



Youth Cyber Awareness Toolkit

The cyber world can be inspiring, confusing, helpful and hurtful all at once to young users. Today's generations are growing up in a fast-paced, ever-evolving environment with an uncharted virtual twist. With this in mind, we have compiled tips and resources to help teens and adults navigate every new digital turn.

This toolkit is broken down into three areas of focus:

Reach

Tips for starting the conversation on cyber activity and awareness

Recognize

Tips for spotting the signs of cyberbullying

Respond

Tips for taking action in response to a cyber incident

How to Get the Conversation Started

One of the most effective ways to promote cyber awareness and prevent cyberbullying is to establish an ongoing dialogue with your child. Most of the time, they use technology safely, but an open line of communication ensures they are comfortable turning to you if they run into trouble.

- 1 **Start Early.** As soon as your child is using any kind of online device, it's time to talk to them about online safety and security. Focus on these three topics:
 - **Conduct** – Kids are still accountable for their actions even in a seemingly anonymous online world.
 - **Contact** – Be wary of people with bad intentions (bullies, hackers, predators, scammers).
 - **Content** – Avoid content with violence, hate speech, pornography, etc.
- 2 **Initiate the Conversation.** Do not wait for your child to come to you. Leverage everyday opportunities to bring up online safety, such as a TV show featuring a teen on social media or a news story on internet scams. Refer to these scripts on [Talking to Teens about Online Harassment](#) for ideas.
- 3 **Create an Open Environment.** Listening and taking your child's feelings into account establishes a supportive and honest line of communication. It's okay if you do not have all the answers.
- 4 **Share Values.** Communicating your values clearly and tying them to online conduct will help them make more thoughtful decisions when faced with a tricky situation.
- 5 **Be Patient.** Many kids need to hear information repeatedly in small doses to internalize the message. Do not rush the dialogue or push too hard if your child is not immediately willing to share. Plan to have multiple conversations as your child's use of technology evolves.
- 6 **Withhold Judgment.** You may learn that your child has done something online you find inappropriate. Do your best to get to the root cause of this behavior without jumping to conclusions. This will help your child feel more receptive to the necessary corrective action.
- 7 **Ask Questions.** Replace lectures with questions to get more information on your child's online experience. Refer to this guide on [Questions Parents Should Ask Their Children About Technology](#) for inspiration.
- 8 **Align with School Approach.** Ask your child's school for their policies and procedures regarding online conduct. Using the same language across multiple channels (parents, schools, caregivers, etc.) will keep expectations clear and consistent. Refer to this [Online Safety Terms Glossary](#) for a list of common terms – it's okay if you don't know them all.
- 9 **Choose the Right Time.** Be strategic about when you approach your child for this discussion. Find time when they are less stressed, with minimal interruption, such as during a long car ride or an activity they enjoy.
- 10 **Take Action.** If you find that your child is a target or initiator of cyberbullying or inappropriate online conduct, let your child know you will work together to find the support and solutions needed to move forward.

Sources:

"Talk to Your Kids about Online Safety," CuraLinc, SupportLinc Employee Assistance.

"Talk to Your Kids," Federal Trade Commission, Consumer Advice, 2011.

Recognize

Signs of Cyberbullying Amongst Youth

While you may not have control over what is said to your child online, you can be attentive to their behavior and look out for changes that may indicate something is amiss. When you are more in tune with how the children or teens in your life normally behave, you can quickly recognize when something may be troubling them.

- 1 They **unexpectedly stop using their device** and may become secretive or avoid discussions about what they are doing online.
- 2 They **appear nervous or jumpy** when using their device and may hide their screen when others are nearby.
- 3 They **appear uneasy** about going to school and may frequently call or text requesting to go home ill.
- 4 They **appear to be increasingly** angry, depressed or frustrated, particularly after going online/using their device.
- 5 You may notice that they are **oversleeping or not sleeping enough**.
- 6 An **increase or decrease in their appetite** may occur.
- 7 They **seem regularly depressed** and may make passing statements about **suicide or the meaninglessness of life**.
- 8 They become **withdrawn from friends and family members** or **lose interest in activities** that once mattered most to them.
- 9 You may notice their **grades slipping at school** due to the inability to concentrate.
- 10 They desire to **spend much more time with parents** rather than peers.



