

The Essential 8 for Parents

1. **DO emphasize that cyberbullying is everyone's problem.**

There is no gray area when it comes to cyberbullying or any kind of aggression. You are either for it or against it. The child has the power of choice – to keep silent about a degrading website or to speak up and tell a trusted adult; to repost a bulletin, and to continue spreading a rumor or to stop the rumor in its tracks.

Do not discount taunting, harassment, or online pranks as “just what kids do”. Cyberbullying is hurtful and harmful, and the consequences of unchecked behavior can be serious.

2. **DO role-model positive interpersonal relationships every day.**

Whether face to face or behind a computer screen, your actions speak louder than words. Look at how you interact with friends and acquaintances in front of your children. Do you gossip? Make nasty comments about others? Verbally harass your child, coworkers, partner, or neighbors? The rules for engagement online should be the same that you enforce and model in face-to-face interaction.

Assume that your child does not know the etiquette of online interaction even if he/she has been using a computer since he/she was four. And do know that they are watching every move you make.

3. **DO teach empathy by asking your child or student to describe how it might feel to be the target of cyberbullying.**

Ask your children or students if they know someone who has ever been bullied, and ask them how they think that bullied friend might feel. Or, ask them to remember a time when they felt scared, sad, afraid, or humiliated. Let them know that bullying of any kind, whether verbal, relational, physical, or cyber, hurts very much. Enforce the “Golden Rule”.

4. **DO talk about privacy.**

Each family has its own views as to what is and is not private. Make it very clear to your children that personal information should never be posted online. Also, challenge your children who may use online blogs or journals, to consider this: They would not let a perfect stranger into their home to browse through the diary they keep hidden in the sock drawer. Why would they let a perfect stranger read that diary online? Establish an agreement that their online profiles are not private to you and are available for you to monitor. And, of course, keep the computer in a common area of your house and not in your child's bedroom.

5. DO hold children accountable when he/she is aggressive, both on and off-line.

Set and enforce the rules for online behavior in your home or in your school. Watch for signs of cyberbullying, investigate every situation, and, when you catch or become aware of your child or student cyberbullying, stop it and start a dialogue.

Be careful not to jump to conclusions or act irrationally. Cyberbullying can be scary, and the consequences for irresponsible postings can be very serious. But, overreacting and taking the computer away may stop your child from bringing cyberbullying to your attention. The number one problem in combating cyberbullying is kids' unwillingness to discuss it.

6. DO show your child that you value and encourage off-line activities and social interaction.

Spending every free moment chatting online or browsing profiles on MySpace.com is not something that should go unnoticed. The benefits for extra-curricular activities and active hobbies are numerous, and the social benefits of getting off-line and out of the house are even greater!

7. DO show children that you know what you're talking about.

And, if you don't know what you're talking about – find out. What are you waiting for? Ask them to walk you through their MySpace profile or their buddy list. Ask questions. Comment on what you think is appropriate or not appropriate. Ask your child's opinion. Start the conversation in your home or classroom! In a school, there should be at least one person on staff who will be the 'expert'.

Do not be surprised or angry if they're not thrilled to show you're their MySpace page. Give them a day to 'clean it up' for your view, but then let them know that you will be checking it periodically.

8. DO assert to your children that there is no difference between "real life" and "online life."

The vast expanse of ideas, images, people, and opportunities online can help your students discover his own identity. But, many adolescents rely on their adults' ignorance of the current technologies to keep their 'online life' hidden. Children need to know that their online persona should mirror who they are in their day-to-day lives with friends, parents, and other adults. Emphasize that there is no difference between online behavior and in-person behavior. They are one in the same.