

Help Kids Stand Up to Online Bullying

Because young people practically grow up online, it's no surprise that bullying has moved to the Internet. In 2012, a Microsoft study of more than 7,500 children ages 8 through 17 in 25 countries worldwide found that 37 percent of those interviewed had experienced meanness online.¹

Just like bullying in person, online bullying (also known as *cyberbullying*) is repeated behavior intended to tease, demean, or harass someone less powerful. Being online, it opens the door to 24-hour hurt, perhaps made anonymously and potentially broadcast to a wider audience. Kids can use any type of Internet-connected device through web services like text and instant messaging, games, or social media such as Facebook and Tumblr.

Kids who bully may:

- > **Send hurtful or threatening messages** to a target's phone or in an online game, or distribute altered pictures or a humiliating video on social media.
- > **Disclose secrets or private information**—for example, by forwarding a confidential instant or text message.
- > **Deliberately exclude someone from a group** in a game or virtual world, or on social media.
- > **Impersonate the target.** Break into someone's phone or social media account, and then send or post hateful comments or cause trouble with friends.
- > **Pretend to befriend someone,** gain his or her trust, and then betray that trust.

There are many reasons why young people mistreat others online—out of boredom, to get approval or be funny, to retaliate for having been bullied themselves, or because they are in distress. It isn't always intentional—what starts as an argument may escalate. Often, kids may not even recognize their behavior as bullying, rather referring to it as *drama*.²

Help stop the cycle of bullying

There are two powerful things you can do to intervene in the cycle of online bullying: pay attention to kids' lives online and encourage empathy for others.

Pay attention

Listen to kids. Ask them to talk about their lives. Sit with younger children while they play and explore online. Regularly ask tweens and teens to show you around—what websites they visit, where they hang out, who with, and how they talk to each other.



Lead by example. Kids learn from what adults do. They notice how you react to stress and see if you treat others with kindness and respect—your family, friends, neighbors, even strangers.

Watch for signs of online cruelty. Look for kids getting upset when online or texting, or for a reluctance to go to school. Watch, too, for kids being mean to others online. Make clear that they should never bully anyone.

Ask your kids to report bullying to you. Promise unconditional support. Reassure them that you won't curtail phone, gaming, or computer privileges because of others' behavior.

Encourage empathy

Ask kids to put themselves in others' shoes (those of bullies, too). With you standing by for support, here are steps they can take to stand up for someone being bullied online:

- > **Be kind.** Spend time together, and be a good listener. Reassure the friend with supportive phone calls and texts.
- > **Set a good example.** Don't forward mean messages, or use insults to defend a friend.
- > **Block bullying.** Advise the friend not to reply to or even read text messages and online attacks. Help the friend block bullies or change his or her password. Check with the service—social network site, IM, mobile phone—to find out how.
- > **Ask those who are bullying to stop**—politely, though, and only if it feels safe to do so.
- > **Tell others.** Help the friend report what's happening to a trusted adult like a parent, teacher, or coach, or to a counselor or other trained professional. Report the abuse to the website.

¹ "Worldwide Online Bullying Survey," Microsoft, 2012. (aka.ms/OnlineBullyingSurvey)

² See "The Drama! Teen Conflict, Gossip, and Bullying in Networked Publics" (aka.ms/teen_drama)



What to do if a child is involved in online bullying

Support all the kids involved in bullying, whether they are being bullied or are bullying others (or both).

Get the full story. Listen carefully and take it seriously. It may not be simple: the child or teen may be the target of bullying, or may be bullying someone as well. Recognize, too, that kids may be reluctant to talk about it.

Together, make a plan. Ask what you can do to help, and make the kid's answers the basis of the plan. Discuss what each of you will do.

For a kid being bullied online:

- > Don't blame the target of bullying (even if he or she started it). No one deserves to be bullied.
- > Advise kids not to respond or retaliate. (Do save the material in case authorities need it.)
- > Report bullying to the website or company where the abuse occurred. For example, contact Microsoft at www.microsoft.com/reportabuse.
- > If you feel that your child is *physically* at risk, call the police at once.

For a kid bullying someone online:

- > Try to understand the source of the bullying behavior. (But, don't let reasons become excuses.)
- > Be supportive. It's the behavior, not the kid that is the at the heart of the conflict.
- > Discuss how the child or teen can make amends, like an apology or good deed for the person bullied.

Get help. Find counselors or other experts, trained to deal with kids who have been bullied or have bullied others.

Promote kindness in your community

Research shows that promoting empathy and kindness can be a potent way to help stop bullying.

Advocate for empathy training at school. One of the most effective ways to prevent online bullying is social and emotional learning—the process through which we learn to build strong relationships and develop healthy boundaries and self-perceptions. (For a list of well-tested programs, see aka.ms/EffectivePrograms.)

Start a kindness campaign at home, school, or in your neighborhood. This could be as simple as each family member agreeing to do one kind thing a day, or broad in scope, like developing a program to challenge a culture of criticism at school.

Teach thoughtfulness. This lesson can help students (grades 6 to 9) understand how small, thoughtful actions can make a huge difference in others' lives: ikeepcurrent.org/lesson/philanthropy-be-good-for-goodness-sake.



More helpful info

These websites offer practical ideas for addressing online bullying:

- > stopbullying.gov
- > schoolclimate.org/bullybust/resources/key_resources



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