# CyberbullyNOT—Stopping Online Social Aggression

Cyberbullying is being mean to others by sending or posting harmful material using the Internet or a cell phone.

## Types of Cyberbullying

- *Flaming:* Angry, rude arguments.

- *Harassment:* Repeatedly sending offensive messages.

- *Denigration:* "Dissing" someone online by spreading rumors or posting false information.

- *Outing and trickery:* Disseminating intimate private information or talking someone into disclosing private information, which is then disseminated.

- *Impersonation:* Pretending to be someone else and posting material to damage that person's reputation.

- *Exclusion:* Intentionally excluding someone from an online group.

- *Cyberstalking:* Creating fear by repeatedly sending offensive messages and engaging in other harmful online activities.

## How, Who, and Why

- Cyberbullying may occur via personal Web sites, blogs, e-mail, discussion groups, message boards, chat, instant messaging, or voice, text, or image cell phones.

- A cyberbully may be a person whom the target knows or an online stranger. A cyberbully may be anonymous and may enlist the aid of others, including online "friends."

- Cyberbullying may be a continuation of, or in retaliation for, in-school bullying. It may be related to fights about relationships or be based on hate or bias. Some teens think cyberbullying is entertaining—a fun game.

Several factors may make teens unconcerned about the consequences of harmful online behavior:

- They think they are invisible or can take steps to become invisible, so they think they can't be punished.

- There is no tangible feedback about the harm they cause, so it seems like a game to them.

- Harmful online social norms support cyberbullying: "On the Internet, I have a free speech right to post whatever I want, regardless of the harm I cause."

### The Harm

Cyberbullying can cause great emotional harm to the target. Online communications can be vicious, and cyberbullying can be happening 24/7. Damaging text and images can be widely disseminated and impossible to fully remove. Teens are reluctant to tell adults about problems online for fear of overreaction, restriction from online activities, and possible retaliation by the cyberbully. There are emerging reports of youth suicide and violence related to cyberbullying.

### Responsible Management of Children's Internet Use

Parents have a moral and legal obligation to ensure that their children engage in safe and responsible behavior online! Useful steps to take:

- Keep the computer in a public place and supervise its use.

- Find out what public online sites and communities your child uses and periodically review what your child is posting. Emphasize that these sites and communities are public and that your child should never post personal contact information, intimate personal information, or provocative sexually oriented material. (Your child may argue that you are invading his or her privacy—but you can point out that what you're doing, anyone can do. These are *public* places!)

- Tell your child that you will investigate his or her private online communications if you have reason to believe that the child has

engaged in unsafe or irresponsible behavior. You can install monitoring software to do this.

- Make joint Internet use management agreements with the parents of your child's friends—addressing the amount of time children can spend online, approved activities, and a mutual parental agreement to monitor and report.

### Prevent Your Child from Being a Cyberbully

- Make it clear that all Internet use must be in accord with family values of kindness and respect for others and that any violation of this expectation will result in monitoring of all online activities, using Internet monitoring software.

- If your child is being bullied at school, work with the school to stop the bullying and make sure your child knows not to retaliate online.

### Prevent Your Child from Becoming a Target of Cyberbullying

- Frequently discuss the concerns of public disclosure of intimate personal information and the value of modesty.

- Visit your child's favorite online communities and discuss the values demonstrated by others who participate there.

- Insist that the school intervene effectively to address any in-school bullying.

- Seek to bully-proof your child by reinforcing your child's unique individual strengths and fostering healthy friendships with teens you can trust to be kind.

### Warning Signs That Your Child Might Be a Target

- Negative emotional reactions (sadness or anger) during or after Internet use.

- Withdrawal from friends and activities, school avoidance, decline of grades, and signs of depression and sadness.

- Indications that your child is being bullied at school or having any other difficulties with peers. Pay close attention if you see these indicators because these are the teens most often targeted by cyberbullies.

**Action Steps and Options to Respond to Cyberbullying**

- Save the evidence.

- Identify the cyberbully or bully group. Ask your Internet service provider for help.

- Clearly tell the cyberbully to stop.

- Ignore the cyberbully by leaving the online environment, blocking communications, or both.

- File a complaint with the Internet or cell phone company.

- Seek assistance from the school, if the cyberbully attends the same school. (But know that because of free-speech protections, if the cyberbullying is occurring totally off-campus, your school may be able to provide only informal assistance, not formal discipline.)

- Send the cyberbully's parents a letter that includes the evidence of cyberbullying. Demand that the actions stop and harmful material be removed.

- Contact an attorney to send a letter or file a lawsuit against the cyberbully's parents based on defamation, invasion of privacy, or intentional infliction of emotional distress.

- Call the police if the cyberbullying involves threats of violence, coercion, intimidation based on hate or bias, or any form of sexual exploitation.

**Reporting Other Concerns**

- If you have suspicions your child is involved with an online sexual predator, call the police. Do not talk to your child first—children in that situation often will warn the predator.

- If you see any online threats of school-related violence, call both the school and the police.

- If you see any material that raises concerns that a child is emotionally distressed and may be contemplating suicide, self-harm, or other violence, contact the counselor of the school the child attends.