

EDUCATION

Pull the Plug on Cyberbullies

If you're like me, the part of your child you see the most is the top of their head. A close second? Their fast-moving thumbs.

If you want to compete with the social pull of mobile technology, you need to know what you're up against: Mobile tech has their attention—it's fun, immediate, and connects them with their peers. You? Maybe not so much.

The digital world has much to offer, but the dangers of mobile and online communications are real. Unless you've hacked a daily report of your child's electronic transmissions (not a real thing—or is it?), you probably don't know the full extent of your kid's online activities. Where you may need to lay down a mile or two of iron curtain is in the area of online security. Specifically, any risky behavior that can be easily broadcasted, replicated, or retained.

Why It's Smart to Involve a Teacher

- You don't need to go it alone. After talking with your child, reach out to your child's teacher. Help them help you by making them aware of any potential bullying situation.
- When is it cyberbullying or when is it just "kids being kids?" Teachers can have training materials and [resources](#) available to help assess and address cyberbullying.
- Feel like you need to talk to the parent of a cyberbully? How can you be sure not to make the situation worse? Your child's teacher may have seen cyberbullying before and can help you make the best decisions.

You need a plan to help your child thrive and stay safe online—away from cyberbullies and other predators, and fortunately, you didn't just invent a problem. Help is available for parents and kids to prevent and deal with cyberbullying and inappropriate image sharing crises.

Set limits and supervise

Cyberbullying is real-life bullying, exponentially expanded. It can happen to anyone. Worse, if your child is wandering into any kind of high-risk behavior, some chucklehead "friend" of theirs is likely to broadcast either the exploit itself or legends of the exploit across multiple social media channels. The resulting shame can lead to traumatic and irreversible circumstances.

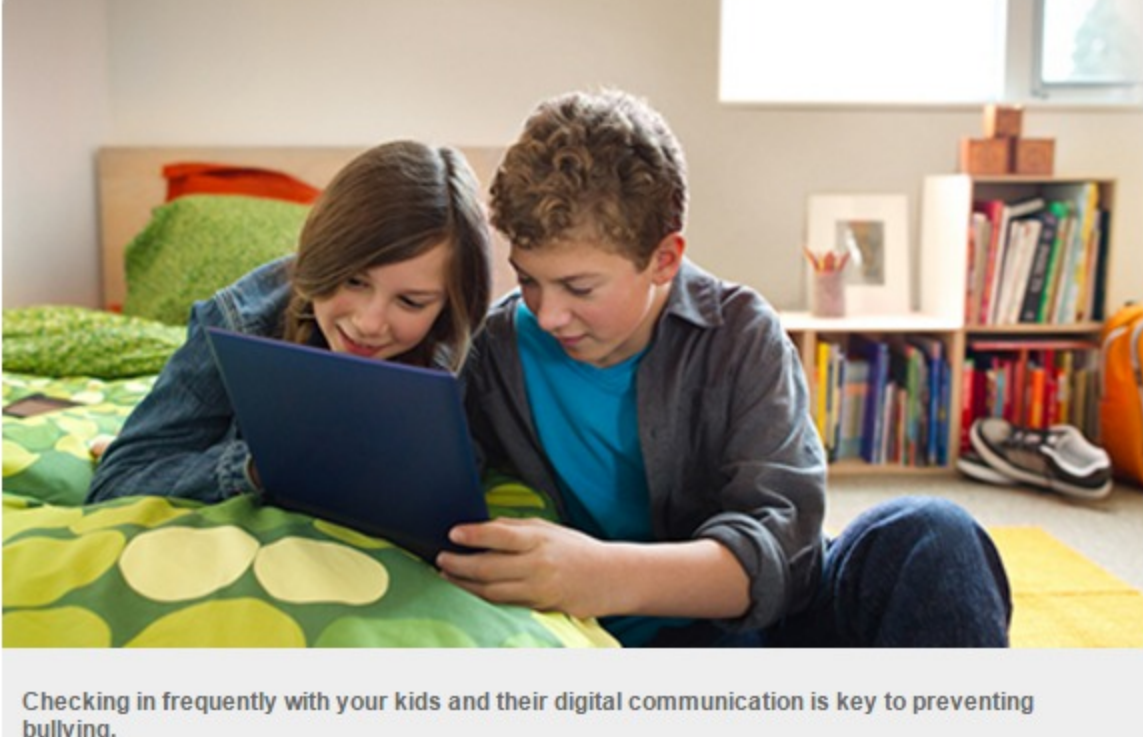
Got your attention? You have your charter to start your own family surveillance (I'll authorize it) to regularly supervise and define your rules of engagement around technology. It's worth it—technology has much to offer to every generation.

