Cyberbullying Prevention 101
A quick guide for adults

WHAT IS CYBERBULLYING?

Cyberbullying is bullying - unwanted, repeated, aggressive, negative behavior - that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, tablets, and computers. Cyberbullying can happen over email, through texting, on social media, while gaming, on instant messaging, and through photo sharing. Some cyberbullying tactics include:

- Posting comments, photos, or videos about someone that are mean, hurtful, or embarrassing
- Threatening to hurt someone, or saying they should hurt themselves
- Pretending to be someone else online in order to solicit or post personal or false information about someone else
- Creating a mean or hurtful web page about someone
- Sharing someone's personal information without their permission

Youth who use technology to hurt, harm, or humiliate their peers can create an even more devastating type of bullying. When youth cyberbully, they can reach their target or access a large audience 24/7. In addition, the person being targeted for bullying can read and re-read a hurtful text or comment on social media, experiencing the hurt over and over again.

OPENING UP A DISCUSSION ABOUT CYBERBULLYING

It's important for adults to encourage youth to tell a trusted adult when they see or experience cyberbullying. Frequently, the behavior occurs in an environment where adults can't see it; unless those involved tell, often no adults will know. Adults should share that they understand it can be difficult to confide in someone, but it's important that youth don't go through the experience alone. For their well-being, it helps to tell someone.

To lay the groundwork for discussion, you can say:

- "I understand how important it is to communicate with other kids by phone and online."
- "You deserve to be safe from bullying online, just like at school, on the playground, and in the neighborhood."
- "If something happening online is hurtful, you don't have to go through it alone."

For youth today, instant access to technology brings both benefits and challenges. While helping youth navigate in-person social situations, adults also need to prepare them for healthy relationships online.

HOW TO HELP YOUTH WHO ARE BEING CYBERBULLIED

IT'S IMPORTANT TO BE SUPPORTIVE

If a child or youth tells you that they are being bullied online, encourage them to express themselves, while letting them know:

• "**This is not your fault.**" Make sure they know they are not to blame.

• "**You are not alone.**" Many children feel isolated by bullying and believe that no one cares or will help them.

• "**Bullying is never okay.**" All students have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.

• "**It is not up to you to stop the bullying; we will work together.**" It's important that both youth and adults are involved in working toward a solution that takes into account what the student wants.

ENCOURAGE THINKING THROUGH THE BEST WAY TO HANDLE THE SITUATION

Self-advocacy—which means communicating on your own behalf, sharing what you need, and then taking action—is especially important in bullying situations, when youth may feel powerless. Being part of the solution and sharing their ideas helps give youth some of the power back and a sense of ownership over the response.

DOCUMENT THE SITUATION AND KEEP A DETAILED RECORD

Cyberbullying leaves behind a trail of evidence documenting the hurt the child has experienced. Keeping a detailed record, such as screenshots or saving emails and texts, will help when planning how to resolve the situation.

When an adult hears that a child has been a part of a cyberbullying situation it's natural to want to take away their access to technology. Because of that, many kids are reluctant to share anything negative about what they experience. A more helpful response is to let a child know right away that you want to work with them so that they can use technology safely.

DEVELOP A PLAN

The "**Parent and Educator Guide to Using the Student Action Plan Against Bullying**" is designed for adults to help guide youth through **The Student Action Plan**. The Plan provides a way for youth to share their ideas and opinions about potential solutions to the bullying they are experiencing. Creating the plan also helps them feel more in control while also discovering ways to resolve the bullying situation.

The plan could include:

• Determining who else can provide support (such as educators, counselors, and peers)

• Outlining strategy on how to respond when bullying happens

• Reporting the behavior to online and social media providers

• Working with the school to address both online and offline bullying

Adults should discuss online conduct and behavior, as well as cyberbullying, as soon as youth start using technology such as cell phones and computers.

