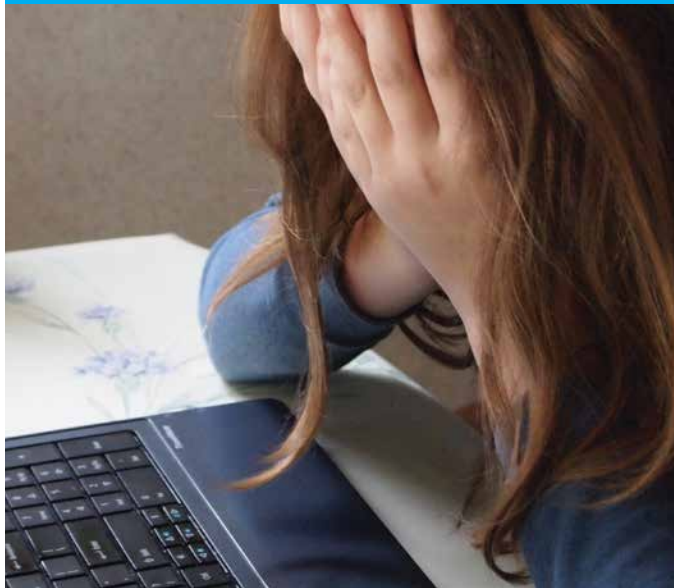# Kid T.I.P.S.

Tough Issues, Proven Solutions

Help to Delete Cyberbullying From Your Child's Life

Keeping up with technology can seem like a never-ending task for parents. Just when you feel like you have a grip on knowing about the latest popular websites and apps, a new one (or twelve) pops up for download.

But as difficult as staying on top of technology and social media can be, it can be even harder to know when your child is the victim of cyberbullying. Few children tell their parents or other adults when they are being bullied online, and they often suffer the negative effects in silence.

Research on cyberbullying, while still emerging, indicates that those effects are similar to those experienced by children who are victims of in-person, or traditional, bullying. They include an increased risk for depressive and anxious symptoms, low self-esteem, substance use, poor peer relations, academic difficulties, and other psychological or social concerns. That's why it's imperative that parents (and educators) keep an eye out for changes in a child's behavior and mood at home, in school, with peers and online, that may signal that bullying is happening.

Warning signs include:

- Withdrawing from others
- Decreased interest in preferred activities
- Depressed or anxious mood
- Increased irritability or arguing
- Lower grades or homework not being completed
- School avoidance
- Not talking about peers or school
- Not associating with friends or certain peers
- Changes in mood or behavior after spending time on phone/video game/computer

Equally important in a bullying situation is the ability of parents and other adults to effectively respond when a child shares his or her problems.

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Here are several tips and resources for helping your children when he or she is being bullied online:

1. **Increase your awareness about technology so you are better prepared to have discussions with your child.** You should not only be aware of the websites and apps that are out there, but also should know which ones your child is visiting or using. Establishing a consistent and open dialogue where you can express your expectations for your child's technology use, as well your genuine interest in his or her online experiences, can make your child feel more comfortable about sharing what he or she is doing or encountering online. Children (especially teens) aren't very likely to share this information with their parents or others if they feel they will be judged or misunderstood. So doing your homework about websites and apps before talking to your child can make you a more credible resource and open up the lines of communication.

2. **Encourage your child to share difficult experiences with you.** Children are more likely to open up to parents who are able to listen to and validate their children's experiences as victims of bullying, and then help them find solutions to the problem. Parents sometimes want to connect with their child or help ease their pain so badly that they often end up simply giving the child a list of things to do. This can leave children frustrated and feeling like their parents really aren't listening to their concerns. Often, the best approach for parents is to be present for their child and listen to what they have to say without immediately offering solutions. Then parents can ask the child how he or she has tried to solve the problem and offer to help. Sometimes, kids just want ideas or want their parents to advocate for them. Above all, parents should show emotional support for their children while exploring possible ways to stop the bullying.

3. **Collect evidence and advocate.** Encourage your child to keep screenshots, text messages and posts as evidence that he or she is being bullied. Then when you advocate for your child at his or her school (or with other authorities), you will have proof that the bullying is occurring.

4. **Consider therapeutic support.** When children are victimized by in-person or cyberbullying, it can lead to substance use and mental health concerns like depression and anxiety. Obtaining therapeutic support from school-based or outpatient providers for your child can help reduce the impact of these problems on his or her cognitive, emotional and behavioral well-being.

Additional Resources:

- **Cyberbullying.org** (link: https://cyberbullying.org/most-popular-social-media-apps).

- **Nebraska Bullying Prevention and Intervention Initiative** (link: https://cehs.unl.edu/empowerment/resources/)

- **Stopbullying.gov** (link: https://www.stopbullying.gov/)

For more information
or to make an appointment at the Boys Town Center for Behavioral Health, call **531-355-3358**.

Visit **BoysTown.org/Parenting** for more information from the parenting experts at Boys Town.

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