

STAND UP!

WHAT EVERY PARENT NEEDS TO
KNOW ABOUT CYBER BULLYING

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StandUp!

Dear Parent or Guardian:

As one of the leading providers of wireless service in your area, Unice! knows how quickly technology is changing. While young people are reaping many benefits from advances in technology, they also face many challenges. Some have learned to exploit technology to produce a particularly cruel and new form of bullying called *cyber bullying*.

When it comes to broadcasting negative information, the cyber world has become the new bathroom wall. Young people are using the Internet's "social" technologies – instant messaging, camera phones, chat rooms, e-mail, Web logs, profiles and cell phone text messaging – to exchange gossip, hash out their daily conflicts and mount bullying campaigns. Schools around the country are seeing skyrocketing numbers of cyber bullying incidents.

Although technology experts advise parents to protect children from anonymous sexual predators and pornography on the Internet, children today are far more likely to be electronically assaulted by a friend or acquaintance.

Unice! is grateful to the Empower Program for sharing its expertise in creating this guide designed to help parents identify, regulate and respond to cyber bullying by and against children. We would also like to thank Nancy Willard, director of the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use, for her commitment to stopping cyber bullying and for her expertise in the field.

Standing up to a bully is one of the hardest things for a child to do – both online and in person. We hope that the information in this guide will lead responsible, loving adults to help young people eliminate cruelty and violence as an adolescent rite of passage and to help them foster an enduring respect for one another that extends into the electronic world.



Richard P. Ekstrand

Richard P. Ekstrand is the president and CEO of Rural Cellular Corporation (RCC), the parent company of Unice!. This guide is part of Unice!'s StandUp! program, an effort to draw attention to the issue of cyber bullying and to take measures to prevent it.



Rachel Simmons

Rachel Simmons is the author of *Odd Girl Out* and a consultant and speaker with the Empower Program, a nonprofit organization that envisions a world where young people are safe from being bullied, harassed and victimized.



CYBER BULLYING DEFINED

Simply stated, cyber bullying is the use of technology such as the Internet and cell phones to degrade or humiliate another person or group. Cyber bullying can be practiced directly, as when a hateful message is sent directly to a target, or indirectly, as when a message, Web site or photograph is sent to others who later use it to bully a target. Cyber bullying is most often done using Web sites, Web logs (“blogs”), chat rooms, instant messaging systems, e-mail and cell phone text and photo messages.

WHAT MAKES CYBER BULLYING SO EASY?

The Internet and wireless networks offer an ideal climate for bullying. Few parents are truly comfortable in an electronic environment, and the resulting lack of supervision makes it easy for cyber bullying to take place.

Faceless, often nameless electronic transmissions make it easy for children to drop their personal boundaries. Anonymity gives many kids a false sense of confidence and power, leading them to think they can be different people online than they are in real life. Many believe they can “say anything” online. Adults are not strangers to this phenomenon – many adults have sent an e-mail that was inappropriately worded. For children, however, this sort of mistake can have grave consequences.

Cyber bullying is also intrusive, allowing bullies to chase victims into their home, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR CHILD'S ELECTRONIC HABITS

Via Cell Phone

Cell phone technology offers new ways to stay in touch and guard your children's safety, but it also brings ways for them to cheat, bully and act irresponsibly. One of the fastest-growing groups of cell phone users is children between the ages of 5 and 9, and incidents of cyber bullying have been reported by more than a third of primary-school-age children with cell phones. The statistic becomes even more alarming as children move into middle school and high school.

Cell phones are quickly becoming a major presence in cyber bullying incidents. Cyber bullying via cell phones includes:

- Taking and circulating inappropriate photographs with cell phones (examples include photographing someone undressing in a gym locker room or in a situation that the target would find humiliating).
- Hateful or threatening voice mails, some of which may be anonymous.
- Hateful or threatening text messaging, including gossip and rumors, sent directly to a target or indirectly to other people about a target.

The best protection you can offer your children from cyber bullying and other threatening behavior that uses cell phone technology is your own involvement. Take the time to learn what they may already know about a cell phone's capabilities.

Try This:

- Prohibit the taking of photographs whose circulation would harm another individual. Tell your child to ask herself before sending a photograph: "Would I want others to see a photograph of me like this?"
- Test the caller ID on your child's phone. Your child always has the option of simply not answering a call from someone he or she doesn't wish to speak to.
- Teach your children basic cell phone etiquette before you allow them to have their own cell phone.
- Explain to your children the many types of cyber bullying, let them know what they should do if they experience or become involved in cyber bullying and inform them of the consequences of inappropriate use.
- Consider purchasing a child-friendly phone that encourages communication with parents and other approved individuals, but blocks unwanted calls.

TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR CHILD'S ELECTRONIC HABITS

Via the Internet

The Internet is another world – one with its own rules, justice, language and culture. Your children will be safest in this world when you become an active participant in it.

Most children have managed to lock parents out of their online activities and will resist strongly when you try to take part. You'll get the best response (which is not to say they'll respond well) when you explain your actions.