HOW TO HELP YOUTH WHO WITNESS CYBERBULLYING

Let youth know how powerful and impactful their response can be; many bullying situations end when a peer intervenes. Youth are often unsure about how to take the first step, especially online. An important role for an adult is to outline action steps that youth can take to help others, including:

- **Helping the person being bullied tell an adult**. Most bullying situations do not resolve well without the involvement of a caring adult.

- **Not participating or engaging**. Don't "like" or share posts that are bullying someone. Liking a mean message shows that they approve of it.

- **Reporting it**. Involving others, such as a caring adult or teacher, in taking action is important.

- **Responding with positive support**. If the child feels comfortable doing so, and it's safe, advise them to post a comment showing solidarity with the target.

- **Reaching out to the person being bullied**. The child can send them a private message letting them know that what's happening is wrong, they don't deserve to be treated that way, and they're not alone.

HOW TO HELP YOUTH WHO ARE CYBERBULLYING OTHERS

If you learn a child or youth is cyberbullying others, it's important to know that bullying is a behavior, and behavior can be changed. Children cyberbully for many reasons, including peer pressure, being bullied themselves, and not realizing the impact their actions can have on others.

- **Start by talking with them and exploring reasons for their behavior.** Allow them to discuss their feelings, to speak up if they are also being bullied, and to talk about other factors that may be leading to this behavior.

- **Next, encourage empathy, respect, and compassion.** Those who cyberbully often lack awareness of how others feel. They may not understand that online behavior has real-life consequences. Let them know how their online behavior can impact how someone feels or thinks.

- **Then, make your expectations and consequences clear and consistent.** Let them know that bullying is not okay under any circumstances and will not be tolerated. Explain that there will be consequences for their behavior. Be specific about what will happen, and take immediate action if you learn that they are still involved in cyberbullying.

- **Finally, provide positive feedback and be patient. It takes time to change behavior.** Provide praise and recognition when they handle online conflict well, or find a positive way to deal with their feelings. This type of positive reinforcement goes a long way! Keep your concern and support visible.

ADVICE TO GIVE A CHILD TO PREVENT THEM FROM CYBERBULLYING OTHERS

- Think before you post. If you're upset, sad, or angry, wait to post. Give yourself time to cool down, so you don't do something that you can't take back.

- Never publicly reveal anything that you wouldn't be comfortable with everyone knowing. Remember that when you share something online, it can potentially be seen by anyone, including your parents and teachers.

- When you make comments about someone else, imagine how you would feel if someone said that about you.

WHAT MAKES CYBERBULLYING UNIQUE FROM TRADITIONAL BULLYING?

While all bullying is characterized by aggressive, often repetitive, hurtful behavior toward another person or group, there are distinguishing elements when it happens using digital devices, which include:

- **Persistence**. Cyberbullying can happen anytime, anyplace where someone has access to technology.

- **Anonymity**. Those being bullied might not even know who is targeting them, which makes it easier to hurt someone and not be held accountable.

- **Difficulty in detecting**. Some bullying is easy to see, such as pushing someone or damaging belongings. Cyberbullying happens on a digital device, on apps or sites where adult access may be restricted, so adults may not be aware what is happening.

- **Sharing to a larger audience**. Information online can be easily and quickly shared, making it difficult to contain or stop negative messages once they are posted.

- **Easier to be hurtful**. The person bullying doesn't see the immediate response from the person being targeted, as technology distances them from the real-life pain they could be causing.

- **Permanence**. Once something is shared on the internet, it is often available to everyone, everywhere, making it challenging to remove or delete.

Adults should discuss online conduct and behavior, as well as cyberbullying, as soon as youth start using technology such as cell phones and computers. Start this conversation early, and return to it as they grow up and their use of technology evolves.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN ADDRESSING CYBERBULLYING?

Every state has bullying prevention laws or policies to help districts and schools address bullying. Many laws and policies require that schools address cyberbullying. Some state laws also cover off-campus behavior that creates a hostile school environment. If a child experiences cyberbullying, check the school's bullying prevention policy to learn more about the role the school can play in helping youth address the issue.