Cyberbullying

What makes cyberbullying so toxic, invasive, and harmful? How do teens think about cyberbullying — and how can they help be part of the solution instead of part of the problem? Cyberbullying has been a major buzzword over the past several years, with a distressing number of headlines calling attention to every parent's worst nightmares: school expulsions, arrests, youth suicides. Thankfully, many schools and young people are now taking a stand against cyberbullying, and children are stepping forward to demonstrate empathy and kindness.

- **Build a support network for your children.**

  It can be easy to think that you'll be the one to support your child in times of need. But kids often hesitate to reach out to parents in the toughest of times. Encourage your kids to turn to any trusted adult — teacher, coach, older sibling — if they are on the receiving end of hurtful online behavior. Remind your kids that you understand these situations are complicated, and that you do not want them to handle it alone. Share personal stories of when you needed someone else's support. Sometimes kids worry that parents will overract, so it is helpful toexplain that you'll think through the solution together. Try communicating your commitment to helping them find solutions that feel comfortable, safe, and supportive if and when these situations arise.

- **Encourage your kids to stand up to the bully — or at the very least to stand *with* the victim.**

  In an ideal world, we hope our kids will stand up to bullies — and this is certainly a great message for your kids. If it feels safe, encourage your child to address the bully online or, better yet, offline. Still, it doesn't always feel safe, socially or otherwise, to stand up to cyberbullies. Urge your kids to at least stand *with* the victim by communicating (1) that they do not share the bully's perspective and (2) that they are there for support. For example, a kid might say, "Hey, I just wanted to let you know that I saw what is going on online and I just wanted to tell you that I'm really sorry this is happening to you. I don't feel that way about it and I think it is really mean that people are saying that. If you need to talk to someone or if there is anything I can do, let me know."

- **Be strategic in your support.**

  If you feel that your child or someone you know is being cyberbullied "aka the target," know that there are concrete steps that you can take. First, listen to the victim and be a sympathetic ear. Show the victim how to block bullies online; many platforms have "blocking" features or have a way to report inappropriate use. Encourage the victim to take screenshots and/or print the evidence of the mean messaging. And last, find ways to encourage kindness at your kids' schools or within the community. How can you highlight the positive ways kids are using media and technology these days?