

# TIPS FOR SAFE SOCIAL NETWORKING FOR PARENTS

**Be reasonable and try to set reasonable expectations.** Pulling the plug on your child's favorite social site is like pulling the plug on his or her social life. Instead of being protective, it can shut down communication and send kids "underground" where they're more at risk. It's too easy for them to set up free blogs and profiles from anywhere, including friends' houses or even a cell phone.

**Talk with your kids about how they use the services.** They, not news reports or even experts, are the ones to consult about their social-Web experience. Help them understand basic safety guidelines, such as protecting their privacy (including passwords), not harassing peers, never talking about sex with people they don't know, avoiding in-person meetings with people they "meet" online, and taking care in what they post - because anything people put online can be grabbed, reworked, and used against them.

**Support critical thinking and civil behavior** because no laws or parental-control software can protect better than a child's developing good sense about safety and relationships. Research shows that kids who are aggressive and mean online toward peers or strangers are at greater risk of becoming victims themselves. So teach them to be good citizens and friends online as much as offline.

**Consider requiring internet use in a high-traffic place in your home** - not in kids' rooms - to help you stay aware of their online time. This way, you can encourage a balance between online time and their offline academic, sports, and social times. Know that there are also many ways kids can access the Internet away from home, including on many mobile phones and game players.

**Try to get your kids to share their profiles and services with you**, but be aware that they can have multiple accounts on multiple services. Use search engines and the search tools on social-networking sites to search for your kids' full names, phone numbers and other identifying information. You're not invading their privacy if they're putting personal info in public "places" online. If their pages are private, that's a good thing, but it's even better if they share it with you. Be aware of the apps they use on their mobile devices.

# TIPS FOR SMART CELLPHONE USE

*Some 95% of Americans own cellphones of some kind, according to Pew Research Center - among 18- to 29-year-olds, the number is a whopping 100%. But no matter your age, there are some basic ideas for keeping mobile phone use safe and constructive:*

**Share with care.** Use the same good sense about what you post from your phone as from a computer. Once they're posted, text, photos, and video are tough to take back, can be copied and pasted elsewhere, and are up there pretty much forever. Think about the people in them (including you!). Reputations are at stake.

**Phones are personal.** Letting other people use your phone when you're not around is like letting them have the password to your social network profile. They can impersonate you, which gives them the power to mess with your reputation and relationships. Lock your phone when you're not using it, and use strong and unique passwords for all your apps.

**Keep it kind.** Because people socialize on cellphones as much as online, cyberbullying can be mobile too. Treat people on phones and the web the way you would in person, and the risk of being bullied goes down. Be aware, too, of people randomly taking pictures at parties, in locker rooms, etc. – you may not want to be tagged in their social-network photo albums!

**Sexting:** The vast majority of kids are smart and don't take, send, or post or even store nude photos of themselves or peers on their phones. People who do so can be charged with production, distribution, or possession of child pornography, a serious crime. They can also be subjected to jokes, bullying, blackmail, expulsion from school, loss of a job, etc. and the images can circulate forever. Just don't go there.

**The value of presence.** If you do a lot of texting, consider the impact that being "elsewhere" might be having on the people around you. Your presence during meals, at parties, in the car, etc. is not only polite, it's a sign of respect and appreciated.

**Know what your apps know.** Pay attention to any permissions apps request as you install them. If an app asks to access your location, contact list, calendar or messages or to post to your social networking services, consider if the app really needs that information to function. When in doubt, consider withholding permission or not using that app.

**Down time is good.** Constant texting and talking can affect sleep, concentration, school, and other things that deserve your thought and focus. You need your sleep, and real friends understand there are times you just need to turn off the phone.

**Share location mindfully.** A growing number of apps allow friends to pinpoint each other's physical location. If you use such a service, do so only with friends you know in person, and get to know the service's privacy features.

**Have a conversation** (not a lecture) with your kids about smartphone use. Consider drawing up a family cellphone contract and talk with your children about why each point is important (there's a sample contract at [ConnectSafely.org/mobile](http://ConnectSafely.org/mobile)). If you decide to use parental-control apps, discuss them with your children.

**Consider parental-control tools.** There are actually two major types of parental controls. The first is family rules or guidelines that you establish with your children, and the second is technology tools provided by cellphone companies, smartphone makers and app developers. If you do use technology to monitor or limit your child's phone activities, in most cases it's a good idea to be up front with them and revisit it every now and then as they mature.

**Don't text or handle your phone while driving.** Texting or even touching your phone while driving is dangerous and illegal in many states. If you must speak on the phone, use a speaker or headset and hands-free controls. Never text, send or read email or post online and if you use your phone for navigation or listening to music or podcasts, set it before you leave or use hands-free voice recognition.

# TIPS TO HELP STOP CYBERBULLYING

*Guidance for parents and young people on cyberbullying, including advice for ending (or preventing) the cycle of aggression. For a more comprehensive look, see [A Parents' Guide to Cyberbullying](#).*

## For kids and teens

**Know that it's not your fault.** What people call "bullying" is sometimes an argument between two people. But if someone is repeatedly cruel to you, that's bullying and you mustn't blame yourself. No one deserves to be treated cruelly.

**Don't respond or retaliate.** Sometimes a reaction is exactly what aggressors are looking for because they think it gives them power over you, and you don't want to empower a bully. As for retaliating, getting back at a bully turns you into one – and can turn one mean act into a chain reaction. If you can, remove yourself from the situation. If you can't, sometimes humor disarms or distracts a person from bullying.

**Save the evidence.** The only good news about bullying online or on phones is that it can usually be captured, saved, and shown to someone who can help. You can save that evidence in case things escalate.

