

## Helping Kids to Help Kids Understand and Prevent Cyberbullying

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Cyberbullying—which we define as “*willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices*” —remains a priority issue in the minds of school administrators and educators. Many are doing a great deal: revising formal policy, implementing curriculum enhancements, holding assemblies, managing staff development trainings in this area, developing investigative protocols, and improving the school climate to reduce peer conflict—offline and online (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). Here are some more ideas to promote awareness by enlisting the help of your students to “get on board” and do their part.

- Ask them to develop questions to pose to cyberbullying experts. They can find them online, and then drop them an email or give them a call to learn more about this problem.
- Ask them to write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper, where they express their concerns about the problem, share how it is affecting the kids they know, and encourage adults to take it seriously.
- Motivate them to create a public service announcement. All they need is a creative mind and their cell phone, digital camera, or digital camcorder, and some editing software. They can then recruit some friends and make a short video to educate others by posting it on YouTube and Facebook!
- Bring them to the table to review your school policy on bullying and cyberbullying. Kids can tell you if it is adequate or deficient. They can clarify if it covers the types of (mis)behaviors they witness and experience at your school (or other schools). They can offer advice to improve it, and think of things you’ve never considered.
- Encourage them to teach their younger friends and relatives how to be safe online. They should, for example, take a look at their younger cousin’s social networking activity and see if he or she has any information posted that could be used to cyberbully. They could also show their younger brother what to do if he is cyberbullied (for example, keep the evidence, block the user from messaging them, report cruel or embarrassing content, etc.).
- Inspire them to mentor younger students, and thereby appreciate the responsibility and risks associated with the use of computers, cell phones, and the Internet.
- Overall, the goal is to encourage youth to take responsibility for the problem and to work together in developing a solution. It also seeks to foster respect and acceptance of others—no matter what—and to get kids to see how their actions affect others and how they can purposefully choose behaviors that promote positive peer relations. Ask their former teachers and principals from elementary school if these older students can talk to the young students about cyberbullying. Your older students can then share their experiences and ideas on how to keep safe online, and tell them what to do if they run into trouble.

- Work with them on *social norming* campaigns. Social norming has to do with modifying the environment or culture within a school so that appropriate behaviors are not only encouraged, but also perceived widely to be the norm. That is, schools must work to create a climate in which responsible use of social networking, is “what we do around here” and “just how it is at our school and among our students.” This requires that they understand that the *majority* of their peers *do* use their electronic devices in positive ways, and only a small minority don’t.

We hope these suggestions are received enthusiastically by the kids you serve and care for, and dovetail well with your own efforts in fostering and maintaining a “Bully Free Zone” across your school campus. Contact [www.cyberbullying.us](http://www.cyberbullying.us) if you need any follow-up or assistance, and check out the numerous resources that are available to help you.

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