

# Child Safety

## HOW TO IDENTIFY AND STOP CYBERBULLYING

Today's students have many new things to contend with as they navigate the school year. As a greater number of schools transition to providing lessons, homework and tests on digital devices, students spend much more time online. This connectivity can have many positive results. However, the same availability also opens up students of all ages to various dangers.

One of these dangers is a more invasive form of bullying called "cyberbullying." The global organization DoSomething.org says nearly half of kids have been bullied online, with one in four saying it has happened more than once.

Cyberbullying has grown as access to computers and devices that offer an online connection has grown. Bullying is now just as likely to occur online as it is on the playground. Cyberbullies may bully classmates through email, social media, instant messaging, and other social applications. Since cyberbullying tends to target emotions and mental well-being, and reaches beyond the school campus into a student's home, its impact can be even more serious.

According to the Megan Meier Foundation, which campaigns against bullying, peer victimization during adolescence is associated with higher rates of depression, suicide ideation and suicide attempts. In the United States, suicide is the second leading cause of death for individuals between the ages of 15 and 24, according to data compiled from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Center for Behavioral Health Statistics, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Cyberbullying occurs in many different forms. Here are some types of cyberbullying educators and parents can look for if they suspect their students or children are being bullied.

- **Flaming:** This is a type of bullying that occurs in an online forum or group conversation. It's achieved by sending angry or insulting



**Children, adolescents and young adults can be the victims of a pervasive type of abuse called cyberbullying.**

messages directly to the person. Flaming is similar to harassment, but harassment usually involves privately sent messages.

- **Outing:** This type of bullying is a sharing of personal and private information about a person publicly. When information has been disseminated throughout the internet, one has been "outed."
- **Fraping:** Fraping occurs when someone logs into another's social media account and impersonates him or her. This could be a child or an adult impersonating the person and posting inappropriate content in his or her name. Sometimes this type of bullying is also called "posing" or "catfishing."
- **Masquerading:** Masquerading occurs when bullies create fake profiles so they can harass someone anonymously. The bully is likely someone the person being targeted knows well.
- **Exclusion:** Sometimes direct targeting is not necessary. Students can be bullied simply by being deliberately left out, such as not being invited to parties or encouraged to participate online conversations.

Securing privacy online is one way to prevent cyberbullying attacks. Students also can be selective about who they share personal information with or whose social media friendships they accept. Thinking before posting and paying attention to language and tone can help curb cyberbullying as well. Students should stick together and report instances of cyberbullying if it becomes an issue.

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# HOW TO KEEP CHILDREN OF ALL AGES SAFE

New and experienced parents alike must keep many things in mind when welcoming a child into their homes. Babies do not come with instruction manuals, but kids of all ages need their parents to perform various functions, including keeping them safe.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says unintentional injuries, or those that result from burns, falls, poisoning, road traffic, and drowning, are the leading cause of morbidity and mortality among children in the United States. But even injuries that do not result in fatalities can still be serious.

**Keeping curious kids out of danger requires diligence on the part of parents and caregivers.**

An estimated 9.2 million children per year visit hospital emergency rooms for unintentional injuries. For children 12 months old and younger, falls account for more than half of the nonfatal injuries.

Child safety is not an issue to take lightly, and parents and other caregivers must remain up-to-date on the latest guidelines regarding safeguarding children. The following are some safety tips and areas of concern parents may want to pay particular attention to.

## FALLS

As children learn to move around their world, stumbles are to be expected. However, there are steps parents can take to minimize injuries.

- Keep babies and young kids strapped and secured when using infant seats, swings, car seats, and strollers. Always keep the devices close to the ground, and not placed on top of a table or other furniture.
- Install safety gates at the top and bottom of all staircases.
- Install window guards to prevent window falls.
- Visit only those playgrounds that have installed shock-absorbing surfaces beneath the play equipment.

## WATER ACCIDENTS

A child can drown in mere inches of water. As a result, parents must be extremely diligent to prevent accidents.

- Never leave a child unattended around any source of water, even for just a few seconds.
- Empty all tubs, containers, and kiddie pools of water immediately after use.
- Use locks to seal toilet lids, and keep doors to bathrooms closed.
- Install fences around home pools. Gates should be self-closing and self-latching.
- Always test the temperature of bath water to ensure it is comfortable and will not scald a child.

## TOYS

Toys are a part of a child's life, and they should bring joy, not danger.

- Keep a child's age in mind when purchasing a toy or game.
- Small toy parts can pose as choking hazards for young children, so inspect toys

frequently for chips.

