

A young woman with long, dark hair is looking down at her smartphone. She is wearing a grey hoodie. The background is dark and out of focus. A blue rectangular box is in the top right corner containing white text.

How to Prevent Cyberbullying:

A Guide for Parents,
Caregivers, and Youth

stopbullying.gov

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What Is Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets. Cyberbullying can occur through SMS, Text, and apps, or online in social media, forums, or gaming where people can view, participate in, or share content. Cyberbullying includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation. Some cyberbullying crosses the line into unlawful or criminal behavior.

The most common places where cyberbullying occurs are:

- Social Media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Tik Tok
- Text messaging and messaging apps on mobile or tablet devices
- Instant messaging, direct messaging, and online chatting over the internet
- Online forums, chat rooms, and message boards, such as Reddit
- Email
- Online gaming communities

Special Concerns

With the prevalence of social media and digital forums, comments, photos, posts, and content shared by individuals can often be viewed by strangers as well as acquaintances. The content an individual shares online – both their personal content as well as any negative, mean, or hurtful content – creates a kind of permanent public record of their views, activities, and behavior. This public record can be thought of as an online reputation, which may be accessible to schools, employers, colleges, clubs, and others who may be researching an individual now or in the future. Cyberbullying can harm the online reputations of everyone involved – not just the person being bullied, but those doing the bullying or participating in it. Cyberbullying has unique concerns in that it can be:

- **Persistent** – Digital devices offer an ability to immediately and continuously communicate 24 hours a day, so it can be difficult for children experiencing cyberbullying to find relief.
- **Permanent** – Most information communicated electronically is permanent and public, if not reported and removed. A negative online reputation, including for those who bully, can impact college admissions, employment, and other areas of life.
- **Hard to Notice** – Because teachers and parents may not overhear or see cyberbullying taking place, it is harder to recognize.

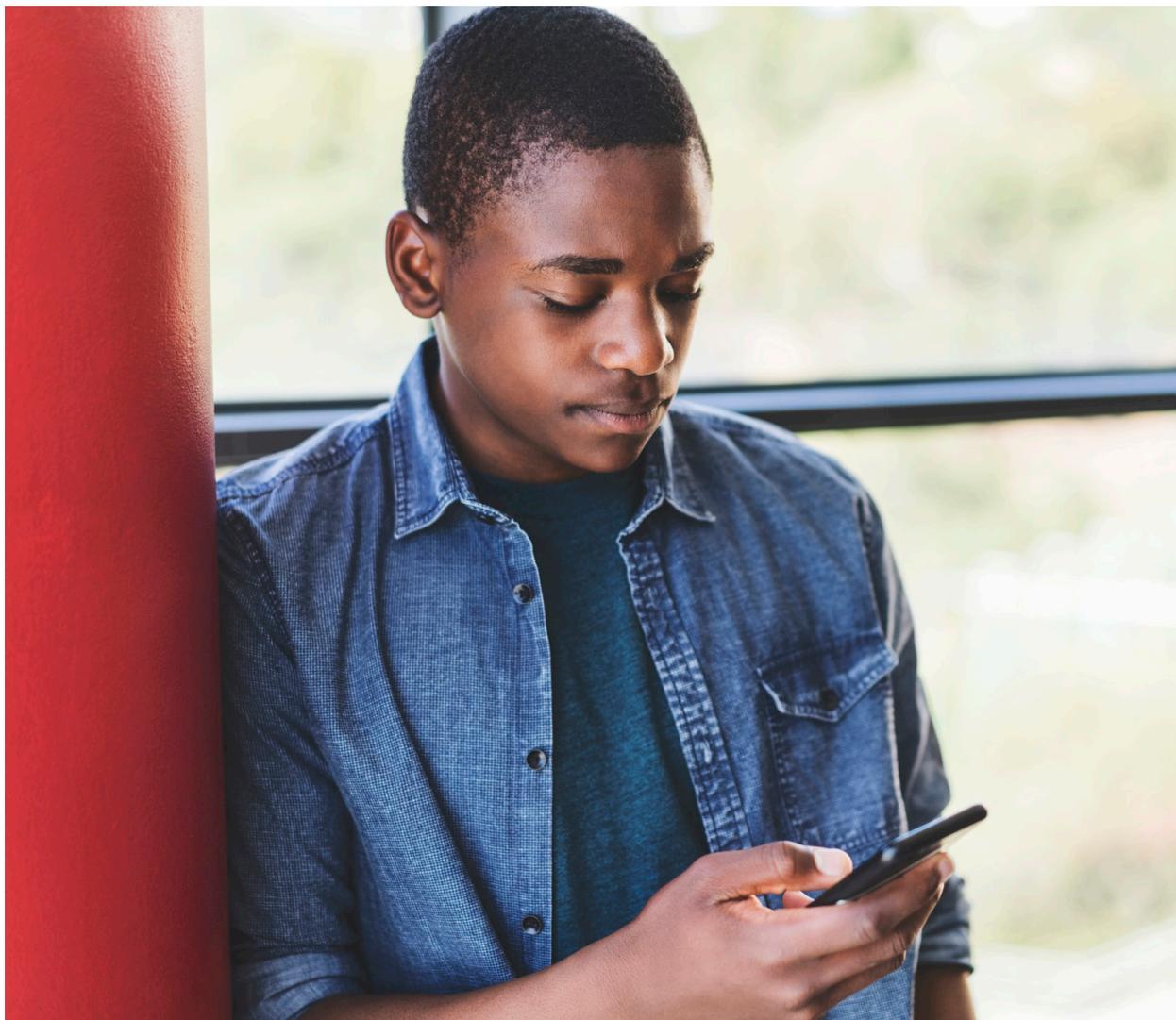
Laws and Sanctions

All states have laws requiring schools to respond to bullying. As cyberbullying has become more prevalent with the use of technology, many states now include cyberbullying, or mention cyberbullying offenses, under these laws. Schools may take action either as required by law, or with local or school policies that allow them to discipline or take other action. Some states also have provisions to address bullying if it affects school performance. You can learn about the [laws and policies](#) in each state, including if they cover cyberbullying.

