How to talk about cyberbullying with teens

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Talking about cyberbullying with your teen can be tough. However, regular conversations can help them stay safer online.

Explore tips and starters below for more effective chats.

Tips for having a conversation

Before the conversation

- Plan your chat beforehand
- Keep the conversation casual
- Choose a neutral setting
- Know how the platforms they use tackle bullying

During the conversation

- Keep the conversation open and allow space for your child to share
- Ask open-ended questions
- Make it clear you're supporting, not punishing
- Use examples e.g. news stories or apps they use

After the conversation

- Follow up with your child even after the issue is dealt with
- Watch out for changes in mood or habits
- Decide on next steps together
- Teach them how to block and report and set privacy controls

Conversation starters to tackle cyberbullying

Teens value independence and privacy. If they feel you are prying, they might shut down and not respond to questions. So, use these conversation starters to help them feel more at ease.

Conversations to prevent cyberbullying

What actions can people take on [app they use] to stop receiving negative behaviour? Asking about issues on specific apps that your child uses can help you explore reporting and blocking tools together.

What do you think about [relevant news story]? Asking about a news story on cyberbullying is an easy way to hear your child's thoughts and experiences. You could also talk about something you saw online or heard from a colleague.

My colleague's son was caught bullying another child online but he's a really nice kid. What do you think could have happened to make him bully someone else? Asking about someone else's experience lets you explore your child's views on cyberbullying, without it feeling like you are accusing them of something.

Conversations to prevent cyberbullying (continued)

What could you do if you saw someone getting bullied online? Using a hypothetical situation helps your child reflect on their experiences without feeling targeted. If they've ever cyberbullied someone, imagining this scenario may help them recognise that their behaviour was wrong.

What advice would you give to a friend being bullied online? This can help your child think of the actions someone could take if they were being cyberbullied, without it being directly about them.

If an app you enjoy using started making you feel upset, what could you do? Asking this will help your teen consider positive actions that can keep their online space safer.

Conversations to deal with cyberbullying

If your teen is a victim or perpetrator of cyberbullying, refrain from showing judgement. While you might feel angry or upset, this could close the door to conversation.

If your child is a target of cyberbullying

How can I help you tackle this issue? Asking how you can help, rather than telling them what to do, lets your teen take ownership on how to handle the situation. It also offers an opportunity to explore the safety features on platforms with your teen and gather evidence of the cyberbullying.

Thank you for telling me. Can you tell me more? Showing appreciation for your teen telling you about the cyberbullying lets them know they were right to tell you. Asking them to share more about the situation can also help them feel supported rather than lectured.

If your child shows bullying behaviours

I appreciate your honesty. What made you want to tell me? By showing appreciation and reassurance, your teen is more likely to continue sharing. Asking why they chose to tell you encourages them to reflect on their experiences and actions, without feeling pushed toward a specific answer.

Is there anything you wish you had done differently? This is not telling the teen that they are in the wrong. Instead, it lets them consider their actions and potentially come to this conclusion themselves, without feeling like they are being lectured.

What made you want to send/post this? Asking your teen why they chose to target someone gives them a chance to share their perspective and any pressures they might feel. This can lead to you agreeing on better ways they can handle similar feelings in the future.