Parents: 7 tips and resources to help children who are bullied

By Zach Myers / Boys Town
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Keeping up with technology can seem like a never-ending task. Just as parents feel they have a grip on what site or app is popular, a new one — or 12 — is available for download. However, recognizing when your child may be the victim of bullying online or in person is even more difficult.

Few kids tell their parents or other adults when they are bullied. Still, adults should be on the lookout for potential warning signs of victimization. Decades of research on traditional (in-person) bullying has highlighted the potential impact of being a victim, including increased risk for depressive and anxious symptoms, low self-esteem, substance use, poor peer relations, academic difficulties and other psychological or social concerns.
Research on cyber-bullying, while still emerging, suggests similar risks for cyber-victims. Therefore, parents and educators should keep an eye out for changes in many areas, including the child’s behavior and mood at home, school, with peers and online. See some of the warning signs below.

• Withdrawing from others
• Decreased interest in preferred activities
• Depressed or anxious mood
• Increased irritability or arguing
• Lower grades or homework completion
• School avoidance
• Avoids talking about peers or school
• Avoids friends or certain peers
• Changes in mood or behavior after spending time on phone, video game or computer.

While these changes may not be the result of bullying, significant changes in your child’s mood or behavior may indicate a need for support or further discussion.
However, just as it is important to identify when your child is facing significant stress, such as victimization, it is also important that parents and educators respond effectively when their child shares their problems. Below are several tips and resources to help adults better help their children when they are bullied:

1. **Increase awareness and discussions on technology.** It's important that adults are not only aware of what sites and apps are out there, but also what their children use. Establishing a consistent and open dialogue that includes both your expectations for technology use, as well as a genuine interest in your child’s online experiences, allows kids to feel more comfortable sharing what they encounter online. However, teens will likely not share this information with their parents or others if they feel they will be judged or misunderstood. Therefore, seek out information to better learn what sites and apps are used for. Doing so will likely result in you appearing as a credible resource to your child.

2. **Encourage your child to share difficult experiences with you.** Parents want so badly to connect with their child or help with their pain that they often do the opposite. Victimized youth typically report frustration after seeking help from adults due to hearing strategies they have already tried or feeling invalidated when adults compare their own bullying experiences to those of their children. When in doubt, be present with your child. Listen to their experiences without immediately offering solutions. Ask them about what they have tried and how you can help. Some may want ideas or even for their parents to help advocate with school officials. Parents who are able to listen, validate and help their children problem-solve will likely have much more success than simply telling them what to do.

3. **Advocate when appropriate and keep the evidence.** When your child does think that advocating to school officials is necessary, do so. One unique aspect of cyber-bullying is that all electronic interactions can be saved. Encourage your child to keep screenshots, text messages and posts as evidence to be shared with school staff or the authorities when necessary.

4. **Consider therapeutic support.** As mentioned above, victimization from both traditional and cyber-bullying has been linked to many mental health concerns, including depression, anxiety and substance. Therapeutic support from school-based or outpatient providers can help reduce the impact on your child’s cognitive, emotional and behavioral well-being.

Below are additional resources for further information:

- [Cyberbullying.org](http://Cyberbullying.org)
- [Nebraska Bullying Prevention and Intervention Initiative](http://Nebraska Bullying Prevention and Intervention Initiative)
- [Stopbullying.gov](http://Stopbullying.gov)

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