Frequency of Cyberbullying

There are two sources of federally collected data on youth bullying:

- The 2017 [School Crime Supplement](#) to the National Crime Victimization Survey (National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice) indicates that, among students ages 12-18 who reported being bullied at school during the school year, 15% were bullied online or by text.
- The 2019 [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) indicates that an estimated 15.7% of high school students were electronically bullied in the 12 months prior to the survey.



Digital Awareness for Parents

The digital world is constantly evolving with new social media platforms, apps, and devices, and children and teens are often the first to use them. Some negative things that may occur include cyberbullying, sexting, posting hateful messages or content, and participating in negative group conversations. If your child posts harmful or negative content online, it may not only harm other children; it can affect their online reputation, which can have negative implications for their employment or college admission.



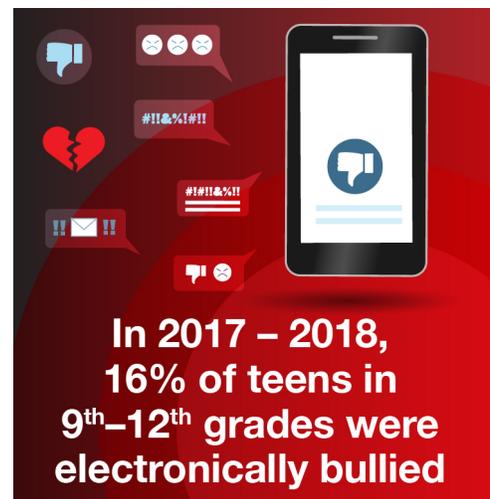
While you may not be able to monitor all of your child's activities, there are things you can do to prevent cyberbullying and protect your child from harmful digital behavior:

- Monitor a teen's social media sites, apps, and browsing history, if you have concerns that cyberbullying may be occurring.
- Review or re-set your child's phone location and privacy settings.
- Follow or friend your teen on social media sites or have another trusted adult do so.
- Stay up-to-date on the latest apps, social media platforms, and digital slang used by children and teens.
- Know your child's user names and passwords for email and social media.
- Establish rules about appropriate digital behavior, content, and apps.

Virtual Learning and Cyberbullying

Virtual learning can pose multiple benefits for students. For instance, it allows students to continue their schooling when it is not possible to be physically present on school grounds. It may also provide relief for students who were experiencing bullying in school. However, virtual learning may also be challenging for some students, and the risk of cyberbullying remains.

Students often use microphones and web cams to attend online classes. Consequently, a student's home life, living situation, setting, or family member may appear in the background while they are in class. Each student's home situation is different, and those differences can show during virtual learning. Students who bully others tend to bully students they perceive as different.



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2019](#).

Prevent Cyberbullying during Virtual Learning

It is important to be aware of common cyberbullying tactics so you can recognize cyberbullying and help prevent it. For example, some teachers restrict socializing by turning off the “chat” function in virtual learning environments. However, some students may use other digital communications, like texting or social media, to engage in conversations without the teacher’s awareness.



Parents, caregivers, and adults who are aware of the cyberbullying risks can take steps to help prevent it during virtual learning.

- Have your child sit with a wall behind them or use a generic photo as a background image to limit what others see of your home via the webcam. Some schools may require all students to use the same neutral background image.
- Have your child mute their microphone when they are not speaking and sit in a quiet place, if possible, so others cannot hear activities in your home.
- Check in with your child while they are attending school virtually to see if they are using other devices or apps during class. Limit the use of other devices and apps while in class to reduce the risk of cyberbullying.
- Role model appropriate videoconferencing behavior and teach your child good digital citizenship skills.
- Remember, if a student conducts any cyberbullying activity while using a school laptop, there may be a record of their cyberbullying activity.

Digital Monitoring Apps and Software for Parents

Parents who want to protect their children from cyberbullying, harmful digital behavior, and exposure to adult content can use parental control and monitoring software to help them set up systems that are less invasive to their children.

There are free software options and apps available to help parents restrict content, block domains, or view their children’s online activities, including social media, without looking at their child’s device every day. Most of the free software options provide some features for free, but charge for more robust insight.

A parent should consider a child’s age, device use, and digital behavior when selecting software – what is suitable to restrict for a ten-year old may not be useful for a teenager.

Social Media and Apps

Social Media Apps and Sites Commonly Used by Children and Teens

Digital media and apps allow children to communicate and express their creativity, connect with peers, and share their feelings. However, they can also be an avenue through which cyberbullying occurs. There are many types of apps and sites available for free that give users the ability to search for people and share or post information anonymously.

Parents may not be aware of the apps that their children use regularly or the risks involved in using them. There are many ways that cyberbullying can be hidden in apps and sites, such as texts, videos, and web calls that disappear or do not appear on the device's call or text message logs.

Many apps also make it easy for users to access, view, or participate in adult or harmful content. In addition, privacy and location settings may make users vulnerable to stalking, cyberbullying, exposure to adult content, or other dangers.

