

CYBER - BULLYING: TOOLKIT FOR PARENTS TO IDENTIFY, MANAGE, AND PREVENT IT

INTRODUCTION

Cyber-bullying can significantly impact children's mental health. The constant exposure to hurtful messages and negative comments can lead to feelings of anxiety and depression. Children may also experience a decline in self-esteem and confidence, affecting their overall well-being. Parents must address cyberbullying promptly to protect children's mental health.

Parents and educators play a vital role in creating a safe and inclusive environment for children to discuss their experiences with cyberbullying. By fostering open communication and providing resources for both victims and perpetrators, adults can help mitigate the negative effects of cyberbullying on children's mental health.

This toolkit enables parents to identify bullying behaviours in children and take steps toward dealing with them.

DEFINITION

It is critical to understand the meaning of the phenomenon, to better handle it.

What is Cyber-bullying?

Cyber-bullying is when someone uses the internet, social media, or other digital platforms to harass, threaten, or embarrass someone else. It can happen on social media, in text messages, or even in online games.

IS MY CHILD A CYBER-BULLY?

Every parent wants their child to grow into a compassionate and respectful individual. It becomes difficult to even consider that your child may ever dream of hurting someone. If, however, you have heard of unpleasant behaviour from a teacher or parent and want to identify whether your child is a cyber-bully, here are some signs for which you can watch out:

- **They frequently blame others:** Often, bullies blame others instead of themselves. They try to rationalize their behaviour by blaming it on something that happened to them or something the victim said or did that 'wronged' them.
- **They are not empathetic:** Children who show bullying behaviour do not have any regard for another person, which is what enables them to dominate over someone else effectively.
- **They like control:** Children who try to force others to do as they wish or control others, whether verbally or physically demonstrate a need for control. At times, this may also arise out of a need to enhance their social status.
- **They have past experiences of being bullied:** Children who have previously been bullied may sometimes resort to bullying others themselves to boost their confidence.
- **They have high self-esteem:** Some studies have found that bullies often have high self-esteem, and a complete disregard or feelings of superiority over others that may make them behave a certain way.

While this list is not conclusive and not a guaranteed way of identifying a bully, it is always a good idea to discuss with your children why bullying is bad behaviour and how they should consider others' feelings and be helpful toward them.

HOW DO I STOP CYBER-BULLYING BEHAVIOUR?

Here are a few ways in which you can prevent cyber-bullying:

- **Discuss it Openly:** Have open conversations with kids about what cyber-bullying is and why it's wrong. Make sure they know they can talk to you if they ever experience it.
- **Lay down Rules:** Establish clear rules about internet use. Set limits for screen time and make sure children know what sites and apps are safe to use.
- **Observe Online Activity:** Supervise your children's activities online. Use parental controls and check their browser history to see who they're talking to and what they're posting.
- **Teach Respect and Kindness:** Encourage your children to be kind and respectful online. Remind them that there are real people behind the screens and that their words can hurt.
- **Lead by Example:** Show kids how to behave online by being a good role model. Treat others with respect and kindness in your own online and offline interactions, as children learn by observing the people around them.
- **Seek Professional Help:** If you feel that your child is engaging in cyber-bullying without an evident cause, you can approach a child psychiatrist or child psychologist for help. There is no harm in getting professional help. It is better to take action sooner rather than later.

IS MY CHILD BEING CYBER-BULLIED?

Your child may exhibit these signs if they are being bullied:

- **Showing Emotional/Behavioural Changes:** If they feel very upset, anxious, or angry after using their phone or computer, they might be experiencing cyber-bullying. Even feelings of persistent sadness, frequent tearfulness, distress, crying a lot, particularly in younger children or poor physical health and low energy, suicidal thoughts or self-harm may indicate that the child is being bullied.
- **Avoiding School or Social Situations:** If your child suddenly doesn't want to go to school, or comes back home early frequently or shies away from meeting friends, it might be because they're being bullied online.
- **Displaying Changes in Sleeping or Eating Patterns:** Cyber-bullying can cause stress, which can lead to changes in sleep and eating habits.
- **Losing Interest in Favourite Activities:** If someone stops doing things they used to enjoy, it could be a sign they're dealing with cyber-bullying.
- **Maintaining Secrecy About Online Activity:** If a child is hiding their screen or being secretive about what they're doing online, they might be trying to hide bullying/threatening messages.

MY CHILD IS BEING CYBER-BULLIED: HOW CAN I PROTECT HIM/HER?

Here's what you can do if you have discovered that your child is being cyberbullied.

- **Offer Reassurance:** It is best to take a positive and calm approach when talking to your child and discussing the issue. Try to refrain from blaming or scolding the child, as it will only hurt them further. It is essential to reassure your child that you are by their side and will resolve the issue together.
- **Discuss without judgment:** If your child is willing to talk to you about what happened, let them talk without interruption or judgment. Listen to them with an open mind and encourage them to vent out their feelings.
- **Collect Evidence:** Ask your child to take screenshots and save any messages, posts, or that show the bullying. These may be helpful at the time of reporting incidents.
- **Inform Relevant Authorities:** If you or your child suspect a school mate to be responsible for the offense, it is best to inform the school authorities or the child's supervisor.
- **File a Cybercrime report:** Report the bullying to the social media platform, website, or app where it took place. Most platforms have policies against bullying and will take action. You can also file a complaint with the [Cybercrime portal in India](#).
- **Get Support:** Reach out to teachers, school counselors, or other parents for support. Sometimes it helps to have a team of people working together to solve the problem.
- **Consult a Psychologist:** Observe your child for a few days to see how they are coping. If you feel they need professional help, don't hesitate to reach out to a counseling psychologist. You could also ask the child's school to refer someone.
- **Find means of distraction:** Engage your child in therapeutic activities such as painting, dancing or singing or any other activity that you think is best-suited to them. This will shift their focus and keep them.

RESOURCES

You can use these resources to learn more about cyber-bullying and how to prevent it:

- [StopBullying.gov](https://www.stopbullying.gov)
- [Cyberbullying Research Center](https://www.cyberbullyingresearchcenter.org)
- [Common Sense Media](https://www.commonsensemedia.org)
- [Department for Education - South Australia](https://www.education.sa.gov.au)