Cyberbullying: What Is Cyberbullying and How to Stop It

Cyberbullying affects countless teens and adolescents.1 A [2015 random sample study](http://cyberbullying.org/2015-data) of 11-15 year olds in the Midwest found that over 34% reported being the victim of cyberbullying in their lifetime. [Other studies](http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/cyberbullying.html) have found that 1 in 4 teens have been cyberbullied. Victims of cyberbullying are much more likely to use alcohol and drugs, avoid school and have poor grades, experience depression and low self-esteem, and may even contemplate suicide.

What Is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is a broad term and is any form of abuse [repeatedly](http://cyberbullying.org/what-is-cyberbullying) directed at a child through technology by another child. This could be online through social media, like Facebook, or via text messages on their mobile phones. Some of the forms that cyberbullying can take include:

* Sharing and posting videos or photos on social media of1 a person that are cruel in intention or violent.
* Sharing and posting videos or photos on social media or via text that are sexual in nature or display violent sexual behavior.
* Making threats of physical harm towards a person or telling someone to kill themselves via email, text, or social media.
* Attacking a person online or via text based on their physical appearance, religion, sexuality, or mental ability.
* Impersonating another person online in order to trick someone into revealing personal details, and then sharing it with others.
* Hacking into another person's social media accounts or email in order to send untrue and cruel messages to others.

With [92% of teens](http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-2015/) reporting going online at least once daily and 24% stating that they are "online constantly," the amount of potential exposure to cyberbullying is high. Unlike bullying, cyberbullying can be unrelenting and seem inescapable since it is online and on phones. It can happen at any time of day, follows pre-teens and teens home after school, and is often completely anonymous.

Cyberbullies can create fake social media profiles and download apps that provide temporary disposable numbers that allow them to send threatening text messages without the victim knowing the identity of their attacker.

In addition to the anonymity, messages, images, and videos can also be spread very quickly via social media and group text messages. Once the information has been shared it's impossible to delete all of the occurrences of it since it can be downloaded by individuals and repeatedly uploaded.

Facts about Cyberbullying

* [Girls (40.6%)](http://cyberbullying.org/2015-data/cyberbullying-gender-2015) are much more likely to be victims of cyberbullying than boys (28.8%). Girls also dominate social media, while boys tend to play [videogames](http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-2015/).
* Facebook, Instagram and SnapChat are the top three most popular social media platforms for teens. Facebook has created a "[Bully Prevention Hub](https://www.facebook.com/safety/bullying/)" to help teens, parents and educators stop cyberbullying on the site.
* Bullying and cyberbullying are [closely related](http://cyberbullying.org/facts). Children who are victims of traditional bullying in school also experience cyberbullying at home. Children who bully traditionally will also bully other children on social media and with text messages.
* In a [random sample study](http://cyberbullying.org/2015-data/cyberbullying-offending-2015-2) over 14% admitted to cyberbullying another person, with spreading rumors online, via text, or email being the most common form of bullying.
* A study by [McAfee](http://www.mcafee.com/us/about/news/2014/q2/20140603-01.aspx), found that 87% of teens have observed cyberbullying.
* Over [70% of teens](http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-2015/pi_2015-04-09_teensandtech_06/) have a smartphone, and 15% have at least a basic cellphone, making texting one of the most common means of cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying Laws

Each state has different laws and policies regarding bullying, however, there is no federal anti-bullying law at the moment. Of the 50 states that have anti-bullying laws, 23 states include the term "cyberbullying" and 48 states include a definition of electronic harassment in their anti-bullying laws.

The only state that does not require schools to have an anti-bullying policy is Montana. Of the 49 states that have mandatory school anti-bullying policies, 14 states have mandatory off-campus anti-bullying policies as well.

Please see the table below for a full breakdown on cyberbullying laws in each of the 50 states.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **State** | **Bullying Law** | **Includes "Cyberbullying"** | **Criminal Sanction** | **School Sanction** | **School Policy** | **Off-Campus Policy** |
| [Alabama](https://www.callersmart.com/AL) | Yes | No | No | No | Yes | No |
| [Alaska](https://www.callersmart.com/Ak) | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Arizona](https://www.callersmart.com/AZ) | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Arkansas](https://www.callersmart.com/AR) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| [California](https://www.callersmart.com/CA) | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| [Colorado](https://www.callersmart.com/CO) | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Connecticut](https://www.callersmart.com/CT) | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| [Delaware](https://www.callersmart.com/DE) | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Florida](https://www.callersmart.com/FL) | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| [Georgia](https://www.callersmart.com/GA) | Yes | Proposed | No | Yes | Yes | Proposed |
| [Hawaii](https://www.callersmart.com/HI) | Yes | Yes | Proposed | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Idaho](https://www.callersmart.com/ID) | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Illinois](https://www.callersmart.com/IL) | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| [Indiana](https://www.callersmart.com/IN) | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Iowa](https://www.callersmart.com/IA) | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Kansas](https://www.callersmart.com/KS) | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Kentucky](https://www.callersmart.com/KY) | Yes | Proposed | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Louisiana](https://www.callersmart.com/LA) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| [Maine](https://www.callersmart.com/ME) | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Maryland](https://www.callersmart.com/MD) | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Massachusetts](https://www.callersmart.com/MA) | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| [Michigan](https://www.callersmart.com/MI) | Yes | Yes | Proposed | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Minnesota](https://www.callersmart.com/MN) | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| [Mississippi](https://www.callersmart.com/MS) | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Missouri](https://www.callersmart.com/MO) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Montana](https://www.callersmart.com/MT) | Yes | No | Yes | No | No | No |
| [Nebraska](https://www.callersmart.com/NE) | Yes | Proposed | No | Yes | Yes | Proposed |
| [Nevada](https://www.callersmart.com/NV) | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| [New Hampshire](https://www.callersmart.com/NH) | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| [New Jersey](https://www.callersmart.com/NJ) | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| [New Mexico](https://www.callersmart.com/NM) | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| [New York](https://www.callersmart.com/NY) | Yes | Yes | Proposed | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| [North Carolina](https://www.callersmart.com/NC) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| [North Dakota](https://www.callersmart.com/ND) | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Ohio](https://www.callersmart.com/OH) | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Oklahoma](https://www.callersmart.com/OK) | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Oregon](https://www.callersmart.com/OR) | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Pennsylvania](https://www.callersmart.com/PA) | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Rhode Island](https://www.callersmart.com/RI) | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| [South Carolina](https://www.callersmart.com/SC) | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| [South Dakota](https://www.callersmart.com/SD) | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| [Tennessee](https://www.callersmart.com/TN) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| [Texas](https://www.callersmart.com/TX) | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Utah](https://www.callersmart.com/UT) | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Vermont](https://www.callersmart.com/VT) | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| [Virginia](https://www.callersmart.com/VA) | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Washington](https://www.callersmart.com/WA) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Washington, D.C.](https://www.callersmart.com/DC) | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| [West Virginia](https://www.callersmart.com/WV) | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Wisconsin](https://www.callersmart.com/WI) | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| [Wyoming](https://www.callersmart.com/WY) | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | No |