Popular Social Media Apps and Sites

Some current popular social media platforms and apps include:

- **Amino:** An app that lets users join online communities, chats, forums, and groups on a variety of topics based on their interests.
- **Askfm:** A social networking site that allows users to ask other people questions, often anonymously.
- **Calculator%:** A “vault” or secret app that appears harmless, but hides photos, videos, files, and browser history.
- **Chatroulette:** There are over 20 different chat roulette sites that allow users to instantly connect via webcam and video chat. Sites typically pair the users randomly and instantly.
- **Discord:** A voice-over-IP (VOIP) app that allows users to video chat with others, private message, and join, create, or participate in public and private chat rooms. This app is often used by players to chat with each other while playing videogames.
- **Facebook and Facebook Live:** The most commonly used social media site that is accessible on many different media platforms.
- **Facebook Messenger Kids:** A messaging app and platform for children.
- **Houseparty:** A group video chat and social networking app that allows up to eight people to video chat at once in a “room.”
- **Instagram:** A photo and video sharing and networking site that connects users through other social networking sites (e.g., Facebook).
- **Kik:** A messaging app that allows users of all ages to contact others anonymously.

- **Line:** A messaging app that allows users to make free phone calls, leave voice messages, and text. Users can delete texts or chats from recipient’s phone using a timer.
- **LiveMe:** A tool to broadcast live-streaming videos and watch other users’ videos.
- **MeetMe:** A dating app that connects users to others based on geographic proximity.
- **Omegle:** An app that pairs users with strangers in anonymous one-on-one chat sessions.
- **Reddit:** A site that stores social news, rates and evaluates web content, and discussion threads.
- **Roblox:** An online game platform with free multiplayer games created by users. Roblox allows users to communicate with each other and join groups.
- **Sarahah:** An anonymous messaging app that allows users to send anonymous messages.
- **Snapchat:** A photo messaging app that allows for sharing pictures and short videos that are intended to be erased shortly after delivery.
- **Telegram:** A messaging app that allows users to share photos, videos, and files; make calls, and delete texts or chats from recipient’s phone using a timer.
- **TikTok:** An app that allows users to create and share their own videos where they lip-synch, sing, dance, or just talk.
- **Tumblr:** A social networking site that allows posting of short blogs and media.
- **Twitch:** A live stream platform for gamers to watch live stream content, chat, and connect.
- **Twitter:** A microblogging site that allows users to send, read, and reply to “tweets” or short messages.
- **VSCO:** A photography app to capture and edit photos.
- **WeChat:** An app that allows user to chat with friends, and to search for people nearby and around the globe.
- **WhatsApp:** A private messaging app that allows users to text, send photos, videos, and location information to their contacts.
- **Whisper:** An anonymous social media site that allows users to post and share photo and video messages.
- **YouTube:** A video sharing platform that allows users to post and share videos.
- **YUBO (formerly YELLOW):** An app referred to as the “Tinder for teens” that allows users to swipe right or left to accept or reject the profiles of other users.
- **YouNow: Broadcast, Chat, and Watch Live Video:** An app that lets teens broadcast themselves live. They can see and respond to live chat or view other broadcasters and chat with them.

Risks of Social Media Apps and Sites

Social media has many benefits that must be balanced with the risks it presents. Risks to be aware of include:

- Screening for harmful content on websites and apps varies widely.
- Content posted can be incorrect, harmful, or hurtful.
- Apps and platforms can be used to share harmful or adult content.
- Apps and platforms can include users of all ages and allow children to connect with adults.
- Apps and platforms can have no moderator for chats, groups, and forums that allow all types of content to be posted or shared.
- Apps and platforms can allow all types of content to be posted or shared.



- Privacy controls over who can view or access posted material vary across apps, and many users are not aware of how to use them effectively.
- Apps that allow for real-time user videos “live streaming” can be used to show bullying, violence, suicide, and harmful acts as they are happening.
- Some apps that include location information can be used to get personal information, such as someone’s age, current location, or where someone lives.
- Apps that support telephone calls do not show up on a call log, so parents may not know who their children are talking to.

Parents can search online for organizations that provide in-depth parental reviews of apps, platforms and games used by children to learn more about them. By learning about the risks, important security features, and other details about the apps, platforms, and games children want to use, parents can make an informed decision about how or if their child will use them.

Cyberbullying and Gaming

Cyberbullying and Online Gaming

Playing videogames is a popular activity, with 70% of youth under the age of 18 playing videogames. Some games are solitary or single-player games; others are multi-player. Multi-player games – whether they are played on a computer, game console, handheld system, smartphone, or tablet – allow users to play with people they know in person and others they meet online. In fact, 65% of video game players of all ages say they play with others. There are many types of videogames: role-playing games, action games, shooter games, sport games, fighting games. There are also educational games like sandbox/build/construct games, puzzle games, and others.

Benefits of Online Gaming

Playing videogames can positively impact a players' cognitive, emotional, and social skills. It can also help children and teens enhance their problem-solving and strategizing skills. Multi-player team games may help youth learn how to cooperate with others. Youth who play videogames may also improve their motor skills and creativity. Videogames also offer players a space to work out their emotions, and can boost a player's mood and ease anxiety. Gaming can also be a place to make new friends and socialize.

Risks of Online Gaming

While gaming has the potential for positive benefits, it is also a place where cyberbullying can happen. If someone is not performing well in a game, other players may curse or make negative remarks that can turn into bullying, or even exclude the person from playing together.

Anonymity of players and the use of avatars allow users to create alter-egos or fictional versions of themselves, which is part of the fun of gaming. But it also allows users to harass, bully, and sometimes gang up on other players.

When players are anonymous, it can be difficult to hold them accountable when they bully others and use the game as a tool of harassment. Some players may use the game as a means to harass others or to get their personal information, like usernames and passwords. They can even make others' personal information available online through a tactic called "doxing." Doxing can compromise not just a child's information, but their parent's information as well, and can make them targets of bullying and harassment.



