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## Bullying and Cyberbullying

Being bullied can leave you feeling helpless, humiliated, depressed, or even suicidal. But there are ways to protect yourself or your child—at school and online—and deal with a bully.



### What is bullying?

Bullying is repeated aggressive behavior that can be physical, verbal, or relational, in-person or online. Bullies are often relentless, bullying over and over again for long periods of time. You may live in constant fear of where and when the bully will strike next, what they'll do, and how far they'll go.

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**Physical bullying** includes hitting, kicking, or pushing you (or even just threatening to do so), as well as stealing, hiding, or ruining your things, and hazing, harassment, or humiliation.

**Verbal bullying** includes name-calling, teasing, taunting, insulting, or otherwise verbally abusing you.

**Relationship bullying** includes refusing to talk to you, excluding you from groups or activities, spreading lies or rumors about you, or making you do things you don't want to do.

Boys frequently bully using physical threats and actions, while girls are more likely to engage in verbal or relationship bullying. But no type of bullying should ever be tolerated.

## What is cyberbullying?

Technology means that bullying is no longer limited to schoolyards or street corners. Cyberbullying can occur anywhere, even at home, via smartphones, emails, texts, and social media, 24 hours a day. Cyberbullies use digital technology to harass, threaten, or humiliate you. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying doesn't require face-to-face contact and isn't limited to just a handful of witnesses at a time. It also doesn't require physical power or strength in numbers.

**Cyberbullies come in all shapes and sizes.** Almost anyone with an Internet connection or mobile phone can cyberbully someone else, often without having to reveal their true identity.

**Cyberbullies can torment you 24 hours a day,** seven days a week, and the bullying can follow you anywhere so that no place, not even home, ever feels safe. And with a few clicks the humiliation can be witnessed by hundreds or even thousands of people online.

**The methods kids and teens use to cyberbully can be as varied and imaginative as the technology they have access to.** This could range from sending threatening or taunting messages via email, text, social media, or IM to breaking

[Making Good Friends](https://www.helpguide.com/communication/making-good-friends.htm)  
(<https://www.helpguide.com/communication/making-good-friends.htm>).

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into your email account or stealing your online identity to hurt and humiliate you. Some cyberbullies may even create a website or social media page to target you.

As with face-to-face bullying, both boys and girls cyberbully, but tend to do so in different ways. Boys tend to bully by “sexting” (sending messages of a sexual nature) or with messages that threaten physical harm. Girls, on the other hand, more commonly cyberbully by spreading lies and rumors, exposing your secrets, or by excluding you from social media groups, emails, buddy lists and the like. Because cyberbullying is so easy to perpetrate, a child or teen can easily change roles, going from cyberbullying victim at one point to cyberbully the next, and then back again.

## The effects of bullying and cyberbullying

Whether you’re being targeted by bullies or cyberbullies, the results are similar:

**You’re made to feel hurt**, angry, afraid, helpless, hopeless, isolated, ashamed, and even guilty that the bullying is somehow your fault. You may even feel suicidal.

*[Read: [Are You Feeling Suicidal?](#)]*

*(<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/suicide-prevention/are-you-feeling-suicidal.htm>)*

**Your physical health is likely to suffer**, and you are at a greater risk of developing mental health problems such as [depression](#)

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/teenagers-guide-to-depression.htm>), low self-esteem, [anxiety](#)

<https://www.helpguide.org/home-pages/anxiety.htm>), or adult onset PTSD.

**You’re more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school** to avoid being bullied.

In many cases, cyberbullying can be even more painful than face-to-face bullying because:

**Cyberbullying can happen anywhere, at any time.** You may experience it even in places where you'd normally feel safe, such as your home, and at times when you'd least expect it, like during the weekend in the company of your family. It can seem like there's no escape from the taunting and humiliation.

**A lot of cyberbullying can be done anonymously,** so you may not be sure who is targeting you. This can make you feel even more threatened and can embolden bullies, as they believe online anonymity means they're less likely to get caught. Since cyberbullies can't see your reaction, they will often go much further in their harassment or ridicule than they would if they were face-to-face with you.

