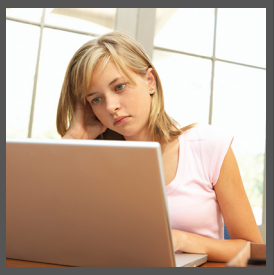
CovenantEyes®
Internet Accountability and Filtering

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO CYBERBULLYING



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Internet Accountability and Filtering

www.covenanteyes.com

1.877.479.1119

1525 W. King St., PO Box 637
Owosso, MI 48867

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever seen your son visibly upset after checking Facebook? Or maybe your daughter has become sullen and withdrawn and has been avoiding the computer, explaining only that "people are mean on there."

These are just two of the behaviors you may notice if your child is a victim of **cyberbullying**—described as the use of online tools to post mean-spirited online messages about another person, usually anonymously. If your child is being cyberbullied, the repercussions may be serious. Some victims have retaliated in kind, becoming bullies themselves. Others develop depression, resulting in a drop in grades or self-harming behaviors. In extreme situations, some victims have even committed suicide, as in these well-publicized cases:

- In 2003, 13-year-old Ryan Halligan committed suicide after a bully spread rumors that he was gay and the girl he liked used online chatting to get and spread embarrassing information about him.[1]
- In 2006, 13-year-old Megan Meier hanged herself after being tormented by a 16-year-old named Josh whom she had met on a social network. "Josh" later turned out to be a fictitious guy invented by one of Megan's former friends and her mother.[2]
- At age 14, Jamey Rodemeyer committed suicide due to constant online and offline bullying. Previously, he had been active online in helping others in similar situations, even creating a video for the "It Gets Better" project, an anti-teen-suicide site.[3]On October 10, 2012, 15-year-old Amanda Todd killed herself. Ever since she flashed a stranger in an online chatroom at age 12, she had been the victim of cyberstalking, online harassment by classmates, and a few instances of physical bullying.[4]

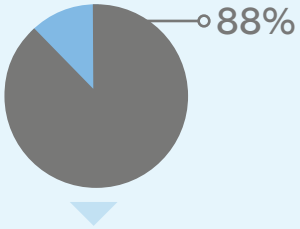
So what exactly is cyberbullying, and what can you as a parent do about it?

UNDERSTANDING CYBERBULLYING

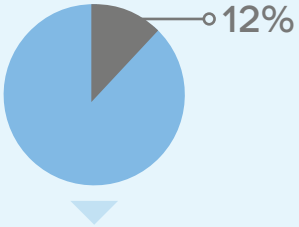
WHAT DOES CYBERBULLYING LOOK LIKE?

Cyberbullying is defined as "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices."[5] Online harassment can take many forms, and occur to many different degrees. In fact, it may sometimes be difficult to tell the difference between a good-natured (if sharp) joke, an isolated but intentionally hurtful incident, and perpetuated cyberbullying.

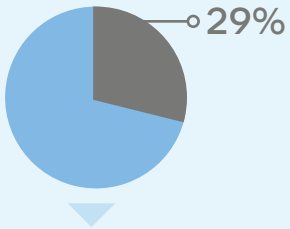
TEENS, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND CRUELTY[6]



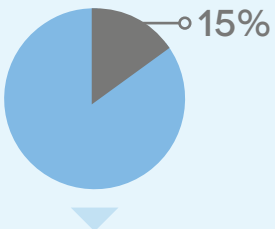
88% of teens who use social media have witnessed other people be mean or cruel on social network sites.



12% say that they have witnessed cruel behavior "frequently."



29% of teens say they saw meanness on social network sites "sometimes."



15% of teen social media users have personally experienced online harassment in the past 12 months.

HURTFUL COMMENTS ON PUBLIC SITES

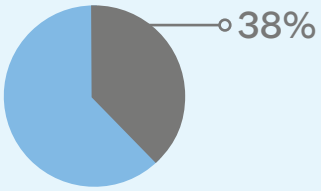
One of the most common forms of online harassment is through public comments on your child's social networking profile. Depending on the site, these may be made anonymously.