Gamers often use online gaming communities and social media to connect with other players, learn tips and tricks, share strategies, create teams/guilds, and connect while they play or watch others play. These types of online communities are also a place where cybercriminals may seek to cause harm – for instance, by posting links that appear to be game-related but are truly computer viruses or malware (software designed to disrupt, damage or gain access to a computer) or where predators may seek access to children.

Prevent Cyberbullying for Gamers



Gaming can be a fun, safe and positive environment for all. Parents can help prevent cyberbullying of their children who play video games by:

- Playing the game with your child or observing the game to understand how it works and what a child is exposed to in the game.
- Checking in periodically with your child about who is online, playing the game with them.
- Knowing which gaming communities, social media, and apps your child uses while gaming and their security risks, which you can research online.
- Helping your child set the privacy and security settings for their games and apps.
- Teaching children about safe digital behavior, including not clicking on links from strangers; not downloading bots (software for automated tasks) or clicking on links in gaming forums; not sharing personal information like emails, phone numbers, addresses, and passwords; not participating in bullying behavior of other players; and what to do if they observe or experience cyberbullying.
- Establishing rules about how much time a child can spend playing video games.
- Keeping an open line of communication about your child's digital life.



There are things that gamers can do if they are experiencing cyberbullying or see it happen to others while gaming:

- Tell the player who is bullying to stop.
- Block the player who is bullying from the game and de-friend them on social media and in gaming communities.
- Report the player who is bullying to the game group, team, platform, community, or developers.
- Take a break from playing the game.
- Tell a parent or trusted adult and get some support.

Cyberbullying Tactics



It is important to understand how children are cyberbullied so it can be easily recognized and action can be taken. Some of the most common cyberbullying tactics include:

- Posting comments or rumors about someone online that are mean, hurtful, or embarrassing.
- Threatening to hurt someone or telling them to kill themselves.
- Posting a mean or hurtful picture or video.
- Pretending to be someone else online in order to solicit or post personal or false information about someone else.
- Posting mean or hateful names, comments, or content about any race, religion, ethnicity, or other personal characteristics online.
- Creating a mean or hurtful webpage about someone.
- Doxing, an abbreviated form of the word documents, is a form of online harassment used to exact revenge and to threaten and destroy the privacy of individuals by making their personal information public, including addresses, social security, credit card and phone numbers, links to social media accounts, and other private data.

In 2017–18, about 15% of public schools reported that cyberbullying had occurred among students at least once a week at school or away from school.



Source: [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#), Indicators of School Crime and Safety Report, 2019, page V.

Viral Tactics: Examples

Because cyberbullying can happen in different ways, examples based on real-life experiences can provide a deeper understanding of the tactics typically used. Along with other risk factors, bullying can increase the risk for suicide-related behaviors. Furthermore, cyberbullying can be relentless, increasing the likelihood of anxiety and depression. Some states have chosen to prosecute young people who bully for criminal harassment, including encouraging someone to die by suicide. Some forms of cyberbullying are forms of harassment that cross the line into criminal activity, and some tactics occur in dating relationships and can turn into interpersonal violence.

The stories below are examples of different cyberbullying tactics that could happen. In reality, with the right interventions, cyberbullying can be addressed positively to lessen harm and the negative outcomes that could result. When not addressed, cyberbullying can have long-term mental health effects. Cyberbullying and bullying can negatively impact the lives of all who are involved.

Nude photo sharing

A teenage girl sent a nude photo of herself to her boyfriend while they were dating. After they broke up, he shared the photo with other children, who then called her hurtful, derogatory names via text and social media.

Lies and false accusations

A group of students got into trouble at school for being drunk, and accused a girl who knew nothing about it of reporting them to school officials. They began texting her day and night, and posted hateful, derogatory messages on social media. Other students saw their messages and joined in harassing the girl. She was bullied constantly via text, and in person at school. She eventually shut down her social media accounts and changed her phone number. Still, the [bullying at school](#) continued.

Bullied for being economically challenged

Students posted mean, negative comments on another classmates' social media account, commenting on his clothes and sneakers, which were not the more expensive name brands most of them were wearing. They ridiculed him, calling him "poor" and continued the bullying in school. The boy missed many days of school trying to avoid the harassment and embarrassment.

False identity profile, sometimes referred to as a "Sockpuppet"

A girl's classmate created a fake social media account in a boy's name, and began an online relationship with her. Though she had not met him in person, the girl divulged personal information about herself and her family to this "boy." The classmate who created the fake account then shared the personal information with other children, who used it to bully, shame, and harass the girl.

Encouraging self-harm or suicide

A young boy with a [physical disability and scars](#) on his face was harassed on social media and via text by other students. They called him derogatory names, told him he'd be better off dead. They wrote "why don't you die?" on his school locker and encouraged him to take his own life.

Bullied for being gay

A teenage boy who was [openly gay](#) began receiving death threats via phone, text, and social media for being gay. Students created an anti-gay social media group and harassed him, posting hateful messages about him.

Jealousy bullying

A teenage girl was harassed by other girls in her class for dating a very popular boy. The girls sent her hateful messages via text and social media, and wrote derogatory messages on her school locker.

Doxing over online gaming

A teenage boy posted comments on a public gaming forum, expressing his dislike of certain game features and tactics. Another user disagreed with him in the forum, then searched for the boy's information online and posted his address, email address, and social media links in another comment. The boy then received multiple emails and messages from strangers threatening to come to his home and assault him, and to block him from games.

