Cyberbullying tips, resources for parents

By Jeremy Thomas and Katy Murphy

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Common Sense Media, a San Francisco-based nonprofit that advocates for responsible technology and media use, offers these tips for parents concerned about online bullying. You can find this guidance and more at www.commonsensemedia.org.

Parent Tips for All Kids

- Give them a code of conduct: Tell them that if they wouldn't say something to someone's face, they shouldn't text it, post it or say it in an instant message.
- Ask your kids if they know someone who has been cyberbullied: Sometimes they will open up about others' pain before admitting their own.
- Establish consequences for bullying behavior: If your children contribute to degrading and humiliating people, tell them their phone and computer privileges will be taken away.

Elementary School Kids

- Keep online socializing to a minimum: Let kids use sites like Webkinz or Club Penguin where chat is pre-scripted or pre-screened.
- Explain basics of correct online behavior: Tell kids that lying, telling secrets, and being mean hurt, even on the Web.
- Tell your kids not to share passwords with their friends: A common form of cyberbullying is when kids log in to another child's email or social networking account and send fake messages or post embarrassing comments. Kids need to learn early on that passwords are private and should be shared only with their parents.

Middle School Kids

- Monitor their use: See what they're posting, check their mobile messages, and let them know you're keeping an eye on their activities.
- Tell your kids what to do if they're harassed: They shouldn't respond or retaliate, they should immediately block bullies, and they should tell you or an adult they trust. They shouldn't delete
the messages because in persistent cases, the content should be reported to a cellphone or Internet Service Provider.

- If your child is the bully, set strict consequences and stick to them: That goes for cruel or sexual comments about teachers, friends and relatives.
- Remind children that all private information can be made public: Posts on friends' walls, private instant messages, intimate photos and inside jokes can all be copied and sent around. If they don't want the world to see it, they should not post or send it.
- "Don't start what you don't want to finish": Chat in online games and virtual worlds can fast turn ugly. Make sure your kids are respectful because hurtful retaliation happens all the time.

High School Students

- Tell teens to think before they reveal: At this age, youths experiment with all sorts of activities, many of which should not be made public. Remind your teens that anything they post can be misused by others.
- Remind them they aren't too old to ask for your help: Coming to parents isn't babyish; it's safe.

Resources

- B.R.A.V.E.: Sacramento-based Bullies Really Are Violating Everyone creates peer-abuse awareness that demands accountability while lobbying the legislature. [www.bravesociety.org](http://www.bravesociety.org)
- CommonSense Media: San Francisco-based nonprofit advocates for children's issues and has a wealth of information on cyberbullying for parents and youths of all ages. The website's "Cyberbullying Toolkit" helps teach students how to stand up to online bullying. [www.commonsensemedia.org](http://www.commonsensemedia.org)
- Cyberbullying Research Center: An information clearinghouse presenting research statistics, tips, prevention strategies, stories, fact sheets, handouts and other downloads to combat cyberbullying. [www.cyberbullying.us](http://www.cyberbullying.us)
- STOP Cyberbullying: Teen- and tween-oriented website trains young volunteers to help peers address cyberbullying; also, the creator of the "Don't Stand By, Stand Up" anti-cyberbullying initiative. [www.stopcyberbullying.org](http://www.stopcyberbullying.org)