**Cyberbullying can be witnessed by potentially thousands of people.** Emails can be forwarded to many, many people while social media posts or website comments can often be seen by anyone. The more far-reaching the bullying, the more humiliating it can become.

## Bullying and Suicide

If bullying or cyberbullying leads to you, or someone you know, feeling suicidal, please **call 1-800-273-8255 in the U.S., or visit [IASP](http://www.iasp.info/resources/Crisis_Centres/)** ([http://www.iasp.info/resources/Crisis\\_Centres/](http://www.iasp.info/resources/Crisis_Centres/)) or **[Suicide.org](http://www.suicide.org/international-suicide-hotlines.html)** (<http://www.suicide.org/international-suicide-hotlines.html>) **to find a helpline in your country.**

## Why am I being bullied?

While there are many reasons why bullies may be targeting you, bullies tend to pick on people who are "different" or don't fit in with the mainstream. While your individualism is something that you will celebrate later in life, it can seem like a curse when you're young and trying to fit in. Perhaps you dress or act differently, or maybe [your race](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/racism-) (<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/racism->

[and-mental-health.htm](#)), religion, or sexual orientation sets you apart. It may simply be that you're new to the school or neighborhood and haven't made friends yet.

*[Read: [Racism and Mental Health](#)]*

*(<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/racism-and-mental-health.htm>)*

Other reasons why kids bully:

- To make themselves popular or to gain attention.
- Because they're jealous of you.
- To look tough or feel powerful.
- Because they're being bullied themselves.
- To escape their own problems.

Whatever the reasons for you being targeted, it's important to remember that you're not alone. Many of us have been bullied at some point in our lives. In fact, about 25 percent of kids experience bullying, and as many as one third of teenagers suffer from cyberbullying at some point. But you don't have to put up with it. There are plenty of people who can help you overcome the problem, retain your dignity, and preserve your sense of self.

## How to deal with a bully

There is no simple solution to bullying or cyberbullying, and no foolproof way to handle a bully. But since bullying is rarely limited to one or two incidents—it's far more likely to be a sustained attack over a period of time—like the bully, you may have to be relentless in reporting each and every bullying incident until it stops. Remember: there is no reason for you to ever put up with any kind of bullying.

**Don't blame yourself.** It is not your fault. No matter what a bully says or does, you should not be ashamed of who you are or what you feel. The bully is the person with the problem, not you.

**Try to view bullying from a different perspective.** The bully is an unhappy, frustrated person who wants to have control over your feelings so that you feel as badly as they do. Don't give them the satisfaction.

**Don't beat yourself up.** Don't make a bullying incident worse by dwelling on it or reading cyberbullying messages over and over. Instead, delete any messages and focus on the positive experiences in your life. There are many wonderful things about you so be proud of who you are.

**Learn to manage stress.** Finding healthy ways to relieve the stress (<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/stress-management.htm>) generated by bullying can make you more resilient so you won't feel overwhelmed by negative experiences. Exercise, meditation, positive self-talk, muscle relaxation, and breathing exercises are all good ways to cope with the stress of bullying.

**Spend time doing things you enjoy.** The more time you spend with activities that bring you pleasure—sports, hobbies, hanging out with friends who don't participate in bullying, for example—the less significance bullying or cyberbullying will have on your life.

## Find support from those who don't bully

When you're being bullied, having trusted people you can turn to for encouragement and support will ease your stress and boost your self-esteem and resilience (<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/surviving-tough-times.htm>). Talk to a parent, teacher, counselor, or other trusted adult—it doesn't mean that you're weak or there's something wrong with you. And reach out to connect with real friends (those who don't participate in any kind of bullying).

*[Read: Surviving Tough Times by Building Resilience (<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/surviving-tough-times.htm>)]*

If you're new to a school or neighborhood, or don't feel that you have anyone to turn to, there are lots of ways to make new friends.

(<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships-communication/making-good-friends.htm>) It may not always seem like it, but there are plenty of people who will love and appreciate you for who you are.

