

TIPS TO HELP STOP CYBERBULLYING

KNOW YOU LUCKY IF YOUR CHILD ASKS FOR HELP: Most young people don't tell their parents about bullying online or offline. So if your child's losing sleep or doesn't want to go to school or seems agitated when on his or her computer or phone, ask why as calmly and open-heartedly as possible. Feel free to ask if it has anything to do with mean behavior or social issues. But even if it does, don't assume it's bullying. You won't know until you get the full story, starting with your child's perspective.

WORK WITH YOUR CHILD: There are two reasons why you'll want to keep your child involved. Bullying and cyberbullying involve a loss of dignity or control over a social situation, and involving your child in finding solutions helps him or her regain that. The second reason is about context. Because the bullying is almost always related to school life and our kids understand the situation and context better than parents ever can, their perspective is key to getting to the bottom of the situation and working out a solution. You may need to have private conversations with others, but let your child know if you do, and report back. This is about your child's life, so your child needs to be part of the solution.

RESPOND THOUGHTFULLY, NOT FAST: What parents don't always know is that they can make things worse for their kids if they act rashly. A lot of cyberbullying involves somebody getting marginalized (put down and excluded), which the bully thinks increases his or her power or status. If you respond publicly or if your child's peers find out about even a discreet meeting with school authorities, the marginalization can get worse, which is why any response needs to be well thought out.

MORE THAN ONE PERSPECTIVE NEEDED: Your child's account of what happened is likely completely sincere, but remember that one person's truth isn't necessarily everybody's. You'll need to get other perspectives and be open-minded about what they are. Sometimes kids let themselves get pulled into chain reactions, and often what we see online is only one side of or part of the story.

WHAT VICTIMS SAY HELPS MOST: Is to be heard – really listened to – either by a friend or an adult who cares. That's why, if your kids come to you for help, it's so important to respond thoughtfully and involve them. Just by being heard respectfully, a child is often well on the way to healing.

THE ULTIMATE GOAL IS RESTORED SELF-RESPECT: And greater resilience in your child. This, not getting someone punished, is the best focus for resolving the problem and helping your child heal. What your child needs most is to regain a sense of dignity. Sometimes that means standing up to the bully, sometimes not. Together, you and your child can figure out how to get there.

ONE POSITIVE OUTCOME: We don't often think about (or hear in the news) is resilience. We know the human race will never completely eradicate meanness or cruelty, and we also know that bullying is not, as heard in past generations, "normal" or a rite of passage. We need to keep working to eradicate it. But when it does happen and we overcome it our resilience grows. It's not something that can be "downloaded" or taught. We grow it through exposure to challenges and figuring out how to deal with them. So sometimes it's important to give them space to do that and let them know we have their back.