
INSIGHTS

FOR FAMILIES

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Strategies to protect children from cyber- bullying

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❖ INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Adapted by Judy McDaniel, communications consultant, from information provided by the National PTA.

Cyberbullying, using new communication technology to torment others, is taking humiliation to a frightening level. Hiding behind the anonymity of the Internet, cyberbullies are able to hurl threats, spread rumors, trash reputations, and damage fragile egos, usually without being caught. The incredible scope of the Internet means that a cyberbully can reach millions with the click of a mouse.

Even though school officials are trying to deal with this problem, parents remain on the front line protecting their children. Here are some strategies you can use to protect your children:

- ❖ Learn about the new technologies. If you are unfamiliar with the Internet, now is the time to start surfing the Web. Learn the many ways that children can bully electronically, through e-mails, blogs (Web logs that are online diaries), and videos that are downloaded from camcorders or picture phones.
- ❖ Talk about values. The technology may have changed, but kindness and decency should still be top priorities for everyone.
- ❖ Guard passwords. A bully can use another child's screen name to send out offensive e-mails. Tell your children not to share passwords with friends and to change passwords frequently.
- ❖ Talk to your children if you believe they are victims of bullies. Oftentimes a child being tormented by a cyberbully will be too embarrassed to tell a parent or teacher. Make sure your children know they are not to blame for being targeted and that they should report any incident to you or an adult at school.
- ❖ Keep copies. Having documentation of the cyberbullying will strengthen your case if you need to report it to school or other authorities. Experts advise not to delete the original e-mail, even after you have printed it out. There may be something in the original e-mail header that would lead to the source.
- ❖ Work with your children's schools. Even if cyberbullying happens outside of school, the repercussions spill over into the classroom.
- ❖ Stress the Internet's impact. An e-mail sent to one child can be forwarded to hundreds. Old e-mails may resurface and get even a well-meaning child in trouble. Encourage your children to think before clicking.