Because these comments will usually be highly visible, it's important to consider the context rather than jumping to the assumption that any hurtful comment is a sign your child is being bullied. Since Facebook comments attach the poster's name, for example, the occasional "That's so stupid" response to your child's status update is probably not a symptom of cyberbullying. However, a series of similar or anonymous responses on a social networking site like Formspring should be cause for concern.

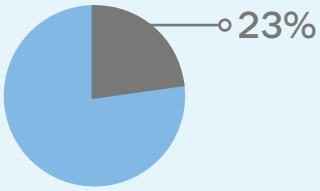
Similarly, unflattering photos must be taken in context. Because of Facebook's photo-sharing capabilities, it is highly likely that at some point a classmate will post an embarrassing or outright hurtful photo of your child. A gallery of embarrassing photos of your child is cyberbullying; a single bad photo in the middle of other photos is not.

IMPERSONATION

If a Facebook or Twitter user forgets to log out of their account on a shared device, it's not uncommon for another user to post something funny or embarrassing in their name. While this is poor online etiquette, an occasional isolated incident is likely not a symptom of cyberbullying.



38% of teen girls have shared a password with a friend or significant other.



23% of teen boys have shared a password with a friend or significant other.[7]

However, in some cases a bully may hack their victim's Facebook account, posting insulting or hateful comments on other users' profiles in the victim's name. The bully may also create a fake profile for the victim, filling the profile with embarrassing or outright false notions, and tricking others into believing it to be the person's actual profile.

For example, one young girl discovered a fake Facebook profile in her name. It featured a doctored photo of her, claimed that she spoke "Retardish," and was used to make obscene comments on classmates' profiles.[6]

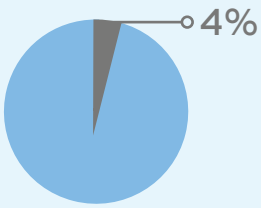
Bullies may also impersonate a classmate in order to get information out of their victim. For instance, if it is known that the victim has a crush on another student, the bully may chat the victim, claiming to be the other child.

Sometimes the bully may even invent a character for the purpose of harassment, as was the case with suicide victim Megan Meier.

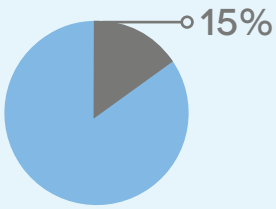
SENDING OR SHARING EXPLICIT CONTENT

Sometimes teens will send others naked pictures of themselves. This may be to a boyfriend or girlfriend, a crush, or even a complete stranger.

IN A STUDY OF CELL-PHONE OWNING TEENS AGES 12-17:

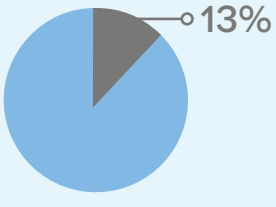


4% have sent a sext.

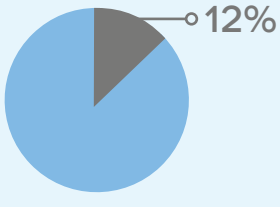


15% have received one.[3]

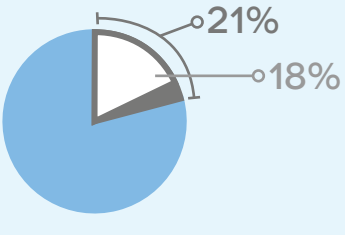
IN A STUDY OF TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS AGES 14-24:



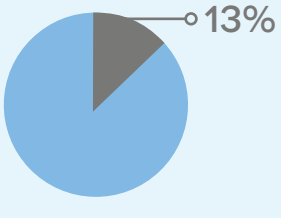
13% have personally sent a naked picture of themselves to someone else.



12% said they have felt pressure from someone to send them a naked picture or video.



21% said someone has sent them naked pictures or videos of themselves. Of these, 18% said they shared it with another person.



13% said someone they know showed them naked pictures of someone else they both know, even though that person didn't say they could share the pictures.[4]

In an MTV poll, only about 1 in 10 teens admitted to doing this…but the same percentage had been shown a "sext" of someone they knew without the sender's permission.

Sending or sharing explicit content of another person is another form of cyberbullying. In some extreme situations, a student's naked picture has spread across the entire school to embarrass or degrade the student, a practice known as "slut shaming." Even if the original recipient didn't intend it as a form of bullying, this sharing can lead to the harassment of the original sender by many people.

