



CYBERBULLYING AND COVID-19

Cyberbullying has become an increasingly common and serious issue in recent years largely due to the easy access, and in some cases the anonymity, of digital devices. As children and teens spend more time online during the COVID-19 pandemic to complete virtual schoolwork and keep in touch with friends, cyberbullying may increase as well.

Parents, however, are also at home with their children more now than ever before. During this time, [healthcare](#) providers say, parents have the opportunity to be more mindful than ever about their child's technology and social media use.

"Technology can be a wonderful, educational and fun resource, but it can have negative consequences as well, especially on children and teens," says Dr. Christopher Min, a CHOC Children's psychologist.

One of the best ways to protect your child from bullying is to talk openly about it, Dr. Min says.

"Remind your child that most bullies have low self-esteem, and they bully others to try and feel better about themselves," Dr. Min says.

To start these conversations, ask open-ended questions, rather than firing off a specific list of questions. Try asking something like "Is there anything going on?" or "Is there anything I can help you with?"

Every parent wants their child to feel comfortable and happy, and to stay safe. Dr. Min shares tips for parents of children using social media and technology:



Tips for Parents

1. Monitor teens' social media use.

To what extent a parent should track social media activity depends on the child, Dr. Min says, but parents need to be aware how a child uses these tools. Monitoring can be accomplished through regular discussions or more formal means such as sharing log-in information, depending on the child's responsibility level.

2. Encourage teens to have virtual get-togethers with friends.

The underlying reason for social media is to create a sense of connectedness, and this can be accomplished faster than meeting in person. Although in-person hangouts aren't possible during current stay at home orders, teens should make an effort to maintain social relationships during this time. Encourage your child to video chat with friends, have a virtual game night, or host a virtual movie night with their friends.

3. Remember that parents control access to social media.

Dr. Min reminds parents that they pay for internet or cellphone access. Parents should exercise authority and reason with teens by stating clear consequences and rewards for social media use.

4. Watch for signs of bullying.

Pay close attention to signs from your child that may show something is wrong, such as acting withdrawn, sad or irritable, or changes in their sleep or appetite. Keep in mind however that that sometimes kids will not display any signs at all so it's important to keep an open dialogue with your child.

5. Have a plan.

Talk about what your child might do if he or she is bullied, including who to tell.

6. Build your child's self-esteem.

The better your child feels about themselves, the less effect a bully will have on their overall well-being.

7. Tell others.

Inform your child's school about the bullying and talk with the bully's parents about the behavior.

8. Remind your child to pause before they post.

Teens ready to post something online should instead pause for 5 to 10 seconds to consider their actions, the post's meaning and possible consequences.

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