

# ▶ HELP PROTECT Your Kids from Cyberbullying

**Bullies are notorious for tormenting their victims face to face** — at school, on the playground, in sports. But now, the Internet has brought bullying into the home.

*Cyberbullying* (or online bullying) is repeated, unwanted, or cruel behavior against someone through computers, cell phones, gaming consoles, or other Internet-enabled means.

The full scope of cyberbullying is difficult to measure. However, we do know that nearly one in six U.S. children grades six to 10 (that's 3.2 million students) is a victim of online bullying each year.

*(Source: National Council of Juvenile Court Judges)*

## ▶ How cyberbullying works

Unlike physical bullying, where the victim can often walk away, the Internet is always "on," opening the door for 24-hour harassment. Cyberbullies can be anonymous. They never have to confront their victims. They don't have to be physically stronger. And, cyberbullies can be virtually invisible to parents and adults.

*A cyberbully may:*

- **Deliberately shut someone out** of an online group—an instant messaging (IM) buddy list, for example.
- **Send hurtful or threatening messages** to a victim's cell phone, harass a person in an online game, post embarrassing pictures on a social networking site (like MySpace or MSN Spaces), or share a humiliating video on a site such as YouTube.
- **Disclose secrets or private information**—for example, forwarding a confidential e-mail or text message.
- **Impersonate the victim** and post hateful comments, or belittle the victim's friends on a blog.
- **Pretend to befriend a victim**, gain his trust, and then turn on him.

Cyberbullying methods may be virtual, but the pain is real—anger, embarrassment, frustration, confusion, fear. Victims of cyberbullying may withdraw from friends, skip school, experience depression, consider—or even commit—suicide. And, the bully's abuse can echo forever. College administrators, employers, friends, and others who search the Internet for a name years later may find the lies and insults.

Cyberbullying is bad for bullies, too. They may be disliked by teachers, find it hard to make or keep friends, and face a future with higher rates of unsuccessful relationships, failure at work, substance abuse, or imprisonment.

***Bullying is not "a phase,"  
nor is it just a normal part of growing up.  
The repercussions of cyberbullying  
can be so grave that 14 U.S. states have  
passed or are proposing laws  
to make it a crime.***

## ▶ Pointers for parents: How to avoid online bullying -----

**Encourage children and their friends to look out for each other.** Cyberbullies are less likely to target those whom they perceive will be supported. If a victim has friends who rally around him or her, the bullying usually stops.

### **Watch over your kids.**

- To keep an eye on younger ones, put the family computer and Internet-connected game consoles in a central location.
- Ask your children what they're doing online. What may have started as a face-to-face argument with a friend can slide into repeated online assaults with others joining in.

### **Talk with your kids about cyberbullying.**

- Teenagers have so many ways to access the Internet that putting the computer in a central spot isn't always effective. With older kids, it's critical to have frank discussions.

- Encourage your children to report bullying to you. Promise that you will take action on their behalf. If appropriate, reassure teens that you won't curtail their phone or computer privileges.
- Let your children know they should never, under any circumstances, bully someone. Make the consequences clear.

**Get help from technology.** Explore different tools to help keep kids safer. Microsoft offers family safety settings in such products as Windows Vista®, Xbox 360® and Xbox LIVE®, Windows Live™ OneCare™ Family Safety, and the Zune® digital media player. Check out the details at:

[microsoft.com/protect/family/safetysettings/default.aspx](http://microsoft.com/protect/family/safetysettings/default.aspx).

You can also find a comprehensive list of popular tools at [kids.getnetwise.org/tools](http://kids.getnetwise.org/tools).

## ▶ What to do if someone is cyberbullying your child -----

**Act immediately.** Your child needs to know that you can and will help. If you feel that your child is physically at risk, call the police at once. Don't wait to see if the abuse will stop.

**Tell your kids not to respond to the bully.** Don't retaliate; that can increase the abuse. Don't answer phone calls, or read text messages, e-mail, or comments from cyberbullies. But do save the material in case the authorities need it.

**Block anyone whose behavior is inappropriate or threatening in any way.** Check in with the service—social networking, IM, cell phone—to find out how.

**Report the problem.** Every effort should be made to find the bully and hold him or her accountable.

- If the bully is a student, consider reporting it to the school, which can take disciplinary action.

- Report bullying to the Web site where the bullying is happening. Many services have moderators and places to report abuse. Ask cell phone companies to track calls and take action.

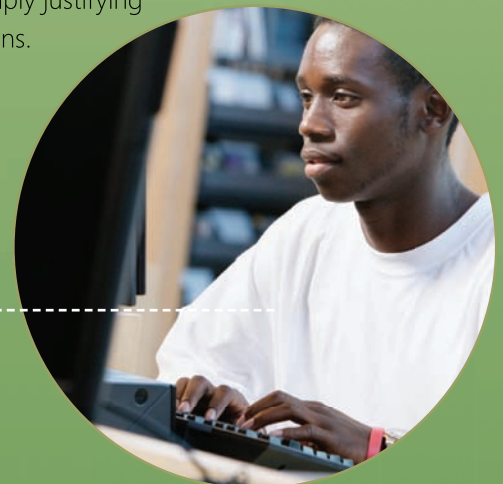
**Acknowledge your child's pain.** Hearing you affirm that what happened wasn't fair or right is important. Make sure your child understands:

- That "weaklings tattle" is a myth. In reality, those who tell are the ones who are not willing to be bullied.
- That he or she is not at fault. The bully is not attacking because of some flaw—"I'm fat, a nerd, wear glasses..." The bully is simply justifying his or her actions.



### **More helpful info**

**Get advice from Microsoft about how to help protect your family online:**  
[microsoft.com/protect/family](http://microsoft.com/protect/family)



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