

HOME CYBER DEFENSE

ARE YOU SAFE FROM CYBER CRIME?

WEEKLY

Volume #4 - Issue #162

June 1st, 2018

This is a weekly publication dedicated to your personal cyber security. Our newsletter is designed to help the public recognize and avoid cyber threats while they are online. If you are not a subscriber, please go to HomeCyberDefense.net to sign up.

Signs Your Child is Being Cyber Bullied



As a parent, you may be the last to know that you have a child being bullied. Here are a few warning signs that your child may be a cyber victim:

- Unexpectedly stops using their computer or cell phone.
- Appears nervous or jumpy when they receive a text or email.
- Uneasy about going to school and often says they don't feel well on school days.

- Appears to be angry, depressed, or frustrated after reading something on their device.
- Becomes withdrawn from friends and family.
- Avoids discussion of their computer or cell phone activities.

What Parents Can Do to Help:

Victims of cyberbullying are in a vulnerable state, so how you respond to your child, and how you proceed with any actions is critically important. Your first task is to listen to your child without judgment, blame, or attempting to jump in and 'solve' it.

Gently ask questions to discover how long the cyberbullying has been going on, the names of those involved (if known), and the forms of cyberbullying used. If there is evidence of the cyberbullying – saved text messages, posts, websites, etc. – have your child show these to you and save these for documentation should it be needed. If the cyberbullying included a realistic physical threat of harm report it to your local law enforcement office immediately.

If your child did not come to you right away, do not place blame, just let them know you are grateful they have come to you now. There are many reasons that youth suffer silently, they may be afraid you'll react by restricting their online access, they may be embarrassed that they can't take care of the bullying themselves, they may be afraid that you'll handle things in a way that escalates the bullying, or that you won't understand and minimize the problem.

You may also learn about the cyberbullying from another source, or suspect that cyberbullying is behind behavioral changes you see in your child. In either of these cases, find time when you can be alone with your child to bring up the topic.

Acknowledge your child's pain. Recognizing your child's pain and hearing you affirm that what happened wasn't fair or right is important validation. Being cyber bullied is alienating enough; do nothing that makes your child

feel any more isolated. Bullying hurts and that hurt is exhibited many forms — anger, embarrassment, betrayal, frustration, confusion, fear, and reprisal.

Your child's or teen's reactions may also differ depending on who is doing the bullying, how pervasive it is, who witnessed it, what the nature of the bullying was, if bystanders lent support or not, and so on. Help them see that bullies' actions are not a result of a fault within your child, but a fault within the bully.

You also need to ask your child to be entirely honest with you about any forms of retaliation they may have taken. Hopefully they have done nothing to retaliate, but often kids and teens lash out and this significantly complicates matters. Let them know that the truth will come out when their cyberbully is confronted, and they will be in far worse shape if they haven't been transparent about their own behavior. If there is evidence of their actions, document these as well.

If your child or teen retaliated with their own cyberbullying, it's time for a full discussion about the inappropriateness of their behavior and what the consequences will be. The claim that "the other kid started it" is irrelevant. Your child cannot blame their choices and behavior on anyone else, and must be held accountable. If they want justice for what was done to them, they need to expect the same yardstick to be applied to any cyberbullying they committed.

Once you understand the scope of the problem, what role if any your child played in it, and how your child feels you're ready for the next step. Assess what support your child needs and the best way to achieve this support, and then take immediate steps to address the issue. Don't wait to see if the cyberbullying goes away. Your child needs to know that you can and will support them with this problem.

Help your child take preventative measures online to block cyberbullies from contacting them, and report cyberbullies to the service providers where the cyberbullying occurred. Responsible sites should take immediate action against cyberbullying incidents. Blocking the bullying is a first step in regaining your child's own power, and it will help reduce (if not eliminate) one aspect of cyberbullying that makes it so damaging; the ability for an abuser to attack at any hour of the day, in any place, and to attack very publicly.

