



## About cyberbullying

Bullying is a serious, long-standing social problem that now occurs in digital as well as physical spaces. But contrary to what you might have heard or read, it isn't just a youth problem, it isn't getting worse, and it isn't more of a problem online than offline. Technology can help amplify it and create another "place" for it to happen, but – just like bullying – cyberbullying is rooted in relationships and how people interact.

Snapchat isn't the most likely "place" for cyberbullying to occur because a lot of what is shared in the app isn't public, doesn't stick around long, and is usually shared only among friends or – in the case of Stories – fans or people who care about what you're sharing. So public humiliation is less likely. But since bad behavior can happen in any social space and Snapchat users can take and share screenshots anywhere, be mindful and nice about your sharing to minimize the chance of negativity. Here is some more help for minimizing cyberbullying and its impact:

### For kids and teens

**Know that it's not your fault** if you're being harassed. What people call "bullying" and "cyberbullying" is sometimes an argument between two people or momentary anger acted out. But if someone is repeatedly cruel to you, that's bullying and you must not 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. But 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.

You deserve backup. Reach out for help – *especially* if the behavior is really getting to you. 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. Under some circumstances it may be necessary to report bullying to school authorities or even law enforcement.

**Save the evidence.** The only good news about bullying in digital media is that it can usually be captured, saved, and shown to someone who can help. Save 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.

**Block and report abuse.** Snapchat allows you to delete or block a harasser and to share only with friends. So if someone's getting really annoying, do yourself a favor and delete or block the person. That won't change the behavior, but you don't need the harassment in your face, and you'll be less tempted to respond. You can also report the problem via Snapchat's Abuse and Safety center. 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.

**Keep an eye on your phone or tablet.** It's a very personal device, so keep in mind that others can

impersonate you and mess with your reputation if you don't password-protect it. Don't share your passwords with anyone – even your closest friends, who may not be close forever. There's more advice at [passwords.connectsafely.org](https://passwords.connectsafely.org).

**If someone you know is being bullied, help out.** Whether in physical or digital spaces, just standing by can empower an aggressor and make things worse for the target. Take a stand against meanness. 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.

### **Additional advice for parents**

**Know that you're lucky if your child asks for help.** Many young people don't tell their parents about bullying online or offline, sometimes because they are afraid the parent will overreact and make the situation worse. 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 because 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 is 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 or piece of the story.

**What targets of bullying 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 some have suggested, "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.