**Unplug from technology.** Taking a break from your smartphone

(<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/addictions/smartphone-addiction.htm>), computer, tablet, and video games can open you up to meeting new people.

**Find others who share your same values and interests.** You may be able to make friends at a youth group, book club, or religious organization. Learn a new sport, join a team, or take up a new hobby such as chess, art, or music. Or volunteer your time

(<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/healthy-living/volunteering-and-its-surprising-benefits.htm>),—helping others is a great way to feel better about yourself and expand your social network.

**Share your feelings about bullying.** Talk to a parent, counselor, coach, religious leader, or trusted friend. Expressing what you're going through can make a huge difference in the way you feel, even if it doesn't change the situation.

**Boost your confidence.** Exercise

(<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/healthy-living/how-to-start-exercising-and-stick-to-it.htm>) is a great way to boost your self-esteem and reduce stress. Go for a run or take a kickboxing class to work off your anger in a healthy way.

## Tips for dealing with cyberbullying

Dealing with cyberbullying is rarely easy, but there are steps you can take to cope with the problem. To start, it may be a good time to reassess your technology use. Spending less time on social media

(<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/social-media-and-mental-health.htm>) or checking texts and emails, for example, and more time interacting with real people, can help you distance yourself from online bullies. It can also help to reduce anxiety, depression, and feelings of loneliness.

*[Read: [Social Media and Mental Health](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/social-media-and-mental-health.htm)]*

(<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/social-media-and-mental-health.htm>).

As well as seeking support, managing stress, and spending time with people and activities that bring you pleasure, the following tips can help:

**Don't respond to any messages or posts** written about you, no matter how hurtful or untrue. Responding will only make the situation worse and provoking a reaction from you is exactly what the cyberbullies want, so don't give them the satisfaction.

**Don't seek revenge** on a cyberbully by becoming a cyberbully yourself. Again, it will only make the problem worse and could result in serious legal consequences for you. If you wouldn't say it in person, don't say it online.

**Save the evidence of the cyberbullying**, keep abusive text messages or a screenshot of a webpage, for example, and then report them to a trusted adult. If you don't report incidents, the cyberbully will often become more aggressive.

**Report threats of harm** and inappropriate sexual messages to the police. In many cases, the cyberbully's actions can be prosecuted by law.

**Prevent communication from the cyberbully**, by blocking their email address, cell phone number, and deleting them from social media contacts. Report their activities to their Internet service provider (ISP) or to any social media or other websites they use to target you. The cyberbully's actions may constitute a violation of the website's terms of service or, depending on the laws in your area, may even warrant criminal charges.

# Tips for parents and teachers to stop bullying or cyberbullying

No matter how much pain it causes, kids are often reluctant to tell parents or teachers about bullying because they feel a sense of shame from being victimized. In the case of cyberbullying, they may also fear losing their cell phone or computer privileges. Bullies also tend to be adept at hiding their behavior from adults, so if a child is being bullied it may not be obvious to a parent or teacher. Therefore, it's important to recognize the warning signs of bullying and cyberbullying.

Your child may be the victim of bullying if they:

- Withdraw from family, friends, and activities they previously enjoyed.
- Suffer an unexplained drop in grades.
- Refuse to go to school or to specific classes, or avoid group activities.
- Show changes in mood, behavior, sleep (<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/sleep/childhood-insomnia-and-sleep-problems.htm>), appetite, or show signs of depression (<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/parents-guide-to-teen-depression.htm>) or anxiety.
- Avoid discussions or are secretive about their cell phone or computer activities.
- Become sad, angry, or distressed during or after being online.
- Appear anxious when viewing a text, email, or social media post.

## Prevent cyberbullying before it starts

One of the best ways to stop cyberbullying is to prevent the problem before it starts. To stay safe with technology, teach your kids to:

- Refuse to pass along cyberbullying messages.
- Tell their friends to stop cyberbullying.
- Block communication with cyberbullies; delete messages without reading them.
- Never post or share their personal information—or their friends' personal information—online.
- Never share their Internet passwords with anyone, except you.
- Talk to you about their life online.
- Not put anything online that they wouldn't want their classmates to see, even in email.
- Not send messages when they're angry or upset.
- Always be as polite online as they are in person.

