

## Cyber Wars: Beware of Bullies Online

- Chuck Colson, BreakPoint
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Did you know that your child doesn't have to leave his or her bedroom to face bullying of the meanest sort? According to the Cyberbullying Research Center, almost 21 percent of American youth between the ages of 10 and 18 have been the target of some form of virtual harassment or "cyber-bullying."

Once kids faced the bully only in the schoolyard, but now their cellphones and Facebook accounts — not to mention Twitter, YouTube and a countless array of online chat rooms — have become the staging ground for hateful rumors and slander.

None of this behavior is surprising, given the anonymity and ease of communicating online and via text messaging. According to an Associated Press-MTV poll, 75 percent of young people say that they do or say things online that they wouldn't feel comfortable doing or saying face-to-face. And according to a recent Crimes Against Children Research Center report, 30 percent of American youth report participating in some level of cyberbullying.

This kind of bullying can be as harmless as a mean prank or it can turn deadly, as in one of the latest cases of teen suicide, when cyberbullying victim Jamey Rodemeyer took his own life last September.

In response such troubling stories, federal and state governments have taken steps to help youth protect themselves against cyber slanderers. In March, President Obama held a forum at the White House for students, parents and experts to confront online bullying. The Department of Education hosts an annual conference to help schools address the issue. And at least 30 states have written laws against online harassment.

This is all good, but you and your church are best positioned to protect and help your kids. Some church leaders have already stepped up to the plate, like one pastor in Oklahoma who taught a class for youth on how to use Facebook responsibly.

Another way churches can help is to prepare youth pastors and other caring adults to offer a listening ear to youth who have been bullied online. According to an organization called WiredSafety, only 5 percent of young people would confide in their parents about this issue, but one-third would tell another trusted adult.

And even if our kids don't invite us into their cyberspace, we parents still have a serious responsibility to help them be safe online. First, caution your children against sharing personal information online — like addresses and telephone numbers. Second, talk to your kids: Make sure they aren't participating in even

the mildest sort of teasing or bullying online. The smallest remark can gather steam online and end up hurting another child in ways they couldn't have imagined.

If you suspect your child is the victim of cyberbullying — and there are warning signs you can learn — get help. The Cyberbullying Resource Center online has a lot of very valuable resources. Come to [BreakPoint.org](http://BreakPoint.org), and we'll link you to it. And don't be afraid to talk to your pastor, Christian counselor and maybe even school authorities.

Most importantly, as the Cyberbullying Resource Center points out, "The best tactic parents can take when their child is cyberbullied is to make sure they feel (and are) safe and secure, and to convey unconditional support."

That's always good advice in any situation.

*Chuck Colson's daily [BreakPoint commentary](http://BreakPoint.org) airs each weekday on more than one thousand outlets with an estimated listening audience of one million people. BreakPoint provides a Christian perspective on today's news and trends via radio, interactive media and print.*

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