

# Parents: Watch for signs of online bullying

**We have recently discovered that our daughter has been bullied online. What's the best approach to deal with this?**

Your daughter is not alone. A 2007 study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project reported that 32 percent of teens who use the Internet said they've been targets of what's known as "cyberbullying." Examples include receiving threatening messages; having private e-mails or text messages forwarded without consent; having an embarrassing picture posted without permission; or having rumors about them spread online.

To help prevent problems, know all of your child's accounts and passwords, and occasionally check any blogs they might have, or accounts on Bebo or MySpace, for example. Also, keep the computer in an open area rather than in your child's room to help keep you more aware of your child's time online.

Many parents don't realize when their children experience cyberbullying. According to the Family Resources Web site of symantec.com, a developer of security and anti-virus software, there are some telltale signs. Start asking questions if your child:

- Becomes upset, sad or angry after being online.
- Withdraws from friends or activities they usually enjoy or is unusually sad or depressed.
- Experiences more trouble with academics or expresses anger or dissatisfaction with school or a specific class.

In your situation, you're already aware of the cyberbullying and are wondering, "Now what?"



Unfortunately, there's not a clear-cut response that will work in every situation. But experts with WiredSafety, a nonprofit online safety and help group, offers guidance on its Web site, [www.stopcyberbullying.org](http://www.stopcyberbullying.org). It suggests:

- Encourage your child not to respond in kind. Find out if the online problem is related to a real-life situation that you may need to deal with quickly.
- Sometimes the best practice is to ignore the message, especially if it's a one-time, non-threatening situation. Even then, you might consider blocking the sender to prevent his or her messages in the future.
- Conduct an online search for your child's name, screen name, nick names, phone and cell numbers to find out if anything untoward has been posted about him or her. Children under the age of 13 are protected by the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, which requires that Web sites remove personal information about children immediately.

In some cases, official action is called for — contacting the sender's ISP (Internet Service Provider), for example, or, in cases of threats, calling the police or taking legal action. However, it can be difficult to determine when to take those steps. The parents' guide at [stopcyberbullying.com](http://www.stopcyberbullying.com) (<http://www.stopcyberbullying.org/parents/guide.html>) offers detailed information on how to decide.

*Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu).*



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION  
OHIO AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH  
AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

**For the month of  
September 2008**

By Martha Filipic  
(614) 292-9833  
[filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu)

**Dear Subscriber:** This column was reviewed by Kara Newby, program coordinator for Ohio State University Extension in the Department of Human Development and Family Science, College of Education and Human Ecology.

To receive Family Fundamentals electronically, sign up at our subscription Web site, <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~news/subscribe.php>.

**Section of Communications  
and Technology  
News and Media Relations**  
2021 Coffey Road  
Columbus, OH 43210-1044  
(614) 292-2011

208 Research Services  
Building  
1680 Madison Ave.  
Wooster, OH 44691-4096  
(330) 263-3780

Ohio State University Extension embraces human diversity and is committed to ensuring that all research and related educational programs are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, or veteran status. This statement is in accordance with United States Civil Rights Laws and the USDA. Keith L. Smith, Ph.D., Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Director, Ohio State University Extension TDD No. 800-589-8292 (Ohio only) or 614-292-1868