



Common Sense on Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is similar to face-to-face bullying, but online tools can magnify the hurt, humiliation, and social drama in a very public way. Though research shows that most teens do not do this, those who do often take advantage of the web's anonymity and do things like spread rumors or forward embarrassing information. Mean-spirited comments can spread widely and rapidly online, which means that it can happen anytime—at school or at home—and can escalate quickly. We can help teach our teens how to identify, prevent and address cyberbullying.

When it comes to identifying cyberbullying and helping prevent it, common sense says:

Recognize context. Cyberbullying is often not thought of as “cyberbullying” to the teens involved. Even though an incident has a history, a story, and nuance, rather than referring it as “cyberbullying,” try the words “digital cruelty,” “abuse,” or “being mean” online.

Help teens understand when behavior crosses the line. Help your teen tune into his or her own feelings. If they feel emotionally or physically scared, it's time to get help.

Encourage empathy. Help teens understand the detrimental impact of cyberbullying on people who are targeted, now and later in life. Encourage them to listen to the targets of bullying and to become their allies.

Be realistic. Teens have their own social dynamics that often don't include parents, so helping them directly may be difficult. Encourage teens to find friends or other trusted adults to help them through the situation, even if it's not you. Reporting an incident to a website administrator can be an empowering step.

Remember that your teen might be the bully. Teens can take different roles in cyberbullying at different times. A teen who is cyberbullied might turn around and cyberbully someone else to feel powerful again. Ask questions to understand what role or roles your teens are playing.

Tell them to disengage. Encourage your teens to ignore and block the bully, and even log off the computer for a while. Point out that cyberbullies are often just looking for attention and status, so don't let them know that their efforts have worked.

