What do you do when your child is the target of cyberbullying?

Once kids go online, their chances of experiencing cyberbullying, haters, and trolls is, sadly, quite high. And cyberbullying is one of the most humiliating and painful experiences that a school-age kid has to deal with. It's also something many kids find difficult to discuss with adults. Because bullying is about a loss of power, the remedy is to help the child reclaim that power. To empower your child, take the time to do the following:

1. Breathe!

For many parents and caregivers, the discovery that your child is the target of online cruelty is highly stressful. Before you take action, talk through the situation with your spouse, partner, or friend. Take care of your own feelings so you can then be there for your kid. And, remember, keep breathing.

2. Show empathy.

Taking the time to say a few kind words to your child will bring him or her to a calmer place. It's important that you convey to your child that you're ready to listen and explore solutions together, so try:

- **Validating their emotions.** Consider saying:

    – *I'm so sorry that you're being treated like this, and I'm here to listen.*

    – *I'm guessing that this is [name an emotion, e.g., scary, overwhelming, etc.] for you.*

- **Normalizing what they're feeling.** Consider saying:

    – *So many kids are the target of cyberbullying. Thank you for telling me what you're going through.*

    – *In your shoes, I'd feel [echo what they're feeling, e.g., angry, anxious, etc.] about this situation, too.*

- **Affirming their decision to seek out help.** Consider saying:

    – *Thank you for trusting me. I'm so glad that you've told me about this situation.*

    – *This is a lot for anyone to handle, and you don't need to go through this alone.*

NOTE: Most kids do *not* find it helpful to be told that things will get better!

3. Find your allies.

Remember that you don't have to work through this situation alone. There are others in your community and in the professional world who can help, so consider:

- **Working with your child's school.** If your child is being cyberbullied online, it's quite likely that they're also being bullied during the day at school. Set up an appointment with your child's principal, counselor, or classroom teacher. Work together to understand what's going on when and who's involved. Many schools have safeguards and/or protocols outlined for such situations. Remember that every student has the right under federal and most state laws to a safe educational environment, free from harassment, threats, and bullying.

- **Reaching out to professionals.** There are two situations in which you should reach out to professionals:
  - **The post breaks the law.** When a post contains a threat to cause serious physical harm or consists of a naked or revealing photo of a child, take a screenshot to preserve the evidence, and report the post immediately to local law enforcement. The police are trained to determine whether this is a criminal threat or the post violates the law in any other way.
  - **The post reveals a danger of self-harm.** Sometimes a post suggests that a child is considering taking his or her own life. This post, whether from your child or one of their friends, may be a cry for help or a real statement of intent. In either case, it needs to be taken seriously. Take a screenshot to preserve the evidence, and let the child's school know that they need the support of a counselor or trained mental health professional. If you feel the child is in immediate risk of self-harm, call 911.

4. Be proactive.

The best way to prevent your kid from getting involved in cyberbullying is to be proactive. You know your kids the best, so talk with them — often. Remember to:

- **Initiate the conversation.** Sit down as a family, and talk about how to balance media and technology. Kids tell us that their digital lives are busy and full of responsibilities. What are your family's expectations around device use, balance, permissions, and social media?

- **Continue the conversation.** Have ongoing conversations with your child about what they're doing daily on their devices. What are their favorite shows and sites? What do they use texting for? By continuing the conversation, you're giving your kids opportunities to open up and share the positives and the negatives of their digital lives.

- **Be watchful.** Don't expect your children to tell you they're being harassed or bullied. Watch for indirect signs that things aren't going well for your child: stomachaches, headaches, irritability, depression, social withdrawal, a sudden change in behavior, or a reluctance to go to school. Remember, you know your child best, so don't second-guess yourself.

- **Gather evidence.** Ask your child to show you what's happened online. When it comes to threatening or offensive emails, texts, or posts, save copies to your device, or take screenshots or photos of the messages.

5. Empower your kids.

Finally, help your children be part of the solution, and remind them to take some of the following suggested steps to change a cyberbullying situation:

- **Tell a trusted adult.** An important part of being empowered is knowing to reach out for help when you need it. Help kids identify several trusted adults, whether it's parents, teachers, coaches, or mentors.

- **Flag posts.** Many social media sites empower users to take action to remove posts and photos they find threatening or embarrassing. Show your kids how to "flag" posts on different sites and platforms. For suggestions on how to remove a post, visit **www.adl.org/combating-hate/cyber-safety/best-practices**.

- **Start an anti-bullying campaign.** Cyberbullying touches many lives, and if it isn't affecting your family directly, chances are it may be happening to others in your child's school or community. Work with your child to start a school-based or neighborhood anti-cyberbullying program using Common Sense Education and No Bully's resources.