

Common Sense on Cyberbullying

What's The Issue?

Cyberbullying is defined as repeatedly sending or posting cruel messages, images, or videos about someone else using the Internet, cell phones, or other digital technologies. Kids may call each other names, spread rumors, post threats, or purposefully make others feel uncomfortable or scared. Cyberbullying is especially disturbing because it is constant, inescapable, and very public. It can happen anytime — at school or at home — and can involve large groups of kids.

Why It Matters

Younger kids are starting to use online communication and at the same time they are exploring ways to test other people's reactions. For instance, kids who send a mean message might not fully understand how another person might react to that message. Cyberbullying behavior also usually happens when adults aren't around. So parents and teachers often see only the anxiety or depression that results from their kids being hurt or bullied. Parents can help by becoming aware of the issue, learning to identify the warning signs of bullying, and helping kids to understand how to be respectful to others online.

Common Sense Says

- **Make a list together of how talking online is different than talking face-to-face.** Help kids consider why it might be easier to say things online you wouldn't say in person, and how this may be good sometimes and problematic at other times.
- **Practice writing a text or an online message to a friend.** Model for your child how to be kind and polite when using cell phones or the Internet. Discuss how to read the "tone" of a message before you send it, and how to avoid mean language or behaviors.
- **Make sure they talk to someone (even if it's not you).** A child should tell a parent, teacher, or trusted adult if he or she is being bullied online. Tell your child that this isn't tattling; it's standing up for him- or herself.
- **Advise them on how to handle cyberbullying.** Even though they might be tempted to, your child should never retaliate against a cyberbully. They can stop the cycle by not responding to the bully. Also remind them to save the evidence rather than delete it.
- **Point out that it's important to stick up for others,** online as well as in the real world. Discuss ways they can support friends who are bullied and report bad behavior they see online.