

# Need to Know Series: Cyberbullying



## Youth In Progress

New York State Foster Care  
Youth Leadership Advisory Team

*“The mission of Youth In Progress is to enhance and advance the lives of today’s and tomorrow’s youth by supporting their sense of self and responsibility. To do this, we pledge to educate everyone involved in the various systems Youth In Progress members represent to the realities of this experience.”*

Sometimes people can be just plain mean to each other. Adults, children, and youth can be targets of these people, known to most of us as bullies. When bullies use information technology (e-mail, instant messaging, blogs, chat rooms, pagers, cell phones, gaming systems, social media websites, etc.) to be mean and hurtful, it's called **cyberbullying**. It can be especially hurtful when everyone can see it, hear about it, and even join in. This pamphlet has been designed to help you better understand cyberbullying and to protect yourself or your friends.



## What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is the creation of a hostile environment by verbal or non-verbal conduct, threats, intimidation, or abuse of a person, through any form of electronic communication, which:

- ☄ Interferes with the person's education, opportunities or benefits, or mental, emotional or physical well-being;
- ☄ Causes a person to fear for his or her physical safety;
- ☄ Causes or would be expected to cause physical injury or emotional harm; or
- ☄ Creates a substantial disruption within a school environment.

## Why is cyberbullying so hurtful?

Cyberbullying can be even more hurtful than face-to-face bullying. A person may publicly post hurtful or damaging things and other people may jump in adding more hurtful comments or indicate they agree with this person. This hurtful material can be spread so that even people in other schools or the community might see it. It can be very difficult to get away from cyberbullying because it can escalate and intensify over time.



## What if you don't know who is hurting you?

Sometimes, the person being hurtful will hide his or her identity. When this happens, it is difficult to know whom you can trust. As strange as it sounds, there are some advantages when someone uses information technology to bully another person. Everything that someone sends or posts to the Internet is permanently saved. It is possible to trace people who use things like computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices, so no one is really ever totally anonymous. Because of this, it may be easier to hold people responsible for their hurtful behavior. This is why it is very important to save anything hurtful that you receive so you can show them to someone (your caseworker, foster parent, or counselor) who can help you.

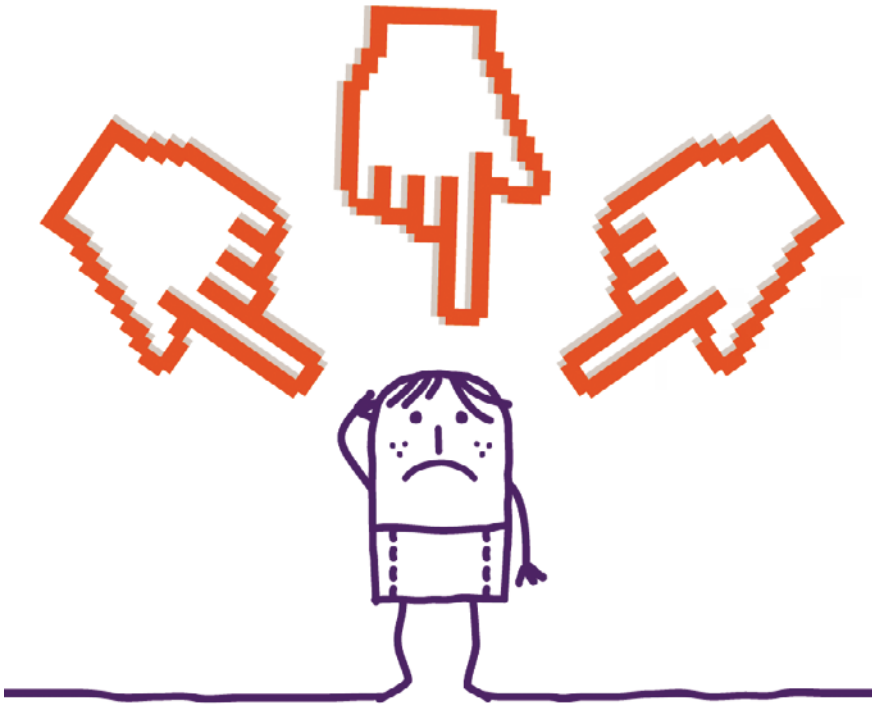
## No one likes a bully.

