9 Ways to Respond to Cyberbullying

Ideas for parents on how to deal with cyberbullying

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As social media becomes the preferred method of communication for teens, there also is a noticeable increase in the number of cyberbullying cases reported. And there are probably even more that go unreported. Consequently, it is vital that parents know how to respond to cyberbullying incidents. While every situation is slightly different, it helps to have some general guidelines on how to handle cyberbullying, and more importantly get your child on a path to overcoming the bullying.

Here are the top things you and your child should do when your teen is confronted with cyberbullying.

Don't respond. Instruct your child that the best way to deal with cyberbullying is to ignore the posts, comments, texts and calls. Although it is hard to refrain from responding to something untrue, it is better to stop and report the incident to a parent or trusted adult instead. Stress to your children that no matter how much the words hurt them, they should not post a response. Cyberbullies are looking for a reaction. Be sure your kids know not to give them one. The issue is more likely to fade away if there is no response from the target. Remember, responding only allows situation to escalate.

Print and keep copies of all the cyberbullying. Save all messages, comments and posts as evidence. This includes emails, blog posts, social media posts, tweets, text messages and so on. Although your child's first reaction may be to delete everything, remind him that without evidence you have no proof of the cyberbullying.

After the evidence is gathered and you have talked to the school and the police, you should be able to delete comments. It is important to note that if the posts involve sexual bullying that contain nudity, these should be deleted. Keeping or printing pictures of an underage child constitutes possession of child pornography and could result in legal action against you and your child.

Report the incident immediately and allow the police to keep the proof. Do not maintain copies of any sexual posts.

Report the cyberbullying to your school's counselor or principal. Reporting these incidents is especially important if the cyberbullying occurred on school grounds. But even if it happened off school grounds, some states allow schools the authority to intervene, especially since the cyberbullying and other types of bullying will infiltrate the school building at some point. What's more, even if the cyberbullying occurred off campus, the students will likely still discuss it at school.

For instance, many times kids will read the posts on Facebook or Instagram. They then use this information as ammunition to engage in additional bullying at school including name-calling, relational aggression and ostracizing. When reporting cyberbullying to the school, include a copy of the tweets, text messages, posts or other correspondence for their files. Be sure to keep a copy for yourself as well.

If your school district is unable or unwilling to respond to the cyberbullying, consider contacting the police to file a report.

Report cyberbullying to the social media sites and your Internet Service Provider (ISP). When cyberbullying occurs on your child's personal accounts or happens at home, it's important that you forward copies of the cyberbullying to your ISP. And if the cyberbullying occurred on a social media site, be sure to report it to them as well. Sites like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter will investigate cyberbullying claims, especially when it involves a minor. Even if the cyberbullying is anonymous or occurs under a fake account, you should report it. Many times, the ISP, along with the police, can track down who is posting or sending the messages. Remember, your child does not have not have to put up with cyberbullying. Many times, the cyberbully will leave a clear trail of evidence that if reported to the appropriate authorities can go a long way in putting an end to it.

Contact the police immediately regarding any threats. Threats of death, threats of physical violence, indications of stalking and even suggestions to commit suicide should be reported immediately. You should also report any harassment that continues over an extended period of time as well as any correspondence that includes harassment based on race, religion or disability. The police will address these incidents.

Cut off communication. Cancel current social networking accounts including Twitter, Instagram and Facebook and open new accounts. If the cyberbullying is happening via cell phone, change your child's cell number and get an unlisted number. Then, block the cyberbully from your child's new social networking sites, email accounts, instant messaging and cell phones. The key is to make it very difficult for the cyberbully to contact your child.

Be aware of the effects of cyberbullying. Kids who are cyberbullied experience a wide variety of effects including everything from feeling overwhelmed and vulnerable to feeling depressed and even suicidal. Be very aware of the consequences of cyberbullying and do not be afraid to get them the help they need in order to heal. Watch for changes in behavior and communicate on a daily basis with your child. It also is important to distract your child from social media. Do something fun together or encourage your child to take up a new hobby. The key is to redirect her attention away from what others are saying and doing.

Seek counseling and support. Cyberbullying is a big issue that shouldn't be handled alone. Be sure to surround your child with supportive friends and family. Remember, it helps to talk to someone about what is happening. Consider finding a professional counselor to help your child heal. You also should have your child evaluated by a healthcare professional, especially if you notice changes in mood, sleeping habits or eating habits. Even college students who are being cyberbullied should get outside help.

Refrain from taking away technology. It is normal for parents to want to eliminate what is hurting their child. And for most parents, the logical answer seems to be to take away the cell phone and the computer. But, for teens, this often means cutting off communication with their entire world. Their phones and their computers are one of the most important ways they communicate with others. If that option for communication is removed, they can feel secluded and cut off from their world. This can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and isolation. Instead, help your child navigate the situation by changing online behaviors, setting up boundaries and limiting time online.

Remember, research has shown that most kids don't report bullying because they are afraid of losing their phone or computer. Instead, remember that it is not the technology that is hurting your child, but the person on the other end of the technology. Assure your children that they will not lose their phone if they report cyberbullying. Then, keep your promises.