How to talk about cyberbullying with vulnerable children

Vulnerable children are more likely to experience cyberbullying than non-vulnerable children, but calm and open conversations can help keep them safe.

Learn how you can have these conversations in an open and natural way to minimise conflict.

Tips for having a conversation

Before the conversation

- Break it into multiple bite-sized conversations
- Choose a neutral location, such as at the dinner table or in the car
- Plan what you want to say and what points to cover
- Review parental settings and block and report tools on platforms they use
- Know who to contact if necessary

During the conversation

- Stay calm
- Ask responsive questions
- Approach the conversation in a relaxed and casual manner
- Be supportive and reassure them
- Use examples relating to real-life or the platforms they use. Some vulnerable children might benefit from roleplaying scenarios as well.

After the conversation

- Continue having conversations to create an ongoing dialogue
- Pay attention to changes in behaviour
- Teach your child how to block and report
- Adjust safety settings on platforms and consider using monitoring apps
- Agree on or explain the next steps, depending on your child's maturity level

Conversation starters to tackle cyberbullying

Some vulnerable children might struggle to talk about cyberbullying behaviours or might not feel comfortable sharing details of their digital life. Start the conversation in a relaxed way and stay calm even if you are told concerning information.

Conversations to prevent cyberbullying

"Have you ever seen something online that make you uncomfortable?" This avoids accusing your child and encourages them to share their own experiences. Some vulnerable children might not always recognise cyberbullying, so asking what makes them uncomfortable can help you chat about behaviours online.

"What could you do if you saw someone being left out of a group chat or game?" Focusing the question on someone other than your child can help them distance themselves from an upsetting situation. It encourages them to consider how they would respond to a specific cyberbullying scenario.

Conversations to prevent cyberbullying (continued)

"Who could you talk to if something online made you upset?" Asking this lets children know that they can look to others for support if they experience bullying online. You can also work together to decide which specific people they can talk to, such as yourself or their teacher.

"What could we do to help you feel safer online?" This can help your child consider steps they can take to protect themselves from harmful behaviour. It also provides an opportunity to review parental controls together, teach them to block and report and signpost resources like Childline.

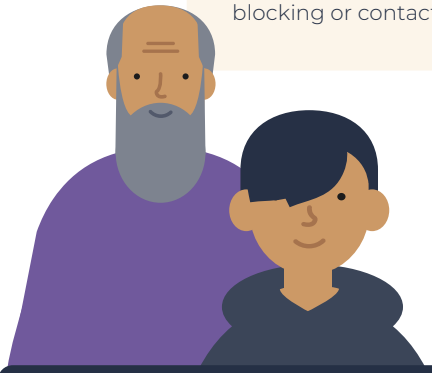
Conversations to deal with cyberbullying

Your child might share with you that they have experienced or participated in cyberbullying. Stay calm and make it clear that they were right to tell you with these starters. .

If your vulnerable child is a target of cyberbullying

"Thank you for telling me. Can you tell me what happened?" Start by showing appreciation to let your child know that they are not being punished. This encourages them to continue sharing which can help you tackle the bullying.

"Would you like to talk about what we should do next?" Using 'we' shows your child that you'll support them in handling the situation while including them in the process. Being bullied can also make a child feel powerless, so this gives them a sense of control. Give suggestions on actions, such as blocking or contacting their school.



If your vulnerable child shows bullying behaviours

"What do you think made you feel like you should do that?" This encourages your child to reflect on their behaviour. Phrasing it in a way that shows you understand outside factors, such as peer pressure, can help your child feel understood rather than attacked.

"'Why might that behaviour upset others?" Some vulnerable children might not realise that their behaviour was bullying because this was not their intention. Asking them to consider how others might perceive their behaviour can help them recognise how their actions can affect others in social situations.

"What do you think you could do differently in the future?" This starter frames the conversation as a learning opportunity, rather than a punishment, which can make them avoid repeating their actions.