You'll also get lots of questions and resistance, so we encourage you to share these answers directly with your children:

- Q.** Why do you care what I see and do on the Internet?
- A.** We already keep an eye on what you see. Parents supervise what their kids watch on TV and in movie theaters, what they read in magazines and books, and what they listen to on the radio and on their MP3 players. There's a lot on the Internet that's just not appropriate for kids, so we've decided to keep an eye on what you view there, too.

Try This: Set up a schedule for Internet use similar to that for television watching; if TV is taken away as a punishment, the Internet should also be limited.

- Q.** Why can't I leave the Internet up while I study?
- A.** You'll get the most out of your homework – and build study skills you really need – if you're not interrupted. Even if you don't mean to, chances are you'll stop what you're doing to chat online.

Try This: During homework times, have your children check in with you first if they need to use the Internet for research. Check in from time to time to see how they're doing.

Other Ways to Take Control

- Limit your child's instant messaging contacts to people he or she knows. You can configure many instant messaging systems in this way.
- Make sure your child is using a teen or kids instant messaging account. This can block the ability to exchange images, files, voice and video and also puts some limits on chat and Web surfing. You can customize all of these settings.
- Some instant messaging systems have controls that will allow you to determine when and for how long your child can use instant messaging.
- Choose a software program that you can configure to block chat and instant messaging programs as well as objectionable Internet sites.
- Talk to your child about the dangers of sharing e-mail or instant messaging passwords.
- Talk to your child about what is appropriate to share in his or her profile on social networking Web sites and what is not (home address, etc.).

KEEPING AN EYE ON THINGS

Direct Monitoring

Children should not be online behind closed doors. *Online access should be limited to a public place in the household, such as the kitchen, den, or living room areas.* Parents should be able to glance over the child's shoulder at any time.

When a child must use a computer in his or her room, parents should check in periodically. If the child appears secretive when you approach the computer and switches or minimizes screens, inappropriate use may be occurring.



Indirect Monitoring

of Cell Phone Activity

- Check on cell phone cheating and bullying by clicking into the phone's text messaging history.
- Limit the amount of time kids talk on the phone.
- Designate the times when the phone can be used (e.g., not after 7 pm – that's homework time).
- Allow communication only with certain phone numbers (e.g., Mom, Dad, siblings, 10 best friends, grandparents, and emergency numbers). Check your child's list of numbers in the device's phone book.
- Block certain numbers when problems are occurring, if the phone has that capability.
- View "call history" to see what calls a child has made and received.

of Internet Activity

- Check the "history" file in your browser to see what sites your child has accessed. If you find the history file empty, your child may be erasing evidence of inappropriate Internet use.
- Conduct a file search for image files ending in .jpg and .gif to see if inappropriate images are being sent to or downloaded by your child.
- Use a search engine to search for your child's full name and screen name in quotes ("jane doe") and the name of your child's school plus full name, first name and screen name to see whether your child has posted or been mentioned on any blogs or Web sites.
- Visit the popular social networking Web sites and search for your child's profile by his or her name or screen name.

HOW YOU CAN HELP PREVENT BULLYING

Talk About It

Begin a conversation with your child about cyber bullying by posing general, third-person questions about his or her social life. It may be easier to do this in a casual, non-confrontational way, such as when your child is setting the table or while you're driving. For example:

"Do kids in school ever use the Internet or cell phones to bully each other?"

"Have you ever seen bullying online? What does it look like?"

Acts of cyber bullying often share a single characteristic: children doing and saying things in the electronic world that they would not do in "real" life. Therefore, we encourage you to communicate clearly your expectations to your child about how he or she should conduct himself or herself electronically.

Explain what's *different* about electronic bullying, and the enormous power technology puts in children's hands. "When you forward a hurtful e-mail to 10 people on your buddy list, it's the same thing as writing 10 separate notes and passing on that information to each person, one by one."

You may also want to remind your child that cyber bullying can appear unexpectedly. For instance, girls in particular use the Internet to hash out their conflicts, and these conversations may quickly turn into bullying episodes. Young people need to know that the Internet is not an appropriate medium for resolving disagreements.

Specify What's OK and What's Not, and Name the Consequences

Once you've talked about what cyber bullying looks like and how you feel about it as a parent, communicate the consequences in your household for breaking the rules. Use of the Internet should be seen as a privilege, one that can be revoked when inappropriate use occurs. For children who spend a great deal of time online, revoking Internet privileges is a very effective deterrent or punishment. Similarly, although many families view their children's cell phones as a necessity, special features such as picture messaging should also be seen as privileges that can be revoked when inappropriate use occurs.

In your conversation, be clear that the consequences are not limited to parental action; cyber bullying can lead to civil litigation. Parents of cyber bullies can be sued for financial damages for defamation, invasion of privacy and intentional infliction of emotional distress.