In other cases, these naked pictures may be used and spread as a form of blackmail. Amanda Todd flashed a stranger in a chatroom when she was 12; later, when she refused to send him another nude photo, her stalker followed up on his threat to share the original photo with her family, friends, and classmates.

In addition, sometimes bullies send pornographic content to their victim, simply for the sake of causing harassment.

OFFLINE BULLYING

It's important to remember that online harassment is usually accompanied by offline harassment as well. According to Pew Internet[12], of the 19% of teens who have been bullied, 50% had been bullied in more than one way. And according to another study[13], a third of students admitted to being a bully at school, and 10% were bullies both at school and online, but only 1% were bullies online only. If a child is being bullied online, there is an excellent chance that she is also being bullied at school.

By the way, school climate is linked to cyberbullying. Students in schools with a high sense of safety and respect from students and teachers were much less likely to report participation in cyberbullying or sending and receiving texts than students in unsafe, disrespectful schools.[5]

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF YOUR CHILD IS A VICTIM?

Adolescence is a turbulent time, and identifying the reasons for swings in emotions can be tough. Your teen's sullenness, for example, may be a sign that he is being bullied…or it may simply be normal hormonal fluctuations. If you notice multiple changes in your child's personality or attitude that can't simply be explained by physical growth, consider seeking professional help for your child.

Some of the most common signs of cyberbullying include:

- Anger or depression
- Withdrawal or avoidance of the computer, friends, or other normal activities
- Visible anger or hurt after using a computer or other Internet-enabled device
- Drop in academic performance

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

IF YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED...

If you think your child is being bullied online, or if you simply want to prevent it from happening, here are some steps you can take:

1. MAKE YOURSELF A SAFE PERSON TO TALK TO.

More than half of bullied teens have sought advice when they witnessed meanness or cruelty online. Of those, half turn to friends or peers for advice, while a third turn to parents.[14]

If you want your child to turn to you when she encounters meanness online, you need to set yourself up as the go-to person before bullying begins. Talk to your children frequently about appropriate and inappropriate online behaviors, and make sure you listen to your children when they come to you with questions or concerns.

2. SET SECURITY AND PRIVACY STANDARDS WITH YOUR KIDS.

Parents, especially those who grew up with computers or the Internet, may take the basics of computer literacy (like not sharing passwords) for granted. For teens, however, such behaviors may feel like a sign of trust of their peers. As many as 30% of teens share their passwords with friends or significant others.[15]

Sit down with your children and set safety and privacy standards, including giving you a list of their social networking and e-mail accounts and passwords. Start by having your children sign the Family Internet Safety Contract at the end of this book.

If your children are old enough to use social networks, you should also sit down with them and walk through the privacy settings (for instance, limiting who can see photos or status updates). Since Facebook in particular is notorious for changing its privacy settings with little warning, make sure to double-check them once a month.

3. MONITOR THEIR INTERNET USE.

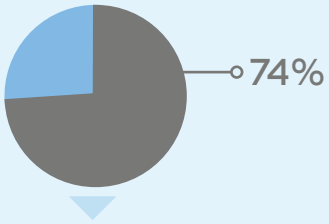
Much like you wouldn't let your child go to a stranger's house, as a parent it is your responsibility to know where your children go online. In addition to keeping all computers and mobile devices in a public space, sign up for an Accountability service like Covenant Eyes. You will receive a regular report of all of the sites your kids visit. (For more information, please see page 12.)

With regular Internet use reports, you can see when your kids are heading down paths that may put them at risk. You may even discover when your child is being harassed...and cut off the abuse before it gets worse.[16]

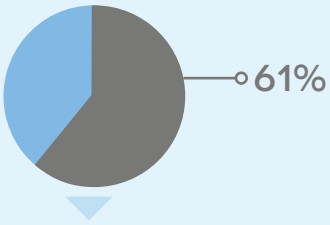
4. TEACH YOUR KIDS HOW TO RESPOND TO BULLIES.

Given that 88% of social media-using teens have witnessed other people be mean or cruel on social network sites, it's important to teach your child how to respond, whether it's an attack on them personally or on a friend or acquaintance. In some instances, ignoring the behavior may be the right response, since the bully may only be seeking attention. They also need to be taught to stick up for another person who is being bullied...and, when necessary, to approach you, a teacher, or another authority figure.

