

What To Do When Your Child Cyberbullies Others

Top Ten Tips for Parents

Sameer Hinduja, Ph.D. and Justin W. Patchin, Ph.D.



Finding out that your child is mistreating others online can be frustrating. Here's how to respond:

- 1. ACKNOWLEDGE THE ISSUE.** As a parent or guardian, accept the reality that your child could be engaging in online behaviors that are hurting others. Rather than try to trivialize, rationalize, or ignore the problem at hand, realize that *anyone* can be cruel to others, given the right circumstances.
- 2. REMAIN CALM.** When addressing cyberbullying, try to discuss the issue in a level-headed manner without demonizing, disrespecting, or judging your child. Remember that your son or daughter isn't the problem; their behavior is. Deal with it, but treat them with dignity rather than condemnation and shame. Otherwise, they may lash out and retaliate if they feel attacked or victimized themselves, and no progress will be made. 
- 3. KEEP AN OPEN LINE OF COMMUNICATION.** Many youth engage in cyberbullying to get revenge for something someone else did first. Make sure that your kids know that they can come to you and discuss issues they are having with peers (offline or online). Give children the opportunity and skillset to solve interpersonal problems in appropriate ways, instead of resorting to revenge.
- 4. STOP THE BULLYING.** Goal #1 is to get the bullying to end and never happen again. Ensure that all instances of bullying are stopped immediately, regardless of who started it. No one deserves to be mistreated, for any reason, ever.
- 5. UNDERSTAND THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM.** We hear that "hurt people hurt people." It is critical to identify the reason(s) your child has acted out. Is it an unhealthy way of coping with stress in their life? Because they themselves are being victimized? Because there are no rules in place, and no threat of sanctions to deter them? Try to get to the bottom of the issue.
- 6. INVESTIGATE.** Take measures to thoroughly find out the extent of your child's bullying. It could span multiple online environments and devices. It could be very direct and observable, or indirect and extremely subtle. Work to fully understand what happened and where. 
- 7. MAKE CHILDREN UNDERSTAND HOW TARGETS FEEL.** Explain the severity of cyberbullying and how it would feel to be on the receiving end of hate or harassment with an example specific to how *your child* would be hurt the most. Try to cultivate empathy and compassion in kids in creative and compelling ways, so that they really understand that we all have our sore spots, hot buttons, and vulnerabilities.
- 8. SET UP PARENTAL CONTROLS.** Monitor your child's online activities, both formally and informally. This can be done through the installation of software or apps on their laptop, tablet, or phone. You should also routinely and randomly check their devices to see what they are doing, at least until you feel sure that they can be trusted.
- 9. SHARE YOUR CONCERNS.** You are not the only parent who has ever faced these problems. Connect with others so that the entire community can rally around the issue and take a stand. This united front can help to create and promote a culture where all members of a peer group recognize that bullying is always wrong and never justifiable. 
- 10. STAY EDUCATED.** While we know that your lives are extremely busy, it is important that you take time to continually learn about new technologies and sites that your kids (and their peers) are using. You should also know where to get help (such as cyberbullying.org), and interface with others (especially school staff) who have relevant experiences and strategies to share.

