

Help Protect Kids from Cyberbullying

Microsoft®

Bullies are notorious for tormenting their victims face to face—at school, on the playground, in sports. But now, *cyberbullying* (or online bullying) opens the door to 24-hour harassment through computers, mobile phones, gaming consoles, and other Internet-enabled means.

The full scope of cyberbullying—using the Internet for repeated, unwanted, or cruel behavior against someone—is difficult to measure. However, research indicates that between 30 and 50 percent of teens report having been a victim of online bullying.¹ A Microsoft study showed that two in five parents surveyed report that their teen has been affected by cyberbullying, either as a victim, bully, or witness.²



How cyberbullying works

Unlike physical bullying, where the victim can often walk away, the Internet is always “on.” And, cyberbullying can be virtually invisible to parents and other adults. A cyberbully may:

- **Send hurtful or threatening messages** to a victim’s phone, harass a person in an online game, post embarrassing pictures on a social website like Facebook, or share a humiliating video online.
- **Disclose secrets or private information**—for example, by forwarding a confidential email or text message.
- **Deliberately shut someone out of an online group**—an instant messaging (IM) buddy list or social networking page, for example.
- **Impersonate the victim** and then post hateful comments or belittle the victim’s friends on a blog.
- **Pretend to befriend someone**, gain his or her trust, and then betray that trust.



More helpful info

- Find out four things you can do to help protect children’s privacy and safety online: microsoft.com/protect/parents/childsafety/steps.aspx.
- Explore a comprehensive list of popular family safety tools at kids.getnetwise.org/tools.

Cyberbullying hurts

Cyberbullying methods may be virtual, but the pain is real—anger, embarrassment, fear, confusion. Cyberbullying can be particularly devastating because many teens and “tweens” (kids age 9 to 12) count on their online and phone connections with others as a vital part of their social life.

Victims of cyberbullying may withdraw from friends, avoid school, experience depression, lash out, consider—or even commit—suicide. And, the bully’s abuse can echo forever when college administrators, employers, friends, and others who search the Internet for a name years later may find the lies and insults.

Cyberbullying hurts bullies, too. They are more likely to be disliked by teachers, find it hard to make or keep friends, and face higher rates of unsuccessful relationships, failure at work, substance abuse, or imprisonment.

Bullying is not “a phase,” nor is it a normal part of growing up. The repercussions of cyberbullying can be so grave that most U.S. states have passed or are proposing laws to make it a crime.

¹ Family Online Safety Institute Annual Conference, November 2009

² Microsoft Cyberbullying Survey, November 2010



Help kids avoid cyberbullying

Encourage children to make friends and to look out for each other. Cyberbullies are less likely to target those whom they perceive to have a strong network of friends, and usually stop when a victim's friends rally around him or her.

Talk with kids about cyberbullying. Ask your children what they are doing online—who they are meeting, what sites they visit, what games they play, and what they talk about. What may have started as a simple argument with one friend can slide into repeated online assaults with others joining in.

Ask children to report bullying to you. Promise to take action on their behalf, and reassure them that you won't curtail their phone, gaming, or computer privileges.

Look for signs of online bullying—for example, getting upset when online or texting or talking on the phone, or a reluctance to go to school or after-school activities.

Don't tolerate cyberbullying. Let your children know they should never, under any circumstances, bully someone. Make the consequences clear.

Keep passwords a secret. Urge kids not to share passwords or other information that could be used to bully them, and not to loan their phones or laptop computers.

Turn on safety features available in most programs and services such as those in Windows® 7, Xbox LIVE®, and the Zune® digital media player. (Get details for Microsoft products at microsoft.com/protect/tools/childsafty/compare.aspx.)

What to do if someone is cyberbullying your child

Children need to know that you will give positive, active, and predictable support.

Act immediately. Don't wait to see if the abuse will stop. If you feel that your child is physically at risk, call the police at once.

Acknowledge the pain. It's important for kids to hear you affirm that what happened wasn't fair or right. Make sure they understand:

- That "only weaklings tattle" is a myth. Those who get help are the ones who are not willing to be bullied.
- They are not at fault. The bully is not attacking because of some flaw—"I'm fat, a nerd, wear glasses..." The bully is simply justifying his or her actions.

Tell your kids not to respond or retaliate because bullies are looking for a reaction. Don't answer a bully's calls, or reply to (or even read) text messages or online attacks. Do save the material in case the authorities need it.

Block anyone whose behavior is inappropriate or threatening in any way. Check with the service—social networking, IM, mobile phone—to find out how.

Report the problem. Every effort should be made to hold the cyberbully accountable.

- If the bully is a student, consider reporting it to the school.
- Report bullying to the website or company where the abuse occurred. For example, in Microsoft® services or software, look for a **Report Abuse** link or contact us at www.microsoft.com/reportabuse.