- Each year in the United States, more than 2,800 kids are treated in emergency rooms after swallowing button batteries. Keep the following away from young children: remote controls, singing greeting cards, digital scales, watches, hearing aids, thermometers, children's toys, calculators, key fobs, t-light candles, and flashing holiday jewelry or decorations.

## RISKS FOR OLDER KIDS

As children age, the ways to protect them change. The National Children's Advocacy Center suggests these guidelines.

- Parents should learn all they can about their children's activities and friends.
- Teach children to refuse anything from strangers.
- The buddy system is a good idea when walking home from school or other events.
- Make sure kids know that strangers can be found online, too. Teach kids to avoid sharing personal information with individuals they meet on social media.
- Develop a family safety plan for meeting up when outside of the home.

## CLEAN OUT THE MEDICINE CABINET

Spring cleaning takes on an entirely new meaning when getting ride of expired or unsafe medicines. Even though people may be quick to toss out expired foods or even clean closets of ill-fitting clothing, few individuals exercise such diligence with their medicine cabinets.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration says the medicine expiration date is critical when determining if a product is safe to use and will work as intended. Medications past their expiration date may not be as strong as intended, and even their chemical composition may change, making them risky to keep around. Furthermore, keeping too many medications in a home — particularly pain prescriptions — can lead to misuse and abuse, as the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration says that rates of prescription drug abuse in the United States have risen considerably in recent years.

Some old medications, such as children's cough and cold products, may no longer be recommended for certain ages. Having such medications in the house could prove harmful.

Taking inventory and cleaning out medicine cabinets frees up space and creates a safe home environment.

- Toss away any expired products, whether they are prescription or over-the-counter medicines. The best way to do so

is to bring the medication to a pharmacy for disposal rather than throwing it in the garbage or flushing medicines down the toilet.

- Discard any unmarked containers or pill foils that are not in their original packaging.
- Test any medical devices, such as a nebulizer, blood pressure monitor and glucose testing equipment to ensure they are in working order.
- Replenish commonly used items, such as fever reducers or headache medicines. Make sure there is a supply of bandages and first aid equipment on hand at all times.
- Relocate medical supplies to an area that isn't high in humidity, as steam from showers can speed up the expiration of medication. Storing medicines in the refrigerator won't help, as that is a high-humidity area, too.

Checking medications and removing expired products from the house can prevent accidents related to medications and ensure that all medicines in the house are as effective as possible.



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## HOW TO EASE KIDS' TRANSITION TO A NEW SCHOOL

Being the new kid in school can be a tall order for youngsters. Children who change schools may face a host of challenges that studies suggest can affect both their social and academic development.

In a 2010 study that followed students who entered kindergarten in 1998 through 2007, the Government Accountability Office found that 13 percent of students changed schools four or more times by the end of eighth grade. Such mobility can adversely affect students, as a study of 13,000 students in the city of Chicago found that children who had changed schools four or more times by the sixth grade were roughly a year behind their classmates.

In addition to the toll transferring schools can take on their academic performance, students also may experience difficulty assimilating into their new schools. Though there's no formula to make such transitions easier, parents can try various strategies to help their kids successfully adjust to new schools.

- Speak with children about the transition. Pathways.org, a not-for-profit organization devoted to providing free child development information to parents and health professionals, recommends parents speak with their children about transitioning to a new school. Encourage children to share what excites and worries them about the transition. The way parents discuss transitions can go a long way toward shaping how kids view the change.

- Stay true to your routine. Pathways also recommends parents of students who are transitioning to a new school do their best to replicate first day of school routines from years past. Some familiar traditions might help calm kids' concerns about their first day in a new school.

- Assimilate into a new community before the school year begins. The education resource Edweek.org notes that the most common causes of students changing schools are residential moves related to parents' jobs or financial instability. Parents on the lookout for a new job or those who may need to relocate for financial reasons may want to delay moving until the current school year has ended. Moving between school years gives families time to acclimate to their new communities. That means kids will get time to make new friends. Some familiar faces on the first day at a new school can go a long way toward alleviating the fears children may have.

- Volunteer at your child's new school. Parental involvement at school can have a profound impact on children. The National Education Association notes that children whose parents are involved at school are more likely to perform academically than students whose parents are uninvolved. In addition, such students are more likely to have good attendance and exhibit stronger social skills than children whose parents do not involve themselves in their children's school. It stands to reason that students transferring to a new school may benefit from parental involvement even more than other students, as seeing their parents approach a new school with excitement and energy may inspire children to follow suit.

Transitioning to a new school is not easy for many students. But parents can help smooth that transition in various ways.

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