

Cyberbullying Response Options

Save the Evidence

Save all e-mail and text messages, as well as records of chat or IM sessions. Download all Web pages. This should be done in all cases.



Identify the Cyberbully

Identification could require some detective work. Look for clues wherever the cyberbully is posting. Remember, a cyberbully may impersonate someone else or could be a proxy cyberbully. You may not need to know the identity of the cyberbully to take action.

Other suggestions include:

- Ask your Internet service (ISP) provider to identify the source, or contact a company that traces the identity of people online.
- If you can demonstrate that a student may be involved, have the district technology director search district Internet use records.
- If you intend to file a lawsuit, consider having an attorney help identify the cyberbully.
- If a crime has occurred, ask the police to identify the cyberbully.

Tell the Cyberbully to Stop

Your child can send the cyberbully a non-emotional, assertive message telling the cyberbully to stop.

Ignore the Cyberbully

Help your child block or filter all communications through his or her e-mail and IM contact list. Your child can also avoid going to the site or group where he or she has been attacked or change his or her e-mail address, account, username, or phone number.

File a Complaint

Cyberbullying is a violation of the terms of use of most Web sites, ISP's, and cell phone companies. File a complaint by providing the harmful messages or a link to the harmful material and ask that the account be terminated and any harmful material removed. Make sure you keep all communications. Here are the steps:

- If the cyberbully is using e-mail, contact the ISP of the cyberbully (you can determine the ISP from the e-mail address), contact the company at support @<ISP>, or look on the ISP's site for "Contact Us."
- If the material appears on a third-party Web site (with a URL such as www.webhostname.com/~kid'sname.html) go to the site's home page and file a complaint through "Contact Us."

- If the material is on a Web site with its own domain name (www.xyzkid.com), go to Whois (www.whois.net) to find the owner of the site and the host company. Go to the host company's Web site and file a complaint through "Contact Us."
- If the cyberbully is using a cell phone, trace the number and contact the company.



Contact Your School

Your school may not be able to discipline a student for totally off-campus actions because of free speech protections. But if the cyberbully is using the district Internet system, or is also bullying your child at school, or if your child's participation in school has been substantially disrupted, the school can intervene with formal discipline. Your school can also contact the parents of the cyberbully to get the cyberbully to stop.

Contact the Cyberbully's Parents

The cyberbully's parents may be totally unaware that their child has engaged in this kind of activity, concerned about it when they find out, and both willing and able to get the cyberbullying to stop. Or they could become very defensive. Avoid meeting with them face-to-face. Instead, send the cyberbully's parents a certified letter that includes the downloaded material and requests that the cyberbullying stop and all harmful material be removed.

Contact an Attorney

Cyberbullying could meet the standards for defamation, invasion of privacy, or intentional infliction of emotional distress. An attorney can send a letter to the cyberbully's parents demanding that the cyberbullying stop. An attorney can also file a lawsuit against the cyberbully's parents for financial damages (money because your child has been harmed), and an injunction (requirement that the cyberbullying stop and material be removed).

Contact the Police

If the cyberbullying appears to be a crime, contact the police. Criminal cyberbullying involves threats of violence, coercion, obscene or harassing text messages, harassment or stalking, hate or bias crimes, creating or sending sexually explicit pictures, sexual exploitation, or taking a picture of someone in a private place.