

GETTING STARTED WITH CYBERBULLYING PREVENTION

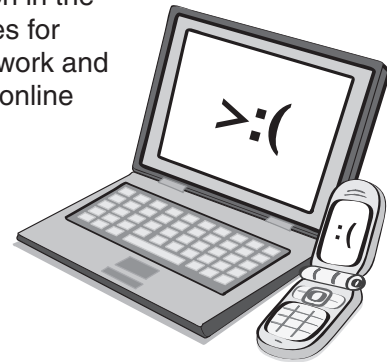


Your teen is taking part in classroom lessons from the CyberSmart! Student Curriculum to begin a dialogue about cyberbullying prevention. CyberSmart!’s approach is standards- and research-based. We focus on adopting best practices from face-to-face bullying prevention, school violence prevention, character education, and cyber security education.

CyberSmart! believes that students should have access to and instruction in the use of the Internet and other information and communication technologies for learning, for socialization, and for preparing for college and 21st century work and citizenship. Filters and other technological solutions for protecting teens online are not a substitute for teaching them how to stay safe online.

What is cyberbullying?

The formal definition of *cyberbullying* is intentional and repeated use of computer and cell phone networks by kids and teens to cause harm or distress to other kids and teens.



Here’s what we teach high school students about cyberbullying:

- The more teens are online, the more likely it is they will be involved in harassing situations. And with teens carrying cell phones and other portable electronic communication devices, they are exposed 24/7.
- Because text-based messages are often ambiguous or may use harsh language, teens should cue their intent with abbreviations such as *JK* (“just kidding”).
- Many teens try out new identities online.
- Social networking sites, blogs, wikis, chat, messaging, and video sharing are great means for self-expression. However, self-expression that is intentionally at the expense of other teens may cross the line into bullying behavior.
- Even if a teen posts a single mean comment or photo intending to embarrass or humiliate only once in anger, it quickly gets passed around online, sometimes creating a cyberbullying situation.
- Often teens can shrug off online bullying, but sometimes it can make them feel angry, fearful, or depressed.
- Self-control and respect for others should be valued online as well as in face-to-face relationships.
- Bystanders, or witnesses, to cyberbullying can have a positive effect in helping the targets of online harassment.
- Save harassing or threatening messages and print them out. Then get help from trusted adults.

Here’s what families can do:

- Start a conversation with your teens about online harassment. Ask them to tell you what they know about it.
- Talk with your teens about positive roles they can take when they witness online harassment, such as supporting the targeted teen and letting others know that the behavior is not acceptable.
- Talk about ways to handle these incidents when your teen is the target of cyberbullying. Emphasize that when they get angry with other teens, it’s best to stop what they are doing, get offline, and calm down.
- Tell your teens that you understand that cyberbullying is just as serious as face-to-face bullying. In fact, because it can take place when they are at home at night or on weekends, it can often be more intrusive and upsetting than schoolyard bullying.
- Talk with your teens about what they do online. Discuss their social network profiles, blogs, and favorite game sites. Talk about who is on their buddy lists and the language they use to communicate by texting and IM-ing.