

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

Editor's Note: Content presented in the Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog is for awareness and informational purposes only, and it is not meant to be a diagnostic tool.

I work with many families whose children in grades K-12 have epilepsy. Youth with epilepsy are 42% more likely to experience bullying behavior than youth with other disabilities. One form of bullying youth experience is cyberbullying. In this edition of the blog, I want to give some tips to parents who do not know where to start to help their youth in dealing with this terrible experience. Additionally, I want to shed some light on how to recognize if cyberbullying is happening amongst your children and share some useful advice on how to talk to little ones about it and how to protect them.

Cyberbullying is a very serious matter to address with school age children of all ages who have access to the internet and social media. It happens all the time and any person can be targeted, no matter their status or age.

The consequences of cyberbullying include potential mental health issues such as anxiety, insecurity, and self-doubt. It is crucial that parents inform themselves about how to protect and educate their children in the case of online bullying.

The information you find on the internet can be useful, but make sure you consult with a specialist if you are concerned about the online safety of your children.

What is Cyberbullying?

Children nowadays are in much more contact with technological devices that give them access to the internet. This allows something called cyberbullying, or the type of harassments that happens online.

According to kidshealth.org, it can be defined as “*when someone uses technology to harass, threaten, embarrass or target another person*”.

Cyberbullying is a significant issue that should be addressed or prevented, when possible. Even adults express the devastating effects cyberbullying has over people who, have the tools to navigate through rough episodes.

Cyberbullying happens through devices and during the time that your children spend online. It has relevance especially over social media, as it is a public space where information spreads quickly and widely.

The other feature of cyberbullying, which makes it so delicate, is that follows people everywhere, and does not have time boundaries.

Let's see some of the signs that can tell you your kid might be experiencing cyberbullying:

- Your kid gets upset after using technological devices.

- Your kid is getting secretive and protective with their online interactions.
- Your kid is experiencing withdrawal from social events they enjoyed before.
- Your kid wants to avoid going to school or group events.
- Your kid is more anxious and gets jumpy when getting messages or notifications.
- Your kid avoids discussions about the internet and technological devices.

How can you talk to your kid about cyberbullying?

No matter if you suspect your kid is experiencing cyberbullying or not. Talking about it is extremely important and beneficial for their education and safety.

You, as a parent or primary caregiver, need to approach the topic with respect, patience, and empathy.

Here are some tips and tricks to achieve a smoother conversation about cyberbullying with children:

- Allow an open and safe space to talk about cyberbullying.
- Do not make the conversation a lesson. Allow a back-and-forth flow and encourage your kids to share their perspectives and ideas about how to remain safe.
- Talk from your perspective and express that everyone can experience cyberbullying. Even you.
- Be clear with the expectations, rules, and strategies that all the family will put in place.
- Ask open-ended questions such as ‘Have you ever heard about cyberbullying?’, ‘How do you feel about it?’ or ‘What do you think we can do to be safe from online harass?’
- If your children are old enough, be very transparent about the real consequences of cyberbullying. You can even mention law and privacy.

To protect your children from cyberbullying, the most important thing is the relationship you build with your children. If they feel safe and confident to share with you any concerns, you can act in time. Be sure to validate their emotions, implement their ideas, and follow the rules as any member of the family would.

Other safety precautions are having blocking or parenting apps that track your kids’ online interactions, having time limits, and establishing sites that are safe to visit.

Finally, ensure they are also getting time outdoors and social interactions every day.

In the case of the safety of your children, I know you are all in. Hopefully, this information will give you a bit of guidance on where to start to be able to have this important ongoing conversation at home.

What would be my #1 suggestion for parents? Be super honest with your children, and transparent.

If your child has experienced direct bullying behavior, indirect bullying behavior, or cyberbullying behavior from a classmate, let’s work together to put an end to the bullying behavior. Contact me at Steve.Hutton@epilepsy-ohio.org if you need help in stopping the bullying behavior that your child has experienced at school.

Sources:

Cyberbullying – kidshealth.org

What Is Cyberbullying? – stopbullyng.gov

Cyberbullying – kidshelpline.com.au

How to talk to your child about cyberbullying – positiveparentingsolutions.com

Talking to your kids about cyberbullying part 1: tools for parents – stopbullying.gov

How do I protect my young child from cyberbullying? – commonsensemedia.org

Editor's Note: The Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog will be distributed and posted weekly.

Always remember – **CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE DAY!**

Steve.Hutton@epilepsy-ohio.org