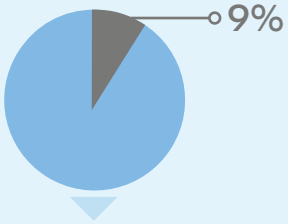
WHEN TEENS SAW SOMEONE ACT MEAN OR CRUEL ON SOCIAL NETWORK SITES:



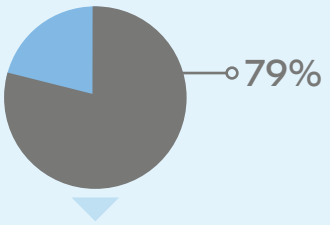
74% just ignored it



61% defended the victim and/or told the bully to stop being mean or cruel



9% joined in the harassment



79% never joined in the harassment[17]

5. WORK WITH YOUR CHILD TO DETERMINE THE COURSE OF ACTION.

If you discover your child being bullied, it may be easy to panic and take extreme measures. For instance, your response may be to take away their Internet access (after all, if your child can't see the bullying, they can't be hurt by it). However, this may mean that your child no longer comes to you with their problems. The better solution might be to ask them to explain the situation fully and work with them to decide on the next steps. You may still need to take decisive action, but by discussing the issue first you and your child can often find an effective solution.

6. BLOCK AND REPORT THE BULLY.

An easy solution to prevent online harassment is to block the bully from your child's profile. Facebook allows you to unfriend users, for example. If your child's profile has been hacked, use this opportunity to change the passwords, and if a fake profile has been set up in their name, use the site's reporting tools to request that the page be removed.

7. CONTACT THE PARENTS OF THE BULLY.

It is entirely possible that the bully's parents have no idea what is going on. If your child knows the name of the attacker, contact their parents, explain calmly how your child has been hurt by this behavior, and ask them to speak with their child. Be careful in your tone; it is likely that the bully's parents will leap to defend their child, and speaking with anger will only exacerbate the issue.

8. NOTIFY THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS.

Since cyberbullying is usually accompanied by physical bullying, consider approaching your child's teachers or principal. Since some schools have been sued for stepping in and punishing a child for online harassment, most schools will be cautious about taking action. However, by notifying them, they can be on the lookout for harsh teasing in the classroom and in the school halls.

9. SAVE THE EVIDENCE.

In some cases, bullies have been brought to court for their behavior. Start collecting evidence of the bullying behavior long before this is necessary. Take screenshots of hurtful comments, and have your child use chatting tools which record conversations.

10. CONSIDER GETTING COUNSELING FOR YOUR CHILD.

If the bullying is ongoing, professional care may be required to help your child cope. A counselor can help a teen work through the pain and learn coping methods. If in doubt, seek professional care sooner rather than later.

WHAT IF YOUR CHILD IS THE BULLY?

Perhaps you've been notified by another parent that your child has been bullying theirs. Or maybe you saw a harassing comment that your child wrote on another child's Facebook profile.

If you have learned that your child is bullying people online, in addition to disciplinary action, here are some steps you should take:

1. REMIND THEM THE INTERNET IS A PRIVILEGE, NOT A RIGHT.

If the incident was isolated, you may not need to cut off the Internet completely. Sit down with your child and remind them of the Golden Rule. Tell them you will more closely monitor their Internet use, especially on social networks. If necessary, set strict time limits, or take away their Internet completely.

As part of this, don't forget to check their smartphones and other mobile devices. Often handheld devices such as mp3 players, e-readers, or handheld gaming systems will have a built-in browser. You may need to uninstall these tools and set parental controls so they cannot be reinstalled, or take the devices away completely. If possible, install Covenant Eyes' Accountability apps for iPhone®, iPod touch®, iPad®, and Android™ phones and tablets.

2. LEARN THE CAUSE.

Before you discipline your child, you need to learn the motivation. Even if the punishment is the same, the conversations you have with your child will be different if they bully "because it's funny" as opposed to "because I really hate him/her." Additionally, it's possible that your child was himself a victim of cyberbullying and started bullying others to deflect the attention away from himself. If this is the case, counseling may be more important than punishment.

