



Parents: Don't Let "Back to School" Become "Back to (Cyber)Bullying"

As kiddos return to school, we must keep in mind some of the not so obvious online issues they face today, including cyberbullying. According to the [Cyberbullying Research Center](#), just over 58% of middle- and high-school students in the US have experienced online harassment of some sort in their lives. No parent wants their child exposed to cyberbullying. But if the alternative is to confiscate their smartphones and laptops, that could do more harm than good. The key is to be vigilant for any warning signs, keep an open dialogue, and offer emotional (and technical) support. Devise a plan and work the problem together as a team.

Cyberbullying: *The willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices.*

Top 10 Myths and Misconceptions about Cyberbullying

1. **What happens online stays online.** Bullies may want to torment their victims in real life as well as online. And even if they don't, the psychological damage they can inflict has a real-world impact on their victims.
2. **It's just kids being kids.** Dismissing bullying as something kids do as a normal part of growing up threatens to downplay its potential gravity.
3. **Ignore it and it will go away.** Reporting and responding to cyberbullying are key. Confronting the bully (with help from a support system) often stops the violence/harassment.
4. **My child will tell me if there's something wrong.** As kids grow older, they may be too embarrassed or humiliated to tell you something is wrong. They may not understand the gravity of what's happening to them. It's important to reassure them that you are there to support, not judge or punish.
5. **Remove the tech and you solve the problem.** Cyberbullying is enabled by technology, but it certainly doesn't miraculously disappear if you take away your child's tech.
6. **It's almost impossible to identify online bullies.** Social media and other platforms can unmask certain users if they are proven to have broken the terms of service through harassment or bullying.
7. **It's easy to spot.** Cyberbullying doesn't leave physical scars but can certainly damage victims mentally. Be cognizant of the warning signs – sudden changes in behavior, demeanor, or academic performance may be useful indicators – but a gentle inquiry may also be necessary.
8. **Cyberbullies are evil outcasts.** When cyberbullies are finally unmasked, the truth of their identity can often shock friends and family. Most bullies are doing what they do because they themselves have been bullied or abused, because they have low self-esteem or mental health issues, or due to peer pressure.
9. **Cyberbullying causes a large number of suicides.** The National Library of Medicine notes that 14.9% of adolescents have been cyberbullied and 13.6% of adolescents have made a serious suicide attempt. There are many reasons why a young person may wish to end their life, and cyberbullying may or may not be one of those reasons.
10. **Social media platforms are to blame.** Social media and messaging platforms are often demonized for the role they play as "enablers" of cyberbullying. Bullying isn't always easy to spot. But they're getting better at doing so – as they must. At any rate, it is important for parents to talk to their children about the risks and pitfalls of social media.

Bullying Policies Across the United States

Most states in the US have provided a model bullying policy for schools in that state to use as a template when crafting or revising their own policies related to bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, intimidation, and threats. The Cyberbullying Research Center has an [Interactive Map](#) to review your state's model bullying policy (if they have one).

Report cyberbullying! Report cyberbullying and online abuse to the relevant social media apps, gaming networks, and related platforms using the contact information at the [Cyberbullying Research Center](#). The information is constantly updated so you know where to get help for bullying, harassment, threats, and other forms of misuse. This additional resource from the Cyberbullying Research Center may also help you and your kids through this difficult experience: [What To Do When Your Child is Cyberbullied: Top Ten Tips for Parents](#).