**10 Tips to Protect Your Child from Cyber Bullying**

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Between the rise of connected devices and the ever-expanding Internet of Things, cyber bullying is a much bigger issue now than even a decade ago. Children and teens are spending more time online: [92 percent of kids are now on the Web daily, and nearly a quarter report being logged in “constantly.”](https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X%2817%2930158-1/fulltext)

Sometimes, these numbers can add up to some devastating real-world consequences. Not only are these so-called “hyper-networking” teens sharing more personal information on their [social media profiles](http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/05/21/teens-social-media-and-privacy/), they also share a [110 percent](https://apha.confex.com/apha/138am/webprogram/Paper224927.html) higher risk of being cyber bullied compared to their peers. In the past year alone,[one million](https://www.teensafe.com/blog/cyber-bullying-facts-and-statistics/) children and teens were bullied just on Facebook, and [87 percent](https://www.teensafe.com/blog/cyber-bullying-facts-and-statistics/) reported witnessing or experiencing risky behavior online. Today, cyber bullying has also been linked to a number of mental health concerns, including depression, drug use and suicide.

While it’s easy for parents to think about taking drastic measures in an effort to prevent the unthinkable, entirely cutting kids off from social media doesn’t prepare them for future adulthood. Instead of attempting to shield them from all online risks, we can use the popularity of social media as a tool for teaching healthy relationship and communication skills—both on the Web, and in person.

Below are ten suggestions for protecting your kids from cyber bullying’s damaging effects: before, during and after conflicts arise.

##### Before: Prevent and Prepare

***1. Set healthy tech boundaries as early as possible.***
Place appropriate restrictions and permissions on technology use as soon as children are able to access electronics. Setting reasonable limits early can prevent kids from becoming too attached to their computers and phones later on, and encourages them to develop a healthy sense of self apart from their digital identity. This makes it easier for children to disengage from risky or hurtful online communication as they age.

***2. Provide an open channel of communication for your child.***
Encourage your son or daughter to come to you with questions about his or her relationships at school and/or activity online. If they raise the issue of getting their own phone, computer or social media account, discuss the rights—and responsibilities—that come with that privilege. Together, you can create a “Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities” detailing what behavior your child can accept and display online.

***3. Look for teachable moments****—and be open to learning along with your kids.*
When appropriate, discuss personal or national stories about cyber bullying, privacy, and other online risks with the whole family. Use these events as icebreakers for conversations about what is and isn’t okay online—and what you and your child can do during an unsafe situation. Ask how your child might respond to certain incidents, and invite feedback about how you can best help them with any issues online. Remember that both of your responses are likely to change as your kids age, so keep these dialogues ongoing.

***4. Cultivate an environment of awareness and understanding around mental illness.***Children with depression, anxiety and other psychological conditions are often targets for bullies, and shame and secrecy can only make things worse. Fortunately, you can help de-stigmatize these illnesses in your own home by educating yourself and your kids about their causes and effects. Reinforce that mental illness is just like any other in that it revolves around physical changes – in this case, changes in brain chemistry. If your child or someone they know is struggling with mental illness, make sure they get the right help—and emphasize that their symptoms don’t make them a bad or flawed person. Modeling positive behavior can eliminate stigma where it most counts: your home.

##### During: Spot and Stop Cyber Bullying

***5. Monitor for behavior changes.***

Isolation, withdrawal, and aversion to activities or social situations your child previously enjoyed can all be red flags for cyber bullying. Unless it’s an extreme circumstance, though, it’s rarely advisable to betray your child’s trust by scrolling through their text messages or private communications without their knowledge. This can easily backfire and lead to even more secretive behavior.

***6. Be aware of how much time your child is spending online, or with their personal devices.***

If you spot an uptick in online activity, or note that your child seems increasingly or emotionally preoccupied with their phone or computer, it could be a warning sign. If you do need to check your child’s online account, but don’t have a prior agreement where your child knows you might do so, it’s usually best to discuss your concerns and plans with them beforehand (or immediately afterward, if the situation is truly urgent). Express why you feel or felt it was necessary to take action, and involve them in figuring out what to do next.

***7. React calmly and compassionately.***

If your child brings up an instance of cyber bullying or unsafe online activity, the first thing to do is to thank them for sharing their concerns with you. Then you can work together to decide how to move forward.

##### After: Help Your Child Cope and Communicate

***8. Find the time to talk.***

If you observe any behavioral or emotional changes, approach the subject during a low-stress, private setting when both you and your child have time and space to communicate freely. Try to keep things as non-dramatic and non-judgmental as possible. It can help to rehearse what you want to say to your child ahead of time.

***9. Ask them what they want.***

If your child is experiencing emotional distress because of a situation online, ask them about the outcome they’d like to see, and work together to brainstorm a solution.

***10. Think about the bigger picture.***

Consider helping to organize school-wide, student-led events and initiatives on cyber bullying, and discuss possible activities and events with school administrators. These initiatives can help build awareness and engage students in combatting social media risks in a proactive, positive way – without shining an unwanted spotlight on your child’s personal experiences.

As parents, it’s up to us to cultivate a sense of empowerment and confidence in our children, both online and off. The links below will direct you to some valuable resources that can help you build your awareness, start a conversation, get help, and take action.