Depending on the severity of the cyberbullying and the needs of your child or teen you have several options:

1) If you know the cyberbully and their parents, and believe you can have a meaningful conversation that will resolve the issue without further involvement, consider this course of action. Do not take this route if you are likely to get upset or act out in some manner, or you suspect that the cyberbullies parents are likely to get upset or act out in some manner.

2) If your son or daughter is of school age, chances are high that the negative fallout has spilled over into their school experience – whether or not the cyberbullying actually occurred while your child or their abuser(s) were on school grounds.

- Ideally you are already informed of your child's school's cyberbullying policy. However, it's more likely you have a vague idea there is such a policy and little to no idea if the policy actually helps protect victims or risks exposing your child to greater bullying.
- Start by contacting the school's vice principal, or whomever is in charge of disciplinary measures, and ask what steps are taken when cyberbullying is reported, how well other victims have been protected, and what steps are taken to ensure the cyberbullying doesn't escalate.
- School staff should be very open and supportive in their answers and you should feel free to ask the questions you need in order to feel comfortable about reporting the incident, and assured that you know what to expect every step of the way. If your questions aren't met with open understanding, or you believe the school will not handle the

issue well, step back and reconsider your options. The last thing a cyberbullying victim needs is for the problem to get worse.

3) Discuss what you learned from the school with your child or teen and chart out the best course of action. Cyberbullying robs victims of their sense of control; by including your child in the process of resolving the issue you help them take another step towards regaining that control. If your child is guilty of retaliation cyberbullying be particularly mindful as you weigh your course of action. Many schools have a zero cyberbullying tolerance and both bullies – the instigator and your child the responder – may be in for the same punishment. Schools may also be obligated to report cyberbullying acts that step over the boundary of the law. If reporting the incident to the school is the best course of action, report and document the incident(s) following the guidelines you received.

4) Cyberbullying may also be criminal. Many tweens and teens have been shocked to discover their actions constitute a crime and that they will have to bear the full consequences within the legal system. Laws vary by state, but cyberbullies may be guilty of cyberstalking, computer trespassing, and other crimes. If the situation warrants it, consider contacting your local law enforcement.

- Ideally you are already informed of your state's cyberbullying laws, but it's more likely that you have a vague idea there are laws but have little to no idea what they are. This isn't a problem; you can go online to find the laws, ask your child's school resource officer (the police person assigned to work in the school) or ask at your local law enforcement office for help. One excellent online resource is the National Conference of State Legislatures website's comparison of cyberbullying and cyberharassment laws, but you should also be able to find this on your state's website, or request this information by emailing one of your elected officials.
- When inquiring your about cyberbullying laws, bear in mind that awareness of recent cyberbullying laws may not have trickled down to all officers and you may need to ask them to look this up. Then ask

what steps are taken when cyberbullying is reported, how well other cyberbullying victims have been protected, and what steps are taken to ensure the cyberbullying doesn't escalate.

- Law enforcement officers should be very open and supportive in their answers and you should feel free to ask the questions you need in order to determine whether you feel comfortable about reporting the incident. If your questions aren't met with open understanding, or you believe your local law enforcement will not handle the issue well, step back and reconsider your options. The last thing a cyberbullying victim needs is for the problem to get worse.

5) As with the school decision, discuss what you learned about the laws and procedures with your child or teen and chart out the best course of action. If your child is guilty of retaliation cyberbullying be particularly mindful as you weigh your course of action. Courts are likely to apply the law to both bullies – the instigator and your child the responder. If reporting the incident to law enforcement is the best course of action, report and document the incident(s) following the guidelines you received.

6) Simultaneously, you may want to help your child or teen increase the strength of their friendships to reduce the feeling of isolation victims often experience.

7) Depending on how deeply the cyberbullying has impacted your child, you may also choose to set up appointments with the school's counselor or ask the school's counselor for names of therapists who have expertise in working through the effects of the cyberbullying.

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