**Tell the person to stop.** This is completely up to you – don't do it if you don't feel totally comfortable doing it, because you need to make your position completely clear that you will not stand for this treatment any more. You may need to practice beforehand with someone you trust, like a parent or good friend.

**Reach out for help** – especially if the behavior's really getting to you. You deserve backup. See if there's someone who can listen, help you process what's going on and work through it – a friend, relative or maybe an adult you trust.

**Use available tech tools.** Most social media apps and services allow you to block the person. Whether the harassment's in an app, texting, comments or tagged photos, do yourself a favor and block the person. You can also report the problem to the service. That probably won't end it, but you don't need the harassment in your face, and you'll be less tempted to respond. If you're getting threats of physical harm, you should call your local police (with a parent or guardian's help) and consider reporting it to school authorities.

**Protect your accounts.** Don't share your passwords with anyone – even your closest friends, who may not be close forever – and password-protect your phone so no one can use it to impersonate you. You'll find advice at [passwords.connectsafely.org](https://passwords.connectsafely.org).

**If someone you know is being bullied, take action.** Just standing by can empower an aggressor and does nothing to help. The best thing you can do is try to stop the bullying by taking a stand against it. If you can't stop it, support the person being bullied. If the person's a friend, you can listen and see how to help. Consider together whether you should report the bullying. If you're not already friends, even a kind word can help reduce the pain. At the very least, help by not passing along a mean message and not giving positive attention to the person doing the bullying.

### **Additional advice for parents**

**Know that you're lucky if your child asks for help.** Most young people don't tell their parents about bullying online or offline. So if your child's losing sleep or doesn't want to go to school or seems agitated when on his or her computer or phone, ask why as calmly and open-heartedly as possible. Feel free to ask if it has anything to do with mean behavior or social issues. But even if it does, don't assume it's bullying. You won't know until you get the full story, starting with your child's perspective.

**Work with your child.** There are two reasons why you'll want to keep your child involved. Bullying and cyberbullying usually involve a loss of dignity or control over a social situation, and involving your child in finding solutions helps him or her regain that. The second reason is about context. Because the bullying is almost always related to school life and our kids understand the situation and context better than parents ever can, their perspective is key to getting to the bottom of the situation and working out a solution. You may need to have private conversations with others, but let your child know if you do, and report back. This is about your child's life, so your child needs to be part of the solution.

**Respond thoughtfully, not fast.** What parents don't always know is that they can make things worse for their kids if they act rashly. A lot of cyberbullying involves somebody getting marginalized (put down and excluded), which the bully thinks increases his or her power or status. If you respond publicly or if your child's peers find out about even a discreet meeting with school authorities, the marginalization can get worse, which is why any response needs to be well thought out.

**More than one perspective needed.** Your child's account of what happened is likely completely sincere, but remember that one person's truth isn't necessarily everybody's. You'll need to get other perspectives and be open-minded about what they are. Sometimes kids let themselves get pulled into chain reactions, and often what we see online is only one side of or part of the story.

**What victims say helps most is to be heard** – really listened to – either by a friend or an adult who cares. That's why, if your kids come to you for help, it's so important to respond thoughtfully and involve them. Just by being heard respectfully, a child is often well on the way to healing.

**The ultimate goal is restored self-respect and greater resilience in your child.** This, not getting someone punished, is the best focus for resolving the problem and helping your child heal. What your child needs most is to regain a sense of dignity. Sometimes that means standing up to the bully, sometimes not. Together, you and your child can figure out how to get there.

**One positive outcome** we don't often think about (or hear in the news) is resilience. We know the human race will never completely eradicate meanness or cruelty, and we also know that bullying is not, as heard in past generations, "normal" or a rite of passage. We need to keep working to eradicate it. But when it does happen and we overcome it – our resilience grows. It's not something that can be "downloaded" or taught. We grow it through exposure to challenges and figuring out how to deal with them. So sometimes it's important to give them space to do that and let them know we have their back.

## Resources

<http://www.connectsafely.org/> - Here you'll find research-based safety tips, parents' guidebooks, advice, news and commentary on all aspects of tech use and policy.

<https://www.common sense media.org/> - Common Sense Media helps families make smart media choices. Common Sense Media publishes independent ratings and reviews for nearly everything kids want to watch, read, play, and learn.

<https://www.net smartz.org> – Created by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. This site offers online safety tools and tip sheets for parents and educators as well as age appropriate videos and games for kids.

<https://www.nsteens.org> – Created by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Through animated videos, short films, games and interactive comics, NSTeens teaches tweens and teens about making safer choices online.

<https://i keepsafe.org> - The iKeepSafe mission is to provide a safe digital landscape for children, schools, and families by supporting the protection of student privacy, while advancing learning in a digital culture.

[www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com) - The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® is a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation whose mission is to help find missing children, reduce child sexual exploitation, and prevent child victimization. Since 1984, NCMEC has served as the national clearinghouse and resource center for families, victims, private organizations, law enforcement and the public on issues relating to missing and sexually exploited children.

<http://inobtr.org> – INOBTR (I Know Better) is a local organization funded through private sector sponsorships and government grants. Since 20011, INOBTR has partnered with Missouri Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force by providing training to local law enforcement agencies as well as educating parents, schools and community groups.

### **CyberTipline - 1-800-THE-LOST or CyberTipline.org**

To report instances of child sexual exploitation on the internet, contact the CyberTipline by phone or the internet. A member of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children will assist you in filing this report and will provide it to the appropriate Law Enforcement Agency. Reports can be made 24-hours a day, 7 days a week.

[www.facebook.com/StCharlesCountyPD](http://www.facebook.com/StCharlesCountyPD)

[www.facebook.com/MOICAC](http://www.facebook.com/MOICAC)

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