American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry](#), children who are bullied experience significant suffering that can interfere with their social and emotional development, as well as their school performance. Some victims of bullying have even attempted suicide rather than continue to endure such harassment and punishment.

What makes cyberbullying different, and sometimes even more traumatic, is that technology now allows bullies to reach beyond the classroom, school bus, playground, or immediate neighborhood to victimize another child before an entire community. Bullies can reach their target at any time or anyplace, including in his or her own home, via a computer, video game system or cell phone, giving the impression that there is no escape from the bully's reach. In addition, cyberbullying can also involve including dozens or hundreds of “spectators” as in the case when a hateful and threatening communication is shared with an entire group of friends, on a [social networking website](#) or with an entire school community.

## Protect Your Child

Talk to your child regularly about his or her online activities and experiences, as well as the activities of others he or she may communicate with online. Review your child's buddy list on a regular basis and ask questions to make certain he or she is communicating only with people he or she actually knows.

Set clear expectations with your child about what he or she should do if they are the target of a bullying communication. Some ideas include: immediately tell you, ignore or block the message (if possible) and report incidents of a threatening nature to the Internet service providers (ISPs) and website on which the message was transmitted.

If your child is the victim of cyberbullying by school peers, report the bullying to your child's school and ask the school to address the behavior and protect your child. If you believe that your child's safety is in danger, immediately contact your local police department.

## Prevent Cyberbullying

Advise your child that cyberbullying may be a criminal offense. Electronically-communicated threats are a crime in the same way that a face-to-face or written threat can generate a criminal charge. Willfully and maliciously directing electronic communications at a specific person that seriously alarm that person and would cause a reasonable person to suffer emotional distress can result in criminal charges as well as generate a lawsuit seeking financial compensation.

In order to ensure that your child does not engage in cyberbullying activities, you should communicate a clear set of expectations regarding acceptable and unacceptable behavior on the Internet to your child. Explain that unacceptable behavior includes:

- ◆ Revealing his or her password or the passwords of others
- ◆ Sending email messages, instant messages or text messages to others disguising himself or herself as another person
- ◆ Spreading rumors or false information about others
- ◆ Sending rude, harassing or threatening email messages, instant messages or text messages
- ◆ Creating websites that ridicule, humiliate, or intimidate others
- ◆ Posting on websites or disseminating embarrassing or inappropriate pictures or images of others.