

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 Twitter
- SMS (Short Message Service) also known as Text Message sent through devices
- Instant Message (via devices, email provider services, apps, and social media messaging features)
- Email

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

Although all states have laws requiring schools to respond to bullying, many states do not include [cyberbullying](#) under these laws or specify the role schools should play in responding to bullying that takes place outside of school. 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](#) [®] (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 2017 [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System](#) [®] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) indicates that an estimated 14.9% of high school students were electronically bullied in the 12 months prior to the survey.

See also "[Frequency of Bullying](#)".

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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.

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.
- **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.

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Kids on Social Media and Gaming

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 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 about them anonymously.

Parents may not be aware of the apps that their children use regularly or may not be aware of 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. Privacy and location settings may make them more vulnerable to stalking, cyberbullying, exposure to adult content, or other dangers.

Some current popular social media venues and apps include:

- **Askfm:** A social networking site that allows users to ask other people questions, often anonymously.
- **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.
- **Instagram:** A photo and video sharing and networking site that connects users through other social networking sites (e.g., Facebook).
- **Kik:** 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.
- **Musical.ly:** Users can post their own videos and view videos posted by others.
- **Reddit:** A site that stores social news, rates and evaluates web content, and discussion threads.
- **Sarahah:** An anonymous messaging app that allows users to send anonymous messages to people they may know.
- **Snapchat:** A photo messaging app that allows for sharing pictures and short videos that are intended to be erased shortly after delivery.
- **Telegram:** 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.

- **Tumblr:** A social networking site that allows posting of short blogs and media.
- **Twitter:** A microblogging site that allows users to send, read, and reply to “tweets” or short messages.
- **Vine:** An app that allows the posting of short 6-second looping videos.
- **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.
- **YouTube:** A video sharing platform that allows users to post and share videos.

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 (e.g., why are you so dumb?).
 - Can be used to share harmful or adult content.
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- 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.

Cyberbullying and Online Gaming

Playing videogames is a popular activity, with 72 percent of teens gaming online. Many video games – whether they are console, web, or computer-based – allow users to play with friends they know in person and others they have met only online. While gaming can have positive benefits like making new friends, socializing, and learning how to strategize and problem solve, it is also another place where cyberbullying occurs.

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, sending or posting negative or hurtful messages and using the game as a tool of harassment. If someone is not performing well, other children may curse or make negative remarks that turn into bullying, or they might exclude the person from playing together.

Because players are anonymous, they cannot necessarily be held accountable for their behavior, and their harassment can cause some players to leave games. Some anonymous users use the game as a means to harass strangers or to get their personal information, like user names and passwords.

There are things adults can do to prevent cyberbullying of children who are gaming:

- Play the game or observe when the gaming happens to understand how it works and what a child is exposed to in the game.
- Check in periodically with your child about who is online, playing the game with them.

- Teach your children about safe online behavior, including not clicking on links from strangers, not sharing personal information, not participating in bullying behavior of other players, and what to do if they observe or experience bullying.
- Establish rules about how much time a child can spend playing video games.

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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.

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.

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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.

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Tips for Teachers

Warning Signs a Child Is Being Cyberbullied or Is Cyberbullying

A child may be involved in [cyberbullying](#) in several ways. A child can be [subject, bully, victim, or witness](#). Parents, teachers, and other adults may not be aware of all the [social media platforms 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.

Many of the warning signs that cyberbullying is occurring happen around a child's use of their device. Since children spend a lot of time on their devices, increases or decreases in use may be less noticeable. It's important to pay attention when a child exhibits sudden changes in digital and social behavior. Some of the warning signs that a child may be involved in cyberbullying are:

- Noticeable, rapid 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.

Preventing and Addressing Cyberbullying

Teachers, school administrators, camp, community, and faith-based staff are in unique positions to use their skills and roles to create safe environments with positive social norms. They are also in positions where they may notice children's behavior changes in group settings, like when a group or cluster of children focuses on another child, or other signs that cyberbullying may be occurring. There are things that you can do in the classroom or other group settings to address or prevent cyberbullying.

- If you think a child is being cyberbullied, speak to them privately to ask about it. They may also have proof on their digital devices.
- If you believe a child is being cyberbullied, speak to a parent about it. Serve as a facilitator between the child, parent, and the school if necessary.
- To understand children's digital behavior and how it relates to cyberbullying, increase your digital awareness.
- Develop activities that encourage self-reflection, asking children to identify and express what they think and feel, and to consider the thoughts and feelings of others. Help children develop emotional intelligence so that they can learn self-awareness and self-regulation skills and learn how to have empathy for others.
- Role model, reinforce, and reward positive behavior towards others.
- Encourage peer involvement in prevention strategies.

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Report Cyberbullying

When [cyberbullying](#) happens, it is important to document and report the behavior so it can be addressed.

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.

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.

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](#) 
- [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.

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