How to Stop Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is an issue, but it's one that can be stopped. There are many online resources to help both parents and children cope with cyberbullying and prevent it.

What teens can do...

...if they are a target of cyberbullying:

* Don't blame yourself for the unfair treatment you are receiving. Bullies have often been the victims of bullying themselves and they treat you poorly so that they can feel control and power.
* Don't retaliate with more cyberbullying, it's best to just ignore a cyberbully if you can. You can block them on social media and [block texts](https://www.callersmart.com/guides/10/How-to-Block-Unwanted-Text-Messages-on-your-iPhone) from them if you don't want to see it. Bullies are looking for a reaction when they attack a person, if you turn the other cheek they go away.
* If the cyberbullying is getting out of hand and it feels like it is too much for you to handle talk to a trusted adult and ask for advice.
* Keep a record of the cyberbullying in case you decide to report the cyberbullying to authorities. With the proof of cyberbullying directly on your phone and computer it can be easy to prove that you are being threatened and attacked by a cyberbully.
* Report offensive social media posts to the company. If you don't like what is being posted about you report it. If you are being harassed by text by anonymous numbers you can screenshot the text, block the number, and look it up in a [reverse phone lookup app](https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/callersmart-reverse-lookup/id771926122?mt=8), like CallerSmart. In our app you can also report a harassing number by leaving your feedback so that others will know to also block the number.

...if they see cyberbullying:

* Don't become a part of cyberbullying by sharing posts, texts, images, or videos which hurt others. Take a stand against cyberbullies.
* Support the person who is being bullied, take the time to listen to them and let them know that it's not their fault. Even if you aren't friends with the person being bullied, reach out and let them know that it's not their fault and that how they are being treated is not right.
* Report the offensive behavior. Most social media sites, like Facebook and Instagram, have made it easy to report posts that are inappropriate.

...to protect themselves from cyberbullying:

* Be careful with what you share online about yourself. If you share overly personal information publicly and even privately via text or private message a person could use it against you in the future.
* Don't let other people use your smartphone since it contains personal information and people can access your social media accounts from it.

Pre-teens and teens usually won't share what is happening to them with their parents so it's important for parents to pay attention to any changes in their child's attitude and talk about the effects of bullying and what to do. Even if you don't think your child is a victim, they could be seeing cyberbullying every day.

What parents can do...

...if your child is being cyberbullied:

* Tell your child that you love them and make them feel safe and supported in their home life. Talk with them and listen to what's happening to them. Encourage them to ignore and block the cyberbully and not to retaliate.
* If the problem continues help your child collect evidence and discuss reporting the cyberbully to school authorities. Go over setting up stronger privacy settings in social media accounts and make sure they know how to report posts that they find hurtful and cruel.
* Don't let your emotions get the better of you. Hearing that your child is being tormented can inspire a range of emotional reactions, one of them being anger. Make sure to be thoughtful and a good listener, don't react quickly. This will only create more confrontation and problems.

...if their child is a cyberbully:

* Your child may be a cyberbully because they were at one time bullied, either in person or over the internet. Talk to them about what they are doing and how they are hurting other people, make sure that they understand the severity of their actions.
* Talk to them about why they are doing what they are doing and listen to them, don't react out of anger.
* Monitor their online and phone behavior to make sure that they are not continuing this type of behavior.
* If the problem persists and it doesn't seem like an isolated offense involve your school authorities in order to show your child that this is a major problem. You may want to seek professional counseling to help your child overcome their problem.

...to prevent cyberbullying from happening:

* Keep the family computer in a public area where you spend a good deal of time.
* Encourage "offline time" with your family. Try to have everyone disconnect for an extended period of time every evening, this could include having family dinner or practicing some shared hobbies together.
* Have open conversations about bullying and cyberbullying, discuss why it's wrong and what your child should do if they see it.
* Make sure your child knows how to maintain their "digital reputation" and knows not to share personal information that they wouldn't want made public with anyone. Discuss how to use privacy settings and talk about how to block unwanted content and texts. Teens can report offensive posts, images, and videos to the social media company, they can report and block harassing phone numbers in a [community phone book](https://www.callersmart.com/).

For more information on preventing cyberbullying and what to do if you're experiencing cyberbullying [ConnectSafely.org](http://www.connectsafely.org/safety-tips-advice/) and the [Cyberbullying Research Center](http://cyberbullying.org/resources) has many resources for teens, parents and educators.