

# Cyberbullying: Parent and teen responses

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*Being cyberbullied is associated with depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. As many as 16% of U. S. high school students report having been bullied through email, chat rooms, instant messaging, websites, or texting in the past year. Parents are central to addressing and preventing cyberbullying.*

*The UI Injury Prevention Research Center (UI IPRC) studied how parents' responses around teen cyberbullying compared to that of teens and to cyberbullying advice from researchers and advocacy organizations—such as monitoring or restricting teens' use of digital technology.*

## KEY FINDINGS

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- **Parents** considered cyberbullying to be a serious issue, but they weren't always sure when it was their place to get involved.
- **Parents** felt schools, children, and other parents all had responsibility for cyberbullying. However, they were unsure when to report cyberbullying, and whether it should be reported to other parents, schools, law enforcement, or the websites where cyberbullying occurred. Some said whether to report depended on the severity of the situation, but assessing severity was difficult without inside knowledge of social situations.
- Some **parents** reported that contacting other parents or schools about cyberbullying hadn't been effective in past situations.
- **Parents'** actions varied based on their child's role in the bullying. While parents understood why it might be helpful for bystanders to intervene in cyberbullying, they were hesitant to tell their own kids to get involved. They wanted to protect their kids by telling them to stay out of it.
- **Teens** saw cyberbullying as a common and even normal part of growing up. They thought most incidents resolved on their own and didn't require adult intervention.
- As bystanders, **teens** might not intervene because they worry about damaging their relationships with people involved. They were wary of telling their parents about cyberbullying because they thought parents would overact and they feared losing access to technology.
- **Teens** said they would only tell parents or other adults about cyberbullying in very serious situations, such as if they feared for someone's safety.



## What can be done to prevent cyberbullying?

*Parents are a crucial component of cyberbullying prevention. However, while parents are aware of cyberbullying as a serious issue, they aren't sure what their role is in addressing it. Expectations of children, schools, and other parents may be in conflict.*

### Parents need:

- More education about when to intervene in cyberbullying and how to intervene effectively.
- Guidance in how to talk openly about cyberbullying with their children, to help prevent incidents before they occur or to encourage children to intervene productively if they witness cyberbullying.
- More generally, help with how to manage children's screen time and access to devices, and how to monitor media use while still maintaining trust. More screen use is a predictor of involvement in cyberbullying.

⇒ Parents should know that maintaining open communication with children and fostering an atmosphere of mutual trust is important in encouraging kids to share about their experiences online.

### Opportunities for home-school partnerships should include:

- Instruction on how school districts define cyberbullying, what schools expect of parents, and what procedures parents should follow.
- Recommendations based on the different roles children can have in cyberbullying -- victim, aggressor, and bystander -- since all three roles require different types of action or support from parents.

These organizations have fact sheets, conversation guides, and additional resources to help parents talk about cyberbullying and other online risks with their children.

Common Sense Media <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>

Cyberbullying Research Center <https://cyberbullying.org/>

Connect Safely [www.connectsafely.org/](http://www.connectsafely.org/)

## What did we ask parents & teens about cyberbullying?

- We conducted **eight focus groups** with 48 parents of middle- and high-school-aged children in MN, IL and IA.
- Participants were recruited through schools in five rural, urban, and suburban communities. 36 participants were female, 43 were white.
- Parents were presented with three hypothetical scenarios. In each, their child was involved in cyberbullying **as a victim, a bystander, or an aggressor**. Parents were asked to discuss what they would do in each situation.
- We **interviewed 17 children** (11 girls and 6 boys). The average child age was 13 years. We asked when they had been involved in cyberbullying and what they might do if they were a victim, bystander, or aggressor.