Live the values you want your child to follow

Guideline No. 1 above is a lot easier to enact if you walk the talk. Model the behavior you want your child to emulate both online and offline (sometimes called "real life"). If your child is confident and capable offline, they've got a better shot at maintaining that persona online. Let them know what you're proud of about them—every day. You may be surprised about what sticks with kids when it comes right down to it.

Ranting about your frustrations with a co-worker or exploding at the dangerous driver that cut you off in traffic—we've all done it. But don't forget that your reactions and verbal barbs set the bar for how your kids will react in their social settings.

When you blow it yourself, make it a teachable moment. Own your own flaws and express to your child how you wish you would have reacted. Use any foible of yours as an opportunity to start a dialogue.



Checking in frequently with your kids and their digital communication is key to preventing bullying.

Keep empathy front and center

In the world of cyberbullying, offline personalities do not often translate as online personalities. As a species, we've learned a new way of interaction. Due to perceived anonymity and distance, we can forget to disagree with each other with empathy. There's even a term for it. It's called [online disinhibition effect](#).

Teach your child empathy, and model it yourself. It's as simple as asking them to imagine what it's like to be in another person's shoes and not saying anything electronically that you wouldn't say in person. Benign online discussions have a way of turning on a dime into a string of invective, joined by masses. Perceived anonymity and mob mentality are not good combinations. Your child can quickly become a victim or a perpetrator without intention—or you knowing about it.

Adults can also keep tabs on kids' online activities and attitudes through apps like [My Mobile Watchdog](#)—easy, technology-based ways to [nip risky behavior in the bud](#).

The power of "stop"

While it may appear that kids today are addicted to their mobile devices, the truth is a little different—and more intractable. Kids are addicted to other kids. With so many rules of engagement imposed by adults, fueled by a long list of modern fears—rational and irrational—kids find virtual relationships the freest form of social interaction. The potential permanency and multiplicity of possible shame doesn't weigh into their thinking so much as the immediate connection to friends.

Unfortunately, friends can turn mean or otherwise insensitive with their communication devices. Kids that are feeling harassed or pressured by cyber bullying have a word they can use to change the game: "Stop."

"'Stop' is very powerful," says teacher Alfred Snyder of Seattle Public Schools' Franklin High School. "Once a kid tells a harasser to 'stop,' then we can get involved. It now becomes actionable—for the persons involved, teachers, parents and even other authorities, such as the police, if necessary."

A teacher's help doesn't stop there: "Teachers and other school staff can also be involved by helping kids learn how to say 'stop,' or even deliver the 'stop' on their behalf," Snyder added.

Check in, and stick with them

Your goal is simple: Create an environment where your child feels comfortable coming to you if they experience bullying. Commonsensemedia.org has a great [short video](#) that can show your child how to prepare for and recover from inappropriate online interactions.

Check in frequently. Tell your kids what their options are if they see or experience cyberbullying, and share the other resources your child can reach out to ([online](#), teachers, relatives).

You know who doesn't like cyberbullies? Pretty much everybody (except the bullies themselves). That means the numbers are on your child's side if they are being affected by cyberbullying. Urge them to say "stop" and to speak with someone in their support system. By reaching out to their network of friends, family members, and authority figures, they might not only protect themselves, but start a mini revolution for good.

Cyberbullies won't stand a chance against a united you and your child.

Use #threadsafety to join the conversation on Twitter.



You Might Also Like

[The Bully Project](#)

The Bully Project is a film, book, community, and website with tools and resources for kids and adults. Participants are encouraged to join or form regional bully project teams, in addition to using the numerous aids in the fight against bullying.

The Bully Project

[Kids & Gadgets: Serenity Now!](#)

Kids and technology: at what age should they start, what are the limits, which devices and apps should they use...how to keep them healthy and us sane. A first-person report on the ins and outs of tech and parenthood.

AT&T Thread

Julian Rogers
THREAD CONTRIBUTOR
OCTOBER 2014

Safeguard Your Family's Phones

Educating kids on safe smartphone behavior is a start, but some threats need a tech defense. That's where the Lookout app can help.



Compatible device req'd. Pricing varies by app, including one-time or monthly recurring charges. Data & messaging rates may apply for download & app usage. Lookout Service Terms of Use.

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