

What is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is when "the Internet, cell phones or other devices are used to send or post text messages intended to hurt or embarrass another person," according to The National Crime Prevention Council. It's a relatively recent problem -- the increasingly-blurring lines of "web life" and "real life" are partly to blame since teens and adults spend so much time using the web, cell phones and video gaming systems. In fact, three out of four children report that they've been the victims of cyberbullying, though only one out of 10 reported the incident(s) to parents or teachers, according to a 2008 UCLA study.

The recent tragedies stemming from cyberbullying show that parents must do their part to help children and teens understand -- and prevent -- cyberbullying in their lives.

How can parents help?

Talk to your child before it starts

This might seem like a no-brainer, but it's important to remember. Take the time to sit down with your children and explain why cyberbullying is wrong. Let them know that it's important to tell a trusted adult if they're the victim and why not to cyberbully another person. While it may not be the easiest topic to discuss, using real-life stories -- like the tragic "sexting" suicide of Hope Witsell in 2008 -- can make the topic seem real, instead of just another parental lecture.

Limit your child's online time

Set firm rules for when and how long you child can spend online. It's a good idea to only allow your child to go online when you're home to supervise their activities. Installing Internet security filters and other protection software is also a good way to regulate your child's online experience.

Look for the warning signs

If your once-happy child suddenly seems depressed, then it's time to set up and take notice. Is your child withdrawing from his friends, or does he want to spend a disproportionate time online? If so, it's time to step in and see if cyberbullying is the reason behind the change.

Seek professional help

The cyberbullying problem is now an epidemic and resources are now available to help children and parents deal with it. Organizations like STOP Cyberbullying, Cyberbullying Research Center and The Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use provide advice, resources and information to help parents understand and respond to cyberbullying. Clergy, psychologists and school guidance counselors are also good resources to tap when cyberbullying becomes a problem.