

When Your Child is Being Cyberbullied: What to Do and How to Help

Cyberbullying doesn't always look obvious. Sometimes it shows up as being excluded from group chats or being targeted through "jokes" that feel hurtful. The common thread is that cyberbullying happens in digital spaces, including texts, social media, or gaming platforms.

Addressing cyberbullying is important because online harm doesn't stay online. It can greatly affect a young person's daily life and overall mental health. If your child is being cyberbullied or you suspect they might be, this resource will help you take a compassionate, Stigma-Free approach to supporting them through it.

Recognizing Cyberbullying

Not all children will say outright that they are being cyberbullied. Many feel embarrassed or scared of somehow making things worse (UBC, 2024). Some possible signs include:

- Becoming more private with their devices or hiding online interactions from you
- A sudden drop in academic performance
- Intense changes in mood after using social media
- Spending much more – or much less – time on their phone or gaming than usual
- Noticeable changes in behaviour, sleep, or appetite

How to Respond

1. Listen and Take Their Experience Seriously

If your child opens up about cyberbullying, listen actively and avoid dismissing or minimizing. Even if the situation doesn't seem severe to you, it may feel overwhelming to them and deserves to be treated just as seriously as in-person bullying. Cyberbullying can be a traumatic experience for youth (Hinduja & Patchin, 2025). However, there are many ways you can help them and reduce harm.

A good place to start is using validating language, such as:

- "I'm really glad you told me."
- "That sounds so hurtful."
- "You don't deserve to be treated that way."

2. Stay Calm and Open

Staying calm helps your child feel safe and prevents them from shutting down. What matters most is preserving trust; let them know that you are on their side. Even if your child believes they "started it" or responded to the bully in a way they regret, bullying is never acceptable and never deserved.



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3. Document What's Happening

Help your child save evidence by taking screenshots of messages or posts and note when incidents occurred. This can be helpful if you need to report the behaviour later.

4. Don't Retaliate

Encourage your child not to respond to the bully. Because engaging may escalate the situation, blocking or breaking contact is usually the safest step. It's also generally not recommended to contact the bully's parents if you don't already have a trusting relationship with them (Government of Canada, 2024).

5. Get Help When Needed

Depending on the situation, you may consider:

- Reporting the behaviour to a social media or gaming platform
- Working collaboratively with your child's school to address the bullying
- Contacting authorities if there are threats, stalking, or image-based abuse

Pay close attention to your child's mental health. If you notice concerning changes, don't hesitate to seek additional support from a mental health professional.

6. Be Patient

Know that cyberbullying can be tough for youth to discuss. They may open up very slowly or change their mind about sharing. Reassure them that you're always available to listen when they're ready.

Protecting Against Cyberbullying

While you cannot control everything that happens online, research shows there are ways to reduce harm and strengthen your child's resilience (Grama et al., 2024).

- **Keep communication warm, open, and supportive.** This communication style can be a protective factor against bullying and even help prevent harm from happening in the first place.
- **Stay involved and supervise.** Show interest in their online world and create an environment where they are comfortable talking about what they see and experience. Simply knowing what youth are doing on their devices can protect against cyberbullying and help you address it sooner if it does occur.



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- **Strengthen offline connections.** A strong support system can help youth cope with challenges of all kinds. Encourage hobbies and hanging out with friends in-person to reduce isolation and build confidence.

Your presence and compassion for your child matters more than you may realize. By taking youth seriously and reminding them they are not alone, you are helping them heal and regain a sense of safety. We hope this resource helps you feel empowered to support your child through difficult experiences online, and we appreciate the care and effort you put into their well-being.

References:

Government of Canada (2024, August 30). What to do if your child is being cyberbullied. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/campaigns/cyberbullying/help-protect-your-child-from-cyberbullying/what-to-do-if-your-child-is-being-cyberbullied.html>

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