Prevent Cyberbullying

Be Aware of What Your Kids are Doing Online

A child may be involved in cyberbullying in several ways. A child can be [bullied, bully others, or witness bullying](#). Parents, teachers, and other adults may not be aware of all the digital media and apps that a child is using. The more digital platforms that a child uses, the more opportunities there are for being exposed to potential cyberbullying.

Warning Signs a Child is Being Cyberbullied or is Cyberbullying Others



Many of the warning signs that cyberbullying is occurring happen around a child's use of their device. Some of the warning signs that a child may be involved in cyberbullying are:

- Noticeable increases or decreases in device use, including texting.
- A child exhibits emotional responses (laughter, anger, upset) to what is happening on their device.
- A child hides their screen or device when others are near, and avoids discussion about what they are doing on their device.
- Social media accounts are shut down or new ones appear.
- A child starts to avoid social situations, even those that were enjoyed in the past.
- A child becomes withdrawn or depressed, or loses interest in people and activities.

What to Do When Cyberbullying Happens

If you notice warning signs that a child may be involved in cyberbullying, take steps to investigate that child's digital behavior. Cyberbullying is a [form of bullying](#), and adults should take the same approach to address it: support the child being bullied, address the bullying behavior of a participant, and show children that cyberbullying is taken seriously. Because cyberbullying happens online, responding to it requires different approaches. If you think that a child is involved in cyberbullying, there are several things you can do:

- **Notice** – Recognize if there has been a change in mood or behavior and explore what the cause might be. Try to determine if these changes happen around a child's use of their digital devices.
- **Talk** – Ask questions to learn what is happening, how it started, and who is involved.

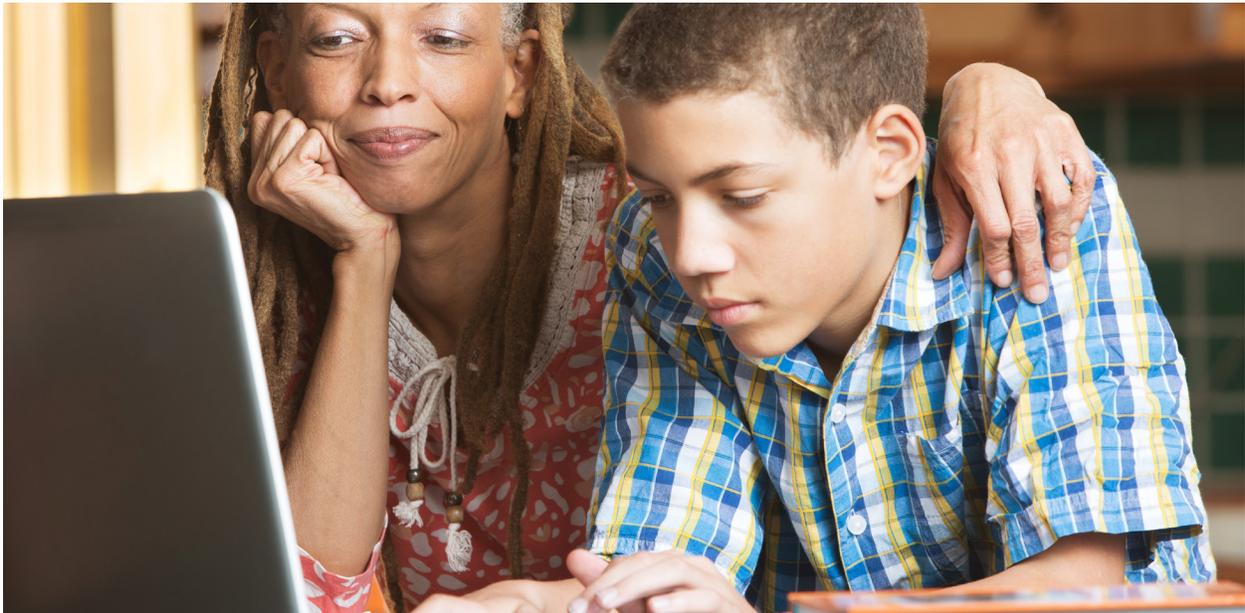
15.7% of  students in grades 9-12 reported being cyberbullied in 2019.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2019](#).



- **Document** – Keep a record of what is happening and where. Take screenshots of harmful posts or content if possible. Most laws and policies note that bullying is a repeated behavior, so records help to document it.
- **Report** – Most social media platforms and schools have clear policies and reporting processes. If a classmate is cyberbullying, report it the school. You can also contact app or social media platforms to report offensive content and have it removed. If a child has received physical threats, or if a potential crime or illegal behavior is occurring, report it to the police.
- **Support** – Peers, mentors, and trusted adults can sometimes intervene publicly to positively influence a situation where negative or hurtful content posts about a child. Public Intervention can include posting positive comments about the person targeted with bullying to try to shift the conversation in a positive direction. It can also help to reach out to the child who is bullying and the target of the bullying to express your concern. If possible, try to determine if more professional support is needed for those involved, such as speaking with a guidance counselor or mental health professional.

Establishing Rules



Tips for Parents: Talk to Your Child about Appropriate Digital Behavior and Content

Parents create trust with children by initiating open, honest discussions. These dialogues are an opportunity to communicate values and expectations about your family's appropriate digital behavior, including viewing or sharing content, and apps they can and cannot use.

Check in frequently with your children about their digital experiences to address any potential risk of cyberbullying and harm. Be clear that your intention is to look out for their wellbeing, and that you want to have an open dialogue. Listen to their concerns and express your perspective.