3. REMIND THEM OF THE CONSEQUENCES.

Your child may have been bullying as a result of peer pressure, or simply because it was funny, without any malicious intent. Remind them of the impact their actions can have on the other child, perhaps even sharing the stories of kids who have committed suicide, such as Amanda Todd or Jamey Rodemeyer. Instead of teasing others, this may even empower your child to stand up when they see that others are bullied.

PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN WITH INTERNET ACCOUNTABILITY AND FILTERING

Cyberbullying is just one of the dangers your kids face online. Each day your children are bombarded with inappropriate content and harmful interactions, ranging from dirty, racist, and sexist language to sexual predation.

REMOVE THE SECRECY OF INTERNET USE.

Covenant Eyes helps you gain more insight and control into your child or teen's online world. **Internet Accountability** monitors all the websites your kids visit and assigns them a rating based on age-appropriateness, such as T for Teen or M for Mature. A detailed and easy-to-read report is automatically e-mailed to you each week.

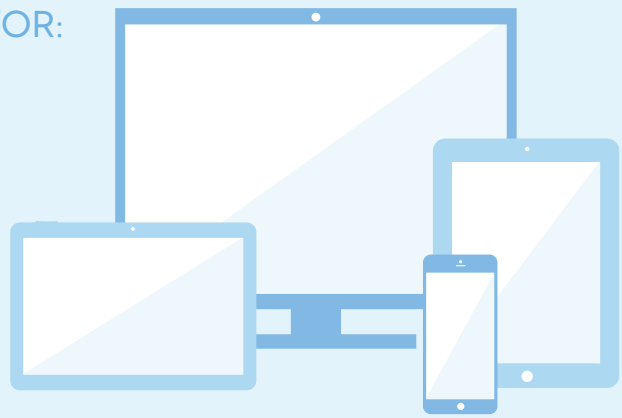
These reports allow you to have specific and informed conversations with your kids about how they use the Internet, helping you discuss the YouTube videos they watch, games they play, images they see, and search terms they use.

The **Windows Filter** lets you block content based on age-appropriateness. You can also choose how long and when the Internet may be used.

SIGN UP FOR INTERNET ACCOUNTABILITY AND FILTERING AT www.**COVENANTEYES**.com

INTERNET ACCOUNTABILITY IS AVAILABLE FOR:

- Windows
- Mac
- iPhone®
- iPod touch®
- iPad®
- Android™ smartphones and tablets



FAMILY INTERNET SAFETY CONTRACT

	INITIAL
1. I will always tell my parents or another adult immediately if I see something confusing, scary, or threatening on the Internet.	1. _____
2. If someone I meet online requests to meet with me in person I will say "no" and tell my parents.	2. _____
3. I will not purposely search and/or view inappropriate images on my computer, phone, or device or another person's computer, phone, or device.	3. _____
4. I will ask my parents or another adult before opening any e-mail, files, links, pictures, or games from people that I don't know or trust.	4. _____
5. I will not send inappropriate or revealing pictures of myself to anyone.	5. _____
6. I will never initiate or participate in cyberbullying.	6. _____
7. I will stay in control of my online reputation. I understand that what I post online will directly reflect how others (such as teachers, employers, parents, strangers, and coaches) perceive me.	7. _____
8. I understand that all online choices have offline consequences, and in some cases may have legal implications.	8. _____
9. I will not give personal information online, even to get so-called freebies. Just as in the physical world, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.	9. _____
10. I will not create or use e-mail addresses, I.M. names, chat nicknames, and so on that give away too much personal information. I will make them gender-neutral, with no age or location information, and they will not sound provocative.	10. _____
11. I will not include personal information in my "public" profile, such as: my birth date, address, phone number, e-mail address, school schedule, passwords, account information, and so on. These can be used to locate me or steal my identity.	11. _____
12. I will only buy things online if I have my parents' permission.	12. _____
13. If I'm ever in doubt, I will talk with my parents or another adult for clarification or permission.	13. _____
14. I will provide to my parents all usernames and passwords to my e-mail, social networking, and other online accounts.	14. _____

Consequences for misuse of the Internet will be: _____

_____

_____

_____

Child/Teen Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent Signature: _____ Date: _____

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