While it might seem like lots of people think cyberbullying is funny and may join in, when surveyed, most kids and teens do not like to see someone being bullied. It may feel like everyone supports the person being hurtful, but this is not the case. People may join in because they look up to the bully and want to impress him or her or because they are afraid themselves. People who feel vulnerable might go along with the bully as a way to protect themselves.










## Don't feed into it.

Sometimes kids or teens think it is cool to be cruel. They think showing they have “power” over someone else proves they are better, but no one deserves to be treated badly. It is important to treat others the way you would like to be treated. You should not accept cyberbullying or think that you have to endure it. It is also important not to retaliate if someone has been hurtful to you. If you see something, say something. If it happens to you, speak up and speak out. Refuse to be a victim and seek help to make it stop.



## What are the different types of cyberbullying to look for?

Cyberbullying can take many forms, but what it boils down to is someone who intends to harass, annoy, threaten, or alarm another person by using information technology. These are just some of the things to look for, avoid, and tell someone, if it is happening. If someone:

-  Sends or posts electronic messages that are deliberately hostile, insulting, mean, angry, or vulgar
-  Spreads rumors, gossip, or untrue statements to intentionally damage your reputation or friendships using a computer, cell phone, etc.
-  Publishes confidential, private, or embarrassing information and/or photos of you
-  Posts or shares videos or images of you being physically attacked or victimized
-  Sends viruses, spyware, and/or hacking programs intentionally to harm your system or spy on you
-  Sabotages your online gaming experience by putting up obstacles, hiding useful objects, and targeting you to lose a game
-  Creates online polls or public boards to make fun of or humiliate you



Those who engage in these types of behaviors could face legal consequences under New York State law, federal law, and/or under the Family Court Act.



Visit the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services at [http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/missing/i\\_safety/cyberbullying.htm](http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/missing/i_safety/cyberbullying.htm) for more information, tips, videos, and resources about cyberbullying.



## When should I get help from an adult?

You should get help from your caseworker, foster parents, principal, counselor at school, or other supportive adult when you are upset or negatively affected by any type of hurtful behavior. Do not allow anyone to bully you. If anyone is threatening you with physical harm, you should get help immediately. Your caseworker or foster parent can work with your school to help effectively resolve the situation and also determine whether it is appropriate to bring in the police.





## Tips to avoid becoming a target of cyberbullying:

-  Be careful what you post online or share through texting, especially photos and details about your personal life. You might want to save where you are, what you may be doing, whom you are with, or what problems or issues you may be dealing with for private conversations. Do not post or share anything that could ever be used to hurt or embarrass you. Anything you post or send could potentially be shared with others or made public.
-  Set your social networking profile so that access to your personal information and images is limited only to your personal





circle of friends. But always remember that your profile is not really private, because anyone you “friend” can share with others.

-  Be selective about whom you “friend” or with whom you start online conversations. If you “friend” someone you do not know very well, be sure to check out his or her profile. Look at how they interact with others to help you decide if you want to allow them access to your information.
-  “De-friend” or block unwanted individuals or messages.
-  Be careful how you communicate online or by text so that you do not accidentally offend or hurt someone else. If you have offended or hurt someone, apologize as soon as you realize this.
-  Don’t respond to “trolls.” Sometimes people post insulting or offensive comments about people or a certain group of people that are meant to antagonize others into online fights just to get attention.



## What are social media sites doing to help?



**Facebook** has a way to report abusive messages or activity that may happen to you, whether you have an account or not ([www.facebook.com/help](http://www.facebook.com/help)). If you have an account, you can anonymously report any post by clicking on the arrow at the top right corner of the post. Choose Report Story or Spam from the drop down menu to make a report about the specific abusive activity. Individual photos can also be reported by clicking on "Report This Photo" in the "Options" menu at the bottom of the photo.