To minimize the risk of cyberbullying or harm from digital behavior, parents can:

- Set clear expectations about digital behavior and online reputation.
- Educate about the harmful effects of cyberbullying, posting hateful speech or comments, sexting, and sharing naked photos of themselves or others (including potential legal issues).
- Be clear about what content can be viewed or shared.
- Identify which apps are appropriate for your child's use and which are not.
- Establish rules about the amount of time that a child can spend online or on their devices.
- Model positive, respectful digital behavior on your own devices and accounts.

Talk to Your Child about Being a Bystander to Cyberbullying

Having conversations with children about cyberbullying and digital behavior is not a one-time event – it is an ongoing dialogue. Begin talking about these issues before children delve into the world of texting, social media, online gaming, and chat rooms. Help them reflect on real and potential cyberbullying situations, and provide ongoing opportunities to practice ways to respond. Doing so can support the transition from being passive bystanders to being allies who serve as powerful role models for others. SAMHSA's free Knowbullying app for parents, teachers, and educators provides conversation starters, tips and other tools you can use to help prevent bullying.

If you think your child is witnessing cyberbullying, there are things that you can encourage them to do - and not do. Such as:

- **Do not participate.** Encourage children not to “like,” share, or comment on information that has been posted about someone, and do not forward a hurtful text to others. Not participating may limit the potential damage of the messages – to others and to themselves.
- **Do not retaliate or respond negatively.** If a child feels that they must respond, encourage a calm, clear, and constructive response. Angry and aggressive reactions can make a bad situation worse. Encourage children (and adults!) to step away from the device so they do not resort to blaming, shaming, or retaliation. This provides time to get calm and centered so they can create a response that makes it clear that others’ digital behaviors are hurtful and unacceptable.
- **Respond privately to the person who created the hurtful message.** If they feel safe doing so, it may be helpful to follow up with the person who created or shared the hurtful message privately, either online, in a phone call, or in person. Doing so can make it clear they do not support the negative actions. It also provides an opportunity to authentically share concerns about the behavior and what might be behind it.
- **Follow up with the person who was targeted.** By reaching out, a child can send a powerful message that they care about the person and they do not support the negative behaviors. If needed, this connection can also provide an opportunity to assist the person in finding help related to the cyberbullying situation.

Report Cyberbullying

Steps to Take Immediately

- Don't respond to and don't forward cyberbullying messages.
- Keep evidence of cyberbullying. Record the dates, times, and descriptions of instances when cyberbullying has occurred. Save and print screenshots, emails, and text messages. Use this evidence to report cyberbullying to web and cell phone service providers.
- Block the person who is cyberbullying.

Report Cyberbullying to Online Service Providers

Cyberbullying often violates the terms of service established by social media sites and internet service providers.

- Review their terms and conditions or rights and responsibilities sections. These describe content that is or is not appropriate.
- Visit social media safety centers to learn how to block users and change settings to control who can contact you.
- Report cyberbullying to the social media site so they can take action against users abusing the terms of service.

Report Cyberbullying to Law Enforcement

When cyberbullying involves these activities it is considered a crime and should be [reported to law enforcement](#):

- Threats of violence
- Child pornography or sending sexually explicit messages or photos
- Taking a photo or video of someone in a place where he or she would expect privacy
- Stalking and hate crimes

Some states consider other forms of cyberbullying criminal. Consult your [state's laws](#) and [law enforcement](#) for additional guidance.

In 2017-2018, 9% of public schools reported that the school environment was affected by cyberbullying, and 8% of schools reported that staff resources were used to deal with cyberbullying.



Source: National Center for Justice Statistics, [Indicators of School Crime and Safety Report 2019 pg V.](#)

Report Cyberbullying to Schools

- Cyberbullying can create a disruptive environment at school and is often related to in-person bullying. The school can use the information to help inform prevention and response strategies.
- In many states, schools are required to address cyberbullying in their anti-bullying policy. Some state laws also cover off-campus behavior that creates a hostile school environment.

Why Some Youth Bully?

Why Some Youth Bully

Children and teenagers who feel secure and supported by their family, school, and peers are less likely to bully. However, some youth do not have these types of support. Every individual is unique and there are many factors that can contribute to bullying behavior. A youth who bullies may experience one, several, or none of these contributing factors.



Peer factors

Some youth bully

- to attain or maintain social power or to elevate their status in their peer group.
- to show their allegiance to and fit in with their peer group.
- to exclude others from their peer group, to show who is and is not part of the group.
- to control the behavior of their peers.



Family factors

Some youth who bully

- come from families where there is bullying, aggression, or violence at home.
- may have parents and caregivers that do not provide emotional support or communication.
- may have parents or caregivers who respond in an authoritarian or reactive way.
- may come from families where the adults are overly lenient or where there is low parental involvement in their lives.



Emotional factors

Some youth who bully

- may have been bullied in the past or currently.
- have feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem, so they bully to make themselves feel more powerful.

In 2017, a higher percentage of female students (20%) reported being cyberbullied than male students (10%). Females reported higher instances of social or emotional bullying, including being the subject of rumors, made fun of, called names, or excluded from activities.

Source: National Center for Justice Statistics, [Indicators of School Crime and Safety Report 2019 pgs. 64 and 60.](#)

- do not understand other's emotions.
- don't know how to control their emotions, so they take out their feelings on other people.
- may not have skills for handling social situations in healthy, positive ways.



School factors

Some youth who bully

- may be in schools where conduct problems and bullying are not properly addressed.
- may experience being excluded, not accepted, or stigmatized at school.

Every youth involved in bullying – as a target, a bystander, or as one who does the bullying – can benefit from adult, school, and community support. Youth who bully may also need support to help them address their behavior. Parents, school counselors, teachers, and mental health professionals can work with youth who bully to help them develop healthy school and peer connections and to learn new social and emotional skills. If you have bullied your peers, reach out to a trusted adult for help. Bullying is a behavior that can be changed.