While it's important not to threaten to withdraw access or otherwise punish a child who's been the victim of cyberbullying, parents should always monitor a child's use of technology, regardless of how much your child resents it.

*[Read: [Smartphone Addiction](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/addictions/smartphone-addiction.htm)]*

*(<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/addictions/smartphone-addiction.htm>)*

**Use parental control apps on your child's smartphone or tablet** and set up filters on your child's computer to block inappropriate web content and help you monitor their online activities.

**Limit data access** to your child's smartphone. Some wireless providers allow you to turn off text messaging services during certain hours.

**Insist on knowing your child's passwords** and learn the common acronyms kids use online, in social media, and in text messages.

**Know who your child communicates with online.** Go over your child's address book and social media contacts with them. Ask who each person is and how your child knows them.

**Encourage your child to tell you or another trusted adult if they receive threatening messages** or are otherwise targeted by cyberbullies, while reassuring them that doing so will not result in their loss of phone or computer privileges.

## If your child is a bully

It can be difficult for any parent to learn that their child is bullying others but it's important to take steps to end the negative behavior before it has serious and long-term consequences for your child. Kids who bully others:

- Have a higher risk of abusing alcohol and drugs.
- Are more likely to get into fights, vandalize property, and drop out of school.
- Are twice as likely as their peers to have criminal convictions as adults and four times more likely to be multiple offenders.
- Are more likely as adults to be abusive toward their romantic partners, spouses, or children.

If your child has trouble managing strong emotions such as anger, hurt, or frustration, talk to a therapist about helping your child learn to cope with these feelings in a healthy way.

*[Read: [Help for Parents of Troubled Teens](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/parenting-family/helping-troubled-teens.htm)]*

*(<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/parenting-family/helping-troubled-teens.htm>)*

Some bullies learn aggressive behavior from their experiences at home. As a parent, you may be setting a bad example for your kids by spanking or otherwise striking them, verbally or physically abusing your spouse, or by displaying bullying behavior such as:

- Abusing your child's sports coach, umpires and referees, or members of the opposing team.
- Swearing at other drivers on the road.
- Humiliating a waitress, shop assistant, or cab driver who makes a mistake.
- Talking negatively about other students, parents, or teachers so that your child thinks it's acceptable to use verbal abuse or cyberbullying to intimidate others.
- Sending or forwarding abusive online messages that target coworkers or acquaintances.
- Communicating with people online in ways that you wouldn't face-to-face.

## Tips for parents dealing with a bullying child

**Learn about your child's life.** If your behavior at home isn't negatively influencing your child, it's possible their friends or peers are encouraging the bullying behavior. Your child may be struggling to fit in or develop relationships with other kids. Talk to your child. The more you understand about his or her life, the easier you'll be able to identify the source of the problem.

**Educate your child about bullying.** Your child may not understand how hurtful and damaging their behavior can be. Foster empathy and awareness by encouraging your child to look at their actions from the victim's perspective. Remind your child that bullying and cyberbullying can have serious legal consequences.

**Manage stress.** Teach your child [positive ways to manage stress \(https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/stress-management.htm\)](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/stress-management.htm). Your child's bullying may be an attempt

at relieving stress. Or your own stress, anxiety, or worry may be creating an unstable home environment. Exercising, spending time in nature, or playing with a pet are great ways for both kids and adults to let off steam and relieve tension.

**Set limits with technology.** Let your child know that you'll be monitoring their use of computers, tablets, smartphones, email, and text messaging. If necessary, remove access to technology until behavior improves.

**Establish consistent rules of behavior.** Make sure your child understands your rules and the punishment for breaking them. Children may not think they need discipline, but a lack of boundaries sends a signal that the child is unworthy of the parents' time, care, and attention.

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