

CYBERBULLYING

Your child may be experiencing cyberbullying in one way or another! You can help!

Understand cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is when a child or teen becomes a target of actions by others – using computers, mobiles or other devices – that are intended to embarrass, humiliate, torment, threaten or harass. It can start as early as age eight or nine right through to their teen years.

Kids call it hating, drama, gossip or trolling. Whatever name it goes by, cyberbullying is serious. It can be emotionally damaging and even lead to tragic consequences. It's happening enough that we need to do more about it.

Signs your child may be involved in cyberbullying

The first thing to keep in mind is that cyberbullying isn't limited to just 'naughty kids' and it's become more common than most of us would like to think. If your child is involved in it, it doesn't mean you're a terrible parent. It may be that they've become caught up in behaviour encouraged by peers all around them.

Or they may be someone who starts it and keeps it up persistently, and needs serious attention and support themselves. Either way, understanding the signs is the first step to stopping it.

Here are some of the signs your child may be involved:

- Your child has a large number of social networking accounts on multiple sites, which may be a sign they're using accounts to harass others.
- You overhear insults, snarky remarks or sarcastic laughter while your child is online or texting.
- Your child becomes secretive about their online activity: they quickly change the screen or hide their mobile device if you interrupt them and may become annoyed when you walk in on them.
- They spend long hours online, almost obsessively, perhaps finding times to be online when the rest of the family is asleep.
- Your child is spending time with friends who behave in ways that are mean or uncaring. Often, children engage in cyberbullying to fit in with a new peer group.
- They don't seem to care if their words or actions hurt



Warning signs of cyberbullying

No parent wants to learn that their child has become a victim of cyberbullying. But worse is not learning about it until long after it's begun. By keeping lines of communication open with our children, and being alert to changes in their behaviour, parents may be able to offer help sooner.

Here are some of the common signs that your child may be experiencing cyberbullying:

- Your child begins to avoid using their mobile device or computer. Or, conversely, they begin to spend much more time texting, gaming or using social networking sites.
- They appear upset, withdrawn or angry after receiving emails, instant messages or text messages.
- Your child becomes more secretive about their online activities and avoids conversations that have to do with their computer or mobile device.
- Your child is reluctant to leave the house; they begin avoiding social situations they used to enjoy or withdraw from family and friends.
- They begin falling behind in school work or their grades go down.
- They become reluctant to go to school, or completely refuse.
- Your child appears sad, frustrated, impatient or angry much more than usual.
- They are having trouble sleeping, or show less interest in eating.

Talk to your child about cyberbullying

Open up a discussion with your child about cyberbullying. It's the best way to show them you think it's important to their lives – and will make it easier for them to come to you in the future:

- Let them know you've become aware of the issue; you might mention it's been in the news a lot, and seems to have become a pretty big thing among teens lately.
- Refer to the stories you may have heard or read about.
- Ask your child if they've ever seen any kind of cyberbullying and let them tell you about it.
- Be careful not to make it an interrogation; listen and open up the lines of communication.
- Reassure them you won't take away their social networking access or mobile device. Children and teens are often afraid to confide in their parents for fear their online access or devices will be taken away.