

Responding to Cyberbullying

Top Ten Tips for Adults Who Are Being Harassed Online



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1. Do not retaliate

Cyberbullies want you to react. The problem is that if you respond angrily, the bully may feed off of that response and continue (and even escalate the severity of) the cyberbullying. Plus there could be consequences for your response.

2. Record everything

Keep evidence of all content (pictures, texts, emails, tweets, status updates) that the cyberbully has sent or posted about you. If the cyberbullying is occurring on a blog or forum, take screenshots of the posts. The evidence will be useful to build a case against the person harassing you, and to work with authorities (such as law enforcement) when needed.

3. Talk to your employer

Let your employer know if the cyberbully is a co-worker, or if the bullying is occurring on a work-related forum or blog. If the harassment prevents you from doing your job, your employer needs to know about it.

4. Contact law enforcement

If threats of physical harm are made, or if the cyberbullying starts to get more dangerous, make a police report. The more evidence you have of the threats, the easier it will be for law enforcement to respond.

5. Report abuse

Every reputable website has a "Report" feature that allows you to tell them about behaviors that violate their terms of use. Guilty parties will be banned. Avoid sites that do not provide clear options to report bullies.

6. Consult with an attorney

If you feel like major damage has been done to your reputation due to a cyberbully, contact a lawyer and see what your options are. You might be able to file a civil suit against the cyberbully depending on the nature of the case. Possible legal actions include intentional infliction of emotional distress, defamation of character, presentation in a false light, invasion of privacy, and harassment.

7. Talk about it

Speaking with trustworthy friends about what you are going through could be cathartic. They might have gone through similar situations and might be able to give you advice. Talking to someone about what you are going through, even if it is just to vent, can be very therapeutic.

8. Cut ties

Don't befriend the cyberbully or try to get them to warm up to you. If you feel like you need to respond to the cyberbully, do it respectfully. Do not try and rationalize or make friends with the bully.

9. Block the bully

Block the cyberbullying at its source. If you are getting incessant emails from a cyberbully, use your email program options to prevent that person from contacting you. Use the options within social media sites or applications to do the same. Then, the cyberbully won't be able to see you, search for you, or contact you in any way. You can even go through your cell phone provider or telephone company and block a particular phone number that is calling you.

10. Change your contact info

Change your e-mail, phone number, or online account completely. This would be a last resort because it greatly inconveniences you, but it may be necessary to terminate the problem.

Sameer Hinduja, Ph.D. is a Professor at Florida Atlantic University and Justin W. Patchin, Ph.D. is a Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Together, they lecture across the United States and abroad on the causes and consequences of cyberbullying and offer comprehensive workshops for parents, teachers, counselors, mental health professionals, law enforcement, youth and others concerned with addressing and preventing online aggression. The Cyberbullying Research Center is dedicated to providing up-to-date information about the nature, extent, causes, and consequences of cyberbullying among adolescents.

For more information, visit <http://www.cyberbullying.us>

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