How to Deal with “Haters”

What is a “Hater?”

“Hater” is a label used to refer to people who use negative and critical comments and behavior to bring another person down by making them look or feel bad. These hurtful and negative comments can be delivered in person, online, or in texts and apps. Often, the comments and behavior are repeated over time. Haters are often anonymous (especially online) but they can also be acquaintances, peers, or people who were once considered friends. Hateful, critical behavior is another form of bullying or cyberbullying. Like bullying, hater behavior is something that a person does – it is not who they are, and it can be changed.

Often, haters pick on people whom they perceive as being different from themselves. Being the focus of negative and critical comments can be upsetting and trigger feelings of anger, hurt, and confusion, and cause the person being criticized to question their self-worth and behavior. If the negative comments are posted online, it can also make someone afraid to use their social media accounts or feel ashamed of what is happening there.

Many children and teens don’t want to be a part of negative behavior like name calling, criticizing, bullying, and cyberbullying. Dealing with haters isn’t that different from dealing with bullying and cyberbullying. Teens who feel overwhelmed by all the drama on social media will often unfriend or unfollow people online to disengage.

How to Deal with Haters

- **Ignore it. Walk away.** Don’t react or respond to negative comments. If it continues, there are other [things you can do](#). If someone threatens you, report it to a parent, teacher, or other trusted adult!
- **Block online haters.** If someone is making negative or hateful comments on your posts or account, or is cyberbullying, block them. If they’re threatening you, tell your parents, report it to the platform, and take screenshots.
- [How to report things on Facebook](#)
- [How to report a post on Instagram](#)
- [How to report abusive behavior on Twitter](#)

In 2019, 8.7% of students did not go to school 1 day in the past 30 days because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school.



Source: Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2019](#).

- [How to report offensive content on Tumblr](#)
- [How to report abuse on Snapchat](#)
- **Be kind and respectful**, even to haters. It shows that you're in control of your emotions and that you aren't letting negativity bring you down.
- **Stick with supporters.** Having a friend nearby if you think you might encounter a hater not only makes it less likely that an incident might happen, but also means you'll have positive reinforcements just in case.
- **Remind yourself** that comments from a hater are a reflection of them and aren't really about you. People who feel good about themselves don't need to put others down.
- **Understand criticism can be a sign of pain.** People sometimes lash out because they have other life struggles. Negative comments may have nothing to do with you.
- **Acknowledge your feelings.** Talk to a trusted adult or friend and get some encouragement and support.
- **Keep being you.** Keep moving forward, pursuing your interests, and being who you are.

When cyberbullying happens, it is important to document and report the behavior so it can be addressed.



Research Summary

Teach Digital Citizenship Skills to Prevent Cyberbullying

Digital citizenship is appropriate, responsible behavior when using technology. This includes social media, websites, online forums, communities, comments, and in apps and other device features. Teaching children and teens digital citizenship skills can help to prevent cyberbullying and its negative effects. When children learn positive online behaviors, social media can be used in productive ways.

Teenagers are often the first to use new social media and digital technology. Research shows that 95% of youth in the U.S. aged 12-17 use the internet.¹ Among U.S. teens that use social media, 88% witness mean or cruel behavior, 67% observe others joining in those negative behaviors, and 21% admit to joining in at least once in a while.¹ Parents are the first source of advice teens go to about responsible internet use. And parents can monitor what their children do online in a variety of ways. Teachers are the second source of information for teens.¹ Both parents and teachers play an important role in teaching digital citizenship skills, including digital safety and digital etiquette.²

Digital Safety

Digital safety involves identifying and taking measures to protect against potential risks when using devices, apps, and the internet. Sharing personal information online can put children and teens at risk for the misuse of personal data, cyberbullying, and exposure to harmful content that may contain violence, suicide, and racist and adult material. Teens may not want or intend to access or post inappropriate content online. However, 44% admitted to giving a false age to access a website or sign up for an online account.¹ Parental knowledge and involvement in mediating teenagers' online activities influence whether teens behave appropriately and responsibly when using digital technologies.³

To reduce risks, parents can help their children set the privacy controls on their devices and accounts to ensure their children's content is not shared with the public. Parents should proactively discuss the types of content and information that is safe or acceptable to share, post, and view online. It is important to foster open dialogue in which youth feel comfortable sharing their cyber experiences with caregivers and other supportive adults. Other tactics parents can use to ensure their children's online safety include:

- Following their child's social media accounts.⁴
- Checking the websites that their child visited.⁴
- Knowing the passwords to their child's email, social media accounts, and cell phones.⁴
- Searching online for information available about their child.¹

Digital Etiquette

Digital etiquette refers to an individual's conduct online and in their use of technology. The virtual nature of social media and the privacy of using individual devices can embolden some to say or do things in cyberspace that they would not do in person. Appropriate behavior for digital interactions should follow the same social guidelines as face-to-face interactions.⁵ Digital etiquette also extends to conduct beyond the screen – how and when individuals use their devices around others in different social settings.⁵

Teaching good digital etiquette skills involves:

- Talking about what to do when children or teens witness cyberbullying or hurtful content.⁴
- Discussing appropriate content children or teens can share, view, or access online.⁴
- Reviewing appropriate behavior toward others online⁴ so that online interactions follow the same social guidelines as face-to-face interactions.⁵
- Role modeling and discussing respectful and tolerant behavior of others; including not posting hurtful, mean, vengeful, or disrespectful content.⁴
- Role modeling appropriate device use including the amount of time spent on devices, and use of devices around others.⁵
- Discussing places that should be device-free, like bathrooms and locker rooms.
- Talking about the permanency of content posted online, and how this can affect online reputation and can have negative consequences with college and job applications.
- Setting limits at every age for use of devices.⁵

Adults should teach digital citizenship skills to reinforce to children and teens that when they are using their voices online they must choose their words wisely and speak with respect and compassion. Most of these strategies should be used, discussed, and updated on an ongoing basis to address the changing social needs of children and teens as they get older, and with the emergence of new technologies. By being a role model for good digital citizenship and providing ongoing guidance on digital safety and etiquette, parents, teachers, and other caregivers can help prevent harmful behavior from happening, including cyberbullying.

