

Skidmore-Tynan Independent School District



Cyberbullying

What Parents Need to Know

What is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is threatening, lying about, stalking or otherwise harassing a person online or via other electronic communication devices like a cell phone. It is becoming a bigger problem as more and more people spend time on the internet. There are a number of behaviors that are considered cyberbullying, including:

- Sending harassing messages
- Impersonating another person and gaining trust
- Posting someone else's personal information
- Posting false or unsavory information about another person
- Using the internet to encourage others to bully the victim

Why is Cyberbullying So Serious?

It may seem like cyberbullying is a trivial matter. Even if you believe that in-person bullying is a problem, it might seem like there is little damage that can be done online. This is far from the truth, however. Cyberbullying can be even more dangerous than in-person incidents:

- It can be more difficult to stop an online bully
- Emotional violence can be more damaging than physical violence
- Cyberbullying can have long term effects as gossip, lies, photos and videos stay long after bruises fade.
- Cyberbullying follows people into the home, which would normally be considered a safe haven from this type of activity.
- It is easy to impersonate another person on-line, gain someone's trust and then turn on them.

Why is Cyberbullying So Difficult to Stop?

- Traditional bullies might be suspended from school, banned from certain places or activities or even arrested, but cyberbullies are more elusive
- The anonymity of the internet makes it difficult to be sure who is doing the bullying
- The anonymity of the internet makes cyberbullies, especially kids, bolder
- Cyberbullying can cross state and even international lines, making it nearly impossible to prosecute
- Cyberbullies may think they can't be caught or punished
- Others may trivialize the damage the cyberbully is doing

How to Prevent Your Child from Being Victimized

Be your child's support system. The biggest way to prevent your child from being a victim is to keep the lines of communication open. This means walking a fine line between a concerned caregiver and an overprotective parent. Your child needs to feel that he or she can come to you without negative repercussions. If they are afraid you'll ban them from the internet or keep them from going out with friends, they will not confide in you. It also means listening carefully and avoiding the tendency to trivialize what they are experiencing. It may not seem like a big deal to an adult that the most popular kids in school made fun of your child's hair or clothes, but it can be a serious blow to the self-esteem of a child or teen.

Be firm. Set rules regarding when and how long your child can be online. Accessing the internet is akin to inviting someone into your home, so you may choose to only allow Web time when you are at home. Use internet filters, timers, and whatever else you need to do to protect your child.

Know your child. This is very important. Kids who are already suffering from low self-esteem or depression are prime targets for cyberbullying. It can be tempting to assume that your child is just going through a phase or that they're just in a "bad mood," but you are better off seeking professional help if there is a problem than simply waiting things out.

Know the danger signs. Your child may become more withdrawn or moody. They may spend more time online, or may refuse to use the computer altogether. They may cut off ties with friends. If your child gives any indication that they are being bullied on or offline, take it seriously.

Educate. Teach your child what to do in cases where they feel threatened or bullied. They should ignore the offender and contact an adult immediately. They should never engage with the person who is threatening them as that is only encouragement for the behaviors to continue. As an adult, if you feel threatened by someone online, contact the police just to be safe. You can also use built-in measures on certain websites, such as ignoring or reporting someone else.