Facebook has also responded to users who have indicated in their status or created messages that they may be considering suicide or planning to attempt suicide. Users can help someone who may be posting this type of information by entering the word "suicide" into the search box on the help page. By selecting "How Do I help someone who has posted suicidal content on this site?" instructions will appear to anonymously have Facebook send that member an e-mail encouraging them to contact the National Suicide Prevention Hotline.

In an effort to combat hurtful posts and activity, Twitter customer support (<http://support.twitter.com>) accepts reports of abuse. Users can also use the "contact us" link from the page where the tweets are located to report a violation.



## What if I become a victim of a cyberbully?

There are some important things to do if you are targeted by someone:

-  **Stop yourself.** You may want to respond immediately. If you do, you are likely to make things worse. Wait until you have had a chance to calm down and plan how to respond.
-  **Calmly and strongly tell the person to stop.** Say “stop” once, and do not get into an argument or exchange of words. Apologize if you have also done something hurtful.
-  **Ignore or block** the communications from the bully.
-  **Save the evidence.** Don’t keep looking at it, but make sure you can show it to someone else.
-  **Talk to someone.** Talk to a friend. Talk to an adult you trust. Share the hurtful materials and discuss the best way to respond. Remember that you are not alone.



## Where can my caseworker, staff, or foster parent get help?

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services and the Adolescent Services Resource Network offer training and resources to your caseworker, foster parents, and direct care staff to help them recognize, prevent, and address issues of bullying. If you are being cyberbullied, tell your caseworker, foster parents, and direct care staff so they can help you talk to your school, police, or others to stop the behavior by which you have been hurt.

## What if cyberbullying happens at school?

Schools need to create and maintain a positive learning environment, as well as develop measured, balanced, and age-appropriate responses to discrimination and harassment of students. The Dignity for All Students Act is a law that is meant to prevent you (the student) from being discriminated against, harassed, bullied, or cyberbullied by another student and/or by an employee. If any of these things happen to you on school property at a school function, or you are being cyberbullied at any time, tell your principal, teacher, and/or other school official. Be sure to save any digital material, texts, messages, or posts used to hurt you. This law is intended to keep students safe and allow you to focus on your education.



## How can I help my friends?

Now that you have a better understanding of how to effectively prevent and respond to cyberbullying, you may be able to help your friends. Help a friend if you think they might be involved in any of the things listed that could make them a target. If you know a friend is being hurt, offer support and let them know where to find help. Sometimes, it might be safe and effective for you to tell the person who is being a bully to stop hurting your friend. You can also help your friend tell an adult (parent, teacher, foster parent, caseworker, direct care staff, or other trusted adult) about the abuse, or reach out for help on your friend's behalf. Remember, it is important to tell an adult when you or someone you know is being hurt.



## Helpful sites:

[stopcyberbullying.org](http://stopcyberbullying.org)

[ncpc.org/cyberbullying](http://ncpc.org/cyberbullying)

[kidshealth.org/parent/positive/  
talk/cyberbullying.html](http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/talk/cyberbullying.html)

[stopbullying.gov](http://stopbullying.gov)

**For Adolescent Services Resource Network  
information, visit:**

[ocfs.ny.gov/main/ddps/adolescent/training.asp](http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/ddps/adolescent/training.asp)

**For OCFS Regional Office information, visit:**

[ocfs.ny.gov/main/regionaloffices\\_main.asp](http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/regionaloffices_main.asp)

**For NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services  
information, visit:**

[criminaljustice.ny.gov/missing/  
i\\_safety/cyberbullying.htm](http://criminaljustice.ny.gov/missing/i_safety/cyberbullying.htm)





# What's **YOUR** region?



find contact information on  
**YouthInProgress.org**

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