Source and Research Limitations

This report includes the most up to date research on bullying, but it is important to note that this research has several important limitations. Most of the research is cross sectional, which means it took place at one point in time. This type of research shows us what things are related to each other at that time, but cannot tell us which thing came first or if one of those things caused the other to occur.

Another limitation is that many of the studies use self reports to identify who bullied or was bullied and to capture symptoms or experiences. While the use of self report is common in bullying research, it can result in biases or errors. The study participants must report information accurately, and some children may not want to admit to others that they have been bullied or have bullied others.

Research Summary

How Youth Can Protect Themselves From Bullying

Understanding

Youth often ask: “What can I do to help stop bullying?” and “How can I protect myself from being bullied?” These are difficult questions to answer, and sometimes parents, teachers, and principals struggle to address them.⁶ Findings from some recent studies of new and innovative strategies can help youth to protect themselves from bullying. While considering the important role of parents, educators, and adults at school, this summary covers protective factors to prevent bullying as well as innovative strategies for youth that can reduce the likelihood of being bullied.

Protective Factors

One of the best ways that youth can protect themselves against being bullied is through healthy friendships and positive relationships with classmates.⁷ A wealth of research indicates that having a healthy peer network protects against being bullied and also helps reduce the negative effects of being bullied, such as feeling depressed and anxious.⁸ In addition, having positive peer relationships also can increase the likelihood that peer bystanders will step in to intervene and help stop bullying when it occurs.⁹

Research also indicates that having positive relationships with teachers is associated with a reduced risk of being bullied¹⁰ and that hostile teacher-student relationships are associated with higher levels of bullying.¹¹ So it is important for youth to seek out and maintain both healthy peer and adult relationships to reduce the likelihood that they will be bullied.

Youth can also reduce their exposure to environments in which bullying frequently occurs such as areas of schools with poor adult supervision or in social media settings where negative and hurtful communication occurs. In those instances where youth are in these environments, they should take extra caution, such as walking between classes with friends or a supportive peer, and protecting their identity online and the information they share electronically.

New and Innovative Strategies

Although research on this topic is emerging, efforts to deflect bullying may also be effective in some situations. Deflecting is doing something to take away the power of bullying and make the behavior less effective. For example, youth with strong social skills can use humor to deflect bullying. One study found that using humor or “telling a joke” was a more effective response to bullying than some of the more typical responses, like pretending not to be bothered, depersonalizing, retaliating, telling the aggressor to stop, appealing to the aggressor’s empathy, walking away, telling an adult at home, telling an adult at school, and telling a friend.

Here are a few ways that have been shown to be effective in responding to bullying and cyberbullying that youth can use.

Specific Strategies Youth Can Use to Deal with Bullying

- Seek assistance from an adult, friend, or classmate when a potentially threatening situation occurs.
- Be assertive (not aggressive, fighting, or teasing back) when possible.
- Use humor to deflect a potential threatening situation.
- Avoid unsafe places or walk away before a potential bullying encounter occurs.
- Agree with or “own” a belittling comment to defuse it.
- Walk with friends or a small group of friendly peers.
- Use positive self-statements to maintain positive self-esteem during an incident.
- Avoid getting emotionally upset when bullying occurs, as this may embolden the person bullying.

Strategies Youth Can Use to Prevent Cyberbullying

- Never accept friend or network requests from unfamiliar people.
- Use the “mom” principle: Do not post or share photographs or movies that you would not be willing to share with your mother, father, or another important caregiver.
- Follow the “forever” principle: Assume that everything you put online will be there forever.
- Follow the “no privacy” principle: Assume that everyone can access information about you in cyberspace.
- Follow the “ex” principle: Would you be okay with your ex-boyfriends or girlfriends having access to content that you are planning to share?
- Block threatening or questionable people from seeing your profile and personal information.
- Do not post provocative, scandalous, or inflammatory remarks online.
- Do not reply to or retaliate against incidents of cyberbullying.
- Regularly change passwords to sites and applications, and immediately delete profiles that have been hacked.
- Avoid sites, networks, and applications that have poor security, provide easy access to personal information, or encourage interactions among strangers.
- Ensure that information is approved before it is posted or shared socially.
- Limit involvement in social networking to a few familiar sites.
- Avoid joining sites that do not have adequate privacy settings.
- Never engage in sexting (sharing pictures or messages that have private sexual content).

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Resources

- StopBullying.gov has information and resources on bullying, cyberbullying, and how to prevent or address bullying, included training resources, research summaries, fact sheets, shareable videos, posters, infographics, and web content.
- Follow StopBullying.gov on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).
- The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) has information and resources on youth bullying and cyberbullying.
- [National Childhood Traumatic Stress Network](#) has resources and information on childhood trauma, including bullying.
- The [Federal Trade Commission](#) has information and resources on how to protect children online.
- The [National Institute of Justice Office of Justice Programs](#) has information and data on cyberbullying and youth.