



What is online bullying?

Online bullying (also known as *cyberbullying*) extends bullying to the Internet and text messaging with repeated behavior that is intended to tease, demean, or harass someone less powerful. Being online opens the door to 24-hour hurt, perhaps made anonymously and potentially broadcast to a wide audience.

Kids who bully may:

- > **Send hurtful or threatening messages** to a target's phone or in an online game, or distribute a humiliating video on social media like Facebook, Tumblr, or YouTube.
- > **Disclose secrets**—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*.*

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

Promote kindness in your community

Research shows that promoting empathy and kindness can be a powerful way to help stop the cycle of 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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Help Kids Stand Up to Online Bullying

- > What is online bullying?
 - > Pay attention
 - > Encourage empathy
- > What to do if a child is involved in online bullying
 - > Promote kindness in your community

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 children to report bullying to you

Promise unconditional support, and reassure them that you won't curtail phone, computer, or gaming privileges because of someone else's behavior.



Encourage empathy

Asking kids to put themselves in others' shoes (those of bullies, too) is a powerful way to help combat online bullying. 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 listen. 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 sites, 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.

What to do if a child is involved in online bullying

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.

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 immediately.

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 at the heart of the conflict.
- > Discuss how the child or teen can make amends, like an apology to 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.

