

THE CYBERBULLY REPORT

With 50% of teens admitting to cyberbullying and 39% using social network sites to bully online, it's time for us to take action! The use and abuse of technology is increasing at an alarming rate, leaving a wake of destruction behind.

What is Bullying?

Bullying involves the harassment or terrorism of an individual. This includes physical, emotional, verbal, sexual and racial teasing or torment. Bullying can occur face to face, in writing, by text message or by using the Internet and social media.

Warning Signs of Someone Being Bullied:

- Unexpected or random bursts of anger
- Pattern of withdrawal, shame or fearfulness
- Onset of depression, anxiety or low self-esteem
- Persistent, vague and unexplained physical complaints
- Damaged or missing belongings
- Unexplained bruises or injuries
- Diminished social contacts and friends
- Excuses to avoid school
- Decline in grades
- Trouble sleeping or eating
- Drug or alcohol abuse

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate!

Just like you talk about drinking and drugs within your family discussions, it's time to integrate cyberbullying and textual harassment into your conversations as well. Discuss this topic often and open up a dialogue by asking questions. *Examples:* Do they have any friends that are being bullied or harassed? Have they ever been bullied or harassed? What would they do if they were?

Review Cell Phone Application, Photos and Phone Bills

Constantly check your child's cell phone for inappropriate applications, photos or text messages. Also review your child's cell phone bill for unrecognizable numbers.

Password Protection

Always keep your passwords private, and store them where they can't be located. Teach your children to never give their passwords to anyone. Don't use the same password for every site; by changing it up, you'll limit your exposure to fraud.

Shawn Marie Edgington is a leading cyberbullying prevention expert, Sharecare.com expert, a Teen Daily Strength blogger, and the author of the bestselling book, *The Parent's Guide to Texting, Facebook, and Social Media: Understanding the Benefits and Dangers of Parenting in a Digital World*, creator of the One-Click Safety Kit, and the founder of The Cyber Safety Academy Fundraising Company.

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Teach Your Kids How to Ignore/Block/Report Unwanted Texts or Postings

Ask your wireless provider how to enable “Parental Controls,” and understand all of the benefits that the service offers. Empower your children to “*Ignore*” anyone who bullies or threatens them online or by text message. Teach them how to “*Block*” anyone who is offensive and “*Report*” them to authorities if needed. Be open, and promise your child that when they come to you with a problem, you won’t take away their technology; instead, you’ll teach them how to defend against online bullies with the Ignore/Block/Report Program.

Talk to Your Children About Bad People

Warn your children that bad people are on the Internet pretending to be someone they are not. Make sure they understand how important it is to *never* allow anyone to access their social media sites. Understand how location based software works, and how it’s now included in *all* Facebook accounts, and learn how to disable it. This way, strangers cannot access your child’s personal information or find out the location of where they are hanging out with their friends.

Maturity is Necessary to Have a Cell Phone or Any Social Media Account

Facebook requires children to be at least 13 years of age. That being said, you’ll need to be the judge of whether or not your child is mature enough to handle the responsibility that goes along with owning a cell phone and/or any Social Media account. Prior to giving them the green light, review and execute the “*The Rules of Engagement: Cell Phone and Social Media Contract.*”

Coach and Monitor

On a regular basis, you’ll need to coach and monitor your children and their social media accounts. Don’t rely 100% on third-party software as a prevention tool. It’s vital that you play a role in their online image until they are ready to do it themselves. The only way your kids are going to learn is if you lead by example and teach them online etiquette. Your goal is to become a valuable adversary and someone they can trust, no matter what happens.

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