Cyberbullying

This discussion guide will help you facilitate a conversation with parents about cyberbullying. Use the following questions and stories to get parents thinking and talking about this issue. You may also want to show the Cyberbullying parent tip video and hand out the Cyberbullying parent tip sheet to help spark the discussion.

What's going on with your kids?

Questions to encourage parents to share experiences, concerns, and solutions

1. Why do you think kids use the Internet or their cell phones to bully others?

2. What are all the different ways that kids can use technology to bully or humiliate others?

3. What makes cyberbullying and its potential impact different from other forms of bullying?

4. If you discovered that your child had sent a hateful or an inappropriate Instant, Text, or Picture Message to another child, what would you do?

5. If you suspect (but aren't sure) that your child is being cyberbullied, what could you do?

6. What might you include in your list of things to teach kids about being good "digital citizens"? What do you think your child would include?

Elementary school child

Seven-year-old Kelly Jones and her friends regularly go on a Web site where they design cartoon dolls, name them, and post them up for ratings by other viewers. She showed her mom that someone she didn't know kept posting dolls named Smelly Kelly Jones. "It makes me sad 'cause… are they talking about… me?" Her mom asked her to take a break from the computer and help in the backyard. Could it be that one of her friends was posting these dolls under this username as a way to make fun of her?

» What can Kelly's mom do?

» What can she say to Kelly to make her feel better?

Middle school preteen or teen

Kim receives a call from the school principal about her twelve-year-old son. The principal says that her son — who's never had any trouble in school — faces suspension because he sent some threatening text messages to another student in class. The texts said, "14 days until you die — the power of Zircon will prevail." Four other boys in the class are involved and one of their text messages warns, "Disaster will come if you step into our circle of fire!" Her son is being held in after-school detention, and Kim has been asked to come in immediately.

» What would you do if you received this call? What questions would you have?

» Who are all the people affected in this situation? What might their views be?

» What do you think the consequences should be for the kids involved?

» How can parents monitor their kids' cell phone messages, pictures, and texts?

common sense
media

Middle school / high school teen

Jennifer's tenth-grade daughter Mia has just broken up with her boyfriend Ryan. It was a hard break-up and Ryan is still steaming, but he has started to date a girl on Mia's volleyball team. All the kids in Mia's class are on Facebook — they use it to plan parties, post pictures, share the latest news about their favorite bands, and just hang out. Jennifer and the other parents complain that Facebook is a waste of time, but they've pretty much accepted that it is part of their kids' lives.

While cooking breakfast one day, Jennifer hears her daughter scream and then rush down the stairs. "Mom, my friends just texted to tell me that someone posted a video of me naked in the locker room on YouTube! And all over his Facbook page there are old photos of Ryan and me kissing and private emails that I sent to him. I tried to get on to his profile page to see them, but he's blocked me as a friend. Mia collapses at the table sobbing, "I'm sooo pissed and so embarrassed. My friends are going to hate me!"

» What would you do and say if this happened to your child?

» What role do you think the school should play in addressing this situation, as opposed to the parents or the kids themselves?

» What are some different ways that kids can use technology to bully others?

» How can playing pranks, even relatively innocent ones, have hugely damaging consequences when video technology and the Internet are involved?

» How can we teach our kids to self-reflect before they self-reveal? Treat one another kindly online? Respect their own privacy and the privacy of others?

High school teen

Nima senses something is bothering her teenage son. He's been quiet and withdrawn lately. She suspects it has something to do with his being online, because sometimes he appears frustrated and walks away from the computer abruptly. The family uses an Internet monitoring software, so Nima decides to check the web history to see where her son has been online. He was on MySpace a lot. One MySpace page was a profile that showed a picture of her son's head morphed onto a dog's body with some other degrading content. After her initial shock, she was confused about how someone could have done this. She knew what MySpace was but had never really visited the site before.

» How did Nima know something was wrong?

» What steps should she take in this situation?

» What can be done to help her son, who has been hurt and ridiculed publicly?

» Who can her son turn to if he can't approach his mom?