Every teen is unique, and this list is not comprehensive. Some teens are much better at masking or hiding a cyberbullying problem they may be facing, or they may display other indicative behaviors. In addition to watching for these instances, make sure that you establish a healthy relationship of trust with your teen, so they feel they can tell you about their problems.

Sources:

Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin. "Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying," Sage Publications, 2015.

"**Cyberbullying Warning Signs: Red Flags That a Child Is Involved in Cyberbullying**," Cyberbullying Research Center, 2015.

"**Be Aware of What Your Kids Are Doing Online**," StopBullying.gov, 2021.

Respond



Tips to Help Teens Respond to Cyberbullying

- 1 **Talk About It.** Encourage teens to tell their parents, a teacher or another trusted adult that they are being cyberbullied. It may be hard to talk about, but it could make the problem go away if they give others a chance to come through for them.
- 2 **Don't Retaliate.** A young person's first response might be to mirror the same hurtful actions as the person doing the bullying. Help them to stay calm and not react quickly out of anger. Emphasize that retaliation can make a situation much worse.
- 3 **Ignore Them.** Share that the best response may be no response at all. Sometimes cyberbullies are just looking for an emotional response and hoping to share it on social media to embarrass their target.
- 4 **Tell Them to Stop.** If ignoring the cyberbully does not work and their attacks become repetitive, tell them to stop. Teach teens how to use their voice to let the cyberbully know what they are doing is hurtful, not cool and juvenile. Stress the importance of being respectful, constructive and clear. Sometimes people really do not know that their actions have been hurtful and responding to them with clarity and without blame or shame can be very effective.
- 5 **Laugh.** Advise teens to try and laugh it off if someone says something funny about them. They may just be joking around and not purposely trying to be hurtful. Teaching kids to laugh at themselves can build confidence and empower them to embrace their unique sense of self. Laughter can also disarm a bully or diffuse a tough situation. However, it is not always funny to be the subject of a joke. If the joke is hurtful, help your child set boundaries by trying one of the other responses listed here.
- 6 **Save the Evidence.** Instruct teens to record all instances of cyberbullying and give the evidence to a trusted adult who they believe can help. Save emails, and screenshot texts and social media posts. You can also screen record Snapchat, Facebook and Instagram Stories.
- 7 **Block Them.** If cyberbullies cannot contact their victims, it is difficult for them to continue the harassment. Most phones allow users to block certain phone numbers, or your cell phone service provider can help. Most apps and platforms also allow you to block users from "seeing you" online and messaging you. Help your teen block the cyberbully on all apps and platforms where inappropriate behavior is occurring.
- 8 **Report It.** Inform teens that they can contact the site or platform where cyberbullying is occurring and make a report – often anonymously. Most popular apps and platforms make it easy to report cyberbullying because harassment is a violation of the Terms of Service of reputable online spaces.
- 9 **Contact the Police.** If you or your teen feel their safety is in danger, call the police immediately.
- 10 **Set Priorities.** Above all, emphasize to young people that their emotional and physical safety, as well as the safety of others they see who are targeted, is paramount. Stress how important it is for them to share their concerns with trusted adults.

Sources:

Janet Olsen. "[Responding to Cyberbullying in Safe and Constructive Ways](#)," Michigan State University Extension, 2018.

Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin. "[Responding to Cyberbullying: Top Ten Tips for Teens](#)," Cyberbullying Research Center, 2018.

Resources

Online Resources:

- [988 Mental Health Crisis Lifeline](#)
- [Cyberbullying Warning Signs](#)
- [Cyberbullying.org | Resources](#)
- [DigitalShield Personal Cyber and Cyberbullying Pricing 2022](#)
- [KnowBullying Mobile App](#)
- [Signs Your Child Is Being Bullied – Tip Sheet](#)
- [Stopbullying.gov:](#)
 - [Digital Awareness for Parents](#)
 - [How to Talk About Bullying](#)
 - [How Youth Can Protect Themselves from Bullying](#)
 - [Prevent Cyberbullying](#)
 - [Videos and Social Media](#)
 - [Videos for Younger Kids](#)
 - [Youth Engagement Toolkit](#)

Reporting Resources:

- [Stopbullying.gov | How to Report Cyberbullying](#)
- [How to Report Posts / Comments on Social Media:](#)
 - [Facebook](#)
 - [Instagram](#)
 - [Twitter](#)
 - [Snapchat](#)
 - [TikTok](#)

Enroll now or find out more about how our DigitalShield coverage can help with cyberbullying at go.nfp.com/DigitalShield.

