Cyberbullying Response Guide for Parents

What to do when your child experiences cyberbullying - evidence collection, reporting, and how to help.

NOTE First: Stay calm and supportive. Your child came to you - that took courage. The most important thing you can do is listen without judgment and make them feel safe and believed.

WHAT IS CYBERBULLYING?

Cyberbullying is the deliberate, repeated use of digital technology to harass, threaten, embarrass, or harm another person. It includes:

- Harassing messages: Repeatedly sending mean, threatening, or humiliating messages.
- Public shaming: Posting embarrassing photos, videos, or information to humiliate.
- Exclusion: Deliberately leaving someone out of online groups and conversations.
- Impersonation: Creating fake accounts to impersonate your child and damage their reputation.
- Doxing: Publishing your child's private personal information (address, school, phone) publicly.

A single hurtful comment, while painful, may not constitute cyberbullying. The defining features are deliberate intent and repetition. However, even a single serious incident (explicit threats, NCII) warrants immediate action.

STEP 1: DOCUMENT EVERYTHING BEFORE TAKING ANY OTHER ACTION

NOTE Critical: Document BEFORE blocking. Once you block the bully, you may lose access to the evidence. Screenshot everything first.

1 Screenshot all messages, posts, and comments

Include the date and time, the username/account name of the bully, and all content. Screenshot the profile page of the bully as well.

2 Note the platform and URL

Write down or screenshot the specific URL of each piece of harmful content.

3 Record timestamps

Note the exact dates and times of each incident - this creates a timeline.

4 Save a copy in multiple places

Save screenshots to your phone, email them to yourself, and print physical copies. Evidence can be needed by schools and law enforcement.

(c) ComputerLeap | computerleap.org | Free to share for educational purposes

5 Continue documenting

Keep collecting evidence as long as the bullying continues. A pattern of repeated behavior strengthens the case.

STEP 2: REPORT TO THE PLATFORM

Every major social media platform has a reporting mechanism. Reporting is important even if you're skeptical it will be acted upon - it creates an official record.

- Instagram: Tap the three dots (...) on the post or profile > Report.
- TikTok: Press and hold a video > Report; or tap the arrow > Report.
- Snapchat: Press and hold a message > Report; or visit their profile > ... > Report.
- YouTube: Three dots under a comment or video > Report.
- Discord: Right-click a message > Report. Or use the Discord Trust & Safety form.
- Roblox: Click the player's name > Report Abuse.

All platforms have a policy against harassment and threatening behavior. If the content constitutes a credible threat, report it as such - the platform response to threats is faster.

STEP 3: BLOCK THE BULLY

After documenting, block the bully on all platforms. Blocking prevents them from seeing your child's content, sending messages, or finding their account. Your child may resist blocking ('it will make it worse') - explain that blocking removes the bully's power to harm them directly. It does not make them angry; the bully was already behaving badly.

STEP 4: REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

If the bully is a classmate or schoolmate, the school must be informed - even when the cyberbullying happens off-campus. Schools have legal authority and obligation to address cyberbullying among students that affects the school environment.

1 Contact the principal or vice principal directly

Email is better than a phone call - it creates a written record. Attach the screenshots.

2 Reference your school district's bullying policy

Most school district websites publish their anti-bullying policy. Reference it in your email to signal you know your rights.

3 Request a formal response in writing

Ask what steps the school will take and by when. Keep records of all school communications.

4 Follow up within 5 school days

If you don't hear back, follow up in writing. Escalate to the district level if the school does not respond adequately.

STEP 5: WHEN TO CONTACT LAW ENFORCEMENT

ALERT

Contact 911 or local police immediately if there is any threat of physical violence, sexual content, stalking, or if your child is afraid for their physical safety.

Contact law enforcement when cyberbullying involves:

- Threats of violence - any credible threat to harm your child physically

- Non-consensual intimate imagery (fake or real explicit content involving a minor)
- Blackmail or extortion ('send money or I'll share this')
- Stalking, harassment tracking your child's physical location
- Hate crimes (targeting based on race, religion, sexual orientation)

You can also report to the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (ic3.gov) and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (cybertipline.org) for crimes involving minors.

STEP 6: SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD

Your child's emotional recovery is as important as the practical steps above. Cyberbullying causes real psychological harm - higher rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation than in-person bullying.

- BELIEVE your child completely. Express this explicitly: 'I believe you. This is not your fault.'
- LISTEN without immediately jumping to problem-solving. Ask: 'How are you feeling about this? What do you need from me right now?'
- NORMALIZE getting help. Consider therapy or counseling - a professional can provide tools your child needs to process the experience.
- MONITOR for warning signs: withdrawal, sleep changes, refusing to go to school, giving away possessions, talk of hopelessness.
- TAKE A BREAK from the platform together - a short social media break often helps your child's mental health during the situation.
- REBUILD confidence by strengthening real-world friendships, activities, and success outside of social media.

CALL Crisis Resources: If your child is in crisis, call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline). Text HOME to 741741 (Crisis Text Line). Call 911 for immediate danger.