

Common Sense on Cyberbullying For Middle School Students

Hurting someone with a simple click

Spreading rumors and bullying is nothing new. Kids have always found ways to be cruel to one another. But today's kids are dealing with something much more sinister: cyberbullying. Kids are now using their cell phones and computers to hurt, humiliate, and harass each other. And it's reaching epidemic proportions. They're not just receiving nasty comments, but also getting demeaning text messages, embarrassing photos, and snide opinion polls. This type of bullying is especially disturbing because it is constant, pervasive, and very, very public.

Some facts

The most commonly experienced form of cyber-bullying is when someone takes a private email, IM, or text message and forwards it to someone else or posts the communication publicly.

38% of girls online report being bullied, compared with 26% of online boys.

Nearly 4 in 10 social network users (39%) have been cyberbullied, compared with 22% of online teens who do not use social networks (*all from Pew, 2007*).

What is cyberbullying?

Whether it's creating a fake Facebook or MySpace page to impersonate a fellow student, repeatedly sending hurtful text messages and images, or posting cruel comments on the Internet, cyberbullying can have a devastating effect. Nasty comments, lies, embarrassing photos and videos, and snide polls can be spread widely through instant messaging (IM) or phone texting, and by posts on social networking sites. It can happen anytime — at school or home — and can involve large groups of kids. The combination of the boldness created by being anonymous and the desire to be seen as "cool" can cause a kid who normally wouldn't say anything mean face-to-face to show off for other kids. Because it's happening in cyberspace, it can be completely undetectable by parents and teachers.

Why it matters

Nothing crushes kids' self-confidence faster than humiliation. And just imagine a public humiliation sent instantly to everyone they know. Sadly, hurtful information posted on the Internet is extremely difficult to prevent or remove, and millions of people can see it. Most cyberbullying happens when adults aren't around, so parents and teachers often see only the depression or anxiety that results from being hurt or bullied. This emotional damage can last a lifetime.

Common Sense says

- » **Give them a code of conduct.** Tell them that if they wouldn't say something to someone's face, they shouldn't text it, IM it, or post it.
- » **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.
- » **Keep online socializing to a minimum.** Let your kids use sites like Webkinz or Club Penguin where chat is pre-scripted or pre-screened.
- » **Explain the basics of correct cyber behavior.** Tell your kids that things like lying, telling secrets, and being mean still hurt in cyberspace.
- » **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 can protect themselves from this by learning early on that passwords are private and should only be shared with their parents.

Raise Media Smart Kids

Webkinz. Facebook. Cell Phones. Video Gaming – it’s hard to keep up with everything your kids are playing, posting and texting. But you can help them be safe and responsible.



5 things parents can do:

.....

1. Set limits.

.....

On time and place, and choose age-appropriate TV, movies, music and games.

.....

2. Make rules.

.....

Cell phones belong outside the classroom and away from the dinner table. If your kids wouldn’t say something to someone’s face, they shouldn’t text it either. And IM? Not during homework.

.....

3. Discuss safety.

.....

Tell them what kind of photos, videos and information are okay to post online.

.....

4. Be a media critic.

.....

Teach your kids not to believe everything they see or hear. Online, in the movies or on TV. Talk to them about media messages, what you agree with and what you don’t.

.....

5. Join the fun.

.....

Watch, listen and play with your kids. Ask their opinions and embrace their world!

For Internet safety tips and helpful guides to finding the best media for your kids based on their age and what they like, visit www.common sense media.org