



## What to do if your child is cyberbullying

### 13 Top tips

**1. Listen.** You may well first hear about this from the school or a parent and will feel many strong feelings, making listening hard. Your first reaction may be to defend your child. Instead, do your best to keep calm and quiet. Listen to all the details and ask for copies of any of the correspondence. Evidence will help address the issue with your child.

**2. Recognise the problem.** Do not automatically assume your child is guilty before you have a chance to talk but do acknowledge the gravity of the situation. Assure the parent/school that you will speak to your child and get back to them. Express your concern and make a commitment to pursue the situation further.

**3. Talk.** Tell your child what you have been told and show them copies of the cyberbullying. Then ask them to explain. The goal is to get your child to acknowledge what they have done and take responsibility.

**4. Accept that your child made a mistake.** It's important that you accept your child's mistake but take action. Remember it is your job to respond appropriately and prevent future bullying incidents. Ignoring or denying the behaviour will only make matters worse and it increases the likelihood that your child will cyberbully again.

**5. Establish consequences.** After cyberbullying occurs, it's important that your child learns how to handle online communications appropriately. Taking away their access to electronic communications is often the best course of action. Discuss your expectations regarding electronic communication including the concept of digital etiquette. Be sure they know that if they want to use social networking and other electronic communications again, then they will have to earn this privilege back by demonstrating that they understand the rules. It also might be a good idea to give these privileges back in stages with your full involvement.

**6. Support the school.** If your child's school implements a disciplinary plan for the cyberbullying, it is extremely important that you support it. As difficult as that may be, you are communicating to your child that cyberbullying is unacceptable and won't be tolerated. Supporting the school is one of the best ways to ensure that your child doesn't cyberbully again.

**7. Learn about relevant legal issues.**



**8. Find the root.** Find out why your child chose to cyberbully. Was the bullying a product of peer pressure? Has your child been bullied and cyberbullying was an act of revenge? Did your child cyberbully hoping to fit in with a clique? Did your child cyberbully because he thought it was fun or entertaining? Once you know why you can fully address the issue. Don't allow the answers to these questions to become an excuse for the cyberbullying. It is still very important that your child realises that the choice to cyberbully was theirs regardless of the circumstances.

**9. Educate your child.** Kids often underestimate the impact of what they write online. It's your job to help your child to understand the seriousness of cyberbullying. If your child doesn't seem to acknowledge that cyberbullying is a problem, show them some tragic cases from the internet. For example - Josh Unsworth, 15 or Hannah Smith, 14. Then, ask them to discuss those cases with you. They need to understand how serious cyberbullying can be and how it affects other people.

**10. Make amends.** Once your child fully understands the impact of his/her actions, it's important that they make amends in some way. Sometimes the victim will feel threatened or anxious if a face-to-face apology is made so a letter might be a better option. In some cases, parents have required their children to make regular contributions from their allowances or pay cheques to anti-bullying organisations.

**11. Monitor electronic devices.** To prevent cyberbullying recurring it may be wise to keep tabs on what your child is doing online. This may include having passwords to all their accounts, having e-mails forwarded to your account and monitoring texts through their phone company. Until your child earns back your trust, having their communications monitored is a consequence for breaking your rules – and in some cases the law.

**12. Educate yourself.** Don't let technology intimidate you – educate yourself. While you may never keep pace with your child, it's important that you at least stay informed. Find a trusted online resource for information about the Internet, social networking and other ways kids communicate and visit it regularly to keep up to date with new developments.

**13. Remember you are not a bad parent.** Any child can become a cyberbully. The important thing is that you address the issue and prevent cyberbullying in the future.

*[Adapted from About.com Health]*