STANDING UP TO A CYBER BULLY

Standing up to a bully is one of the hardest things a child can do. Fortunately, technology, and the confidence it affords young people to say things they normally wouldn't, makes it significantly easier to stand up.

We believe kids need the right words to use with peers who try to involve them in bullying or cyber "fights." Below are suggested responses for your children should they be a target of or witness to cyber bullying.

Direct Response

What to say when you're invited to join a cyber fight:

"I totally understand that you are having a problem with this person, but I can't get involved. No matter what happens between the two of you, our friendship will stay the same."

What to say when you're in the fight:

"I think it's easier to talk in person. Can we talk tomorrow at school at [suggested time]?"

What to say when someone involves you in bullying:

"I don't feel comfortable doing this" or "I'm not cool with this."

"Let's talk later" or "Gotta go."

"Check out this amazing [Web site] [download] [song] [video]!" In other words, change the subject!

Indirect Response

Bullying or cyber fight:

Tell your child to sign off or click "end"! It's that easy.

Don't forward:

Never forward hurtful e-mails. It's one way to decrease the number of people exposed to the harmful information.

Print it out:

Encourage your child to print out any aggressive e-mails, instant messages, away messages, profiles or other items online. They may be the only evidence you have in the event you decide to take action against a perpetrator.

Save it:

Save text messages, voice mails or picture mails that are aggressive. The "missed calls" section of the phone will show the phone number of a person who sent a voice message. Text and picture messages contain the sender's phone number. It's also important to track the number of calls and times of day received.

WHEN TO CALL THE POLICE

A parent or responsible adult should call the police when cyber bullying involves:

- Death threats or threats of other forms of violence to a person or property.
- Excessive intimidation or extortion.
- Threats or intimidation that involve any form of bias or discrimination based on race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc.
- Any evidence of sexual exploitation.

CELL PHONE USE CONTRACT

The best strategy for promoting ethical behavior with cell phones is to be proactive. A basic contract follows that families can use to establish the connection between their values and common ethical cell phone challenges. We encourage you to develop a similar contract for ethical use of the Internet.

The structure of the contract is simple. Its success depends on one thing: every member of the family must participate.

- The first step is to have a discussion and then agreement on the family's top three values.
- The second step is to develop a specific list that articulates what cell phone behavior goes against these values.
- The third step is to decide what the consequences will be when those values are ignored or violated.
- The fourth step is to have the child and parents sign the contract.

Finally, we ask you to remember that cell phones keep parents and their children connected, but they cannot be substitutes for the conversations that keep children safe. It is still very important to verify where your children are and whether an adult is present.



Unicel's StandUp! Use Contract

We, the _____ family, believe that our most important family values are integrity, compassion and kindness. All members of this family will make every attempt to act according to these values at all times.

Further, every member of this family understands that electronic communication must reflect our family values. Therefore we recognize that the following cell phone behavior is in direct contradiction to our values:

- Mean-spirited text messaging, including transmission of gossip or rumors.
- Mean-spirited voice mails.
- Anonymous voice messages.
- The taking of photographs that demean or humiliate another individual.

If any family member is found acting in violation of this contract, the following consequence(s) will occur:

- **First violation:** Cell phone use will be taken away for one week, and a letter of apology must be written and delivered to the target and the family (and/or principal/school).
- **Second violation:** All cell phone use will be taken away for two weeks and another privilege particular to that individual will be revoked.

While we understand that any of us can and do make mistakes, we believe that living according to these values is critically important.

Signed on this day _____ of the year _____

Parent(s) _____

Child(ren) _____

A GUIDE TO CYBER BULLYING LINGO

Away Message – A custom-written automatic reply used to greet any instant messages the user receives while absent.

Instant Messaging – Software allowing users to chat online in “real time” from their computers or via wireless devices.

JK – An acronym for “just kidding.” Some young people follow hurtful comments with “jk,” absolving themselves of any responsibility for their statement.

POS – An acronym for “parent over shoulder.”

Profile – A biographical form, in which members record their hobbies, likes and dislikes.

Text Messaging – The use of cell phone keypads to type short messages that can be instantly sent to other cell phone users.

Three-Way Instant Messaging – An upgrade of the three-way phone call, in which two people instant message from the same computer but suggest only one person is present; this is followed by sensitive questioning of others about the “quiet” third party, who is able to view what people “really think” of him or her.

TYPES OF CYBER BULLYING

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Cyberstalking – Sending harassing communications that may include threats of harm.

Denigration – Sending or posting harmful, untrue or cruel statements or images about a person to other people.

Flaming – Sending hateful messages or images, including pictures taken with cell phones, to a private or online group.

Harassment – Repeatedly sending a person offensive messages.

Impersonation – Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material using that person’s identity that makes him or her look bad or places him or her in potential danger.

Outing – Sending or posting material about or by a person that contains sensitive, private or embarrassing information.

Trickery – Fooling someone into revealing personal information and then distributing it.

RESOURCES & SOURCES

Unicel.com/standup Cyberbully.org

Cyberbully.org is owned by Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use.