

Addressing Cyberbullying in an Online World

It may come as no surprise that increased time online in the age of COVID-19 has increased concerns about cyberbullying. Sometimes kids feel powerful by putting another person down, and it's even easier to do now when our children aren't face to face. According to Boston Children's Hospital's Dr. Peter Raffalli, "Bullying of any type is considered an adverse childhood event," which "without intervention can turn into *toxic stress*." But your child may not tell you about their experience because they are embarrassed or scared. Dr. Raffallis' recent article [Cyberbullying in the age of COVID-19: How to protect your kids](#) can help you learn how to see the signs, prevent the bullying and help all the children involved. If you learn your child is suffering from the effects of bullying, seek help from your school to intervene and mitigate the stress on your child.

CAP's strategies help keep children SAFE, STRONG, and FREE from bullying and cyberbullying by practicing with children how to say "No" or "Stop" to stand up for themselves or for their friends. You can help them, too, by starting a conversation. Warn your child that you know kids might be mean online and that it's not OK; let them know you understand how they feel and that no one has the right to hurt them and they should tell you when that happens. They might try not responding to the comments and the person might drop it; they can save the evidence to show a trusted adult; and, they can block the person.

Look for opportunities to role play with your child on how to respond to bullying. Books and movies might present hurtful exchanges between children and you can pause and rehearse together what your child might say in the same situation. You might play the "What if" game and make up your own cyberbullying role play. Or, share a video like [Power of Words](#) to discuss "trash talking online;" nicertube.org has other videos for various ages. In all these ways, your child is empowered to respond naturally and confidently.

But your child may not always be able to handle repeated and targeted bullying by themselves. Emphasize the importance of getting help from classmates and friends and telling you or any "trusted adult" that they need help to solve this problem. Talk with your children about who they would go to for help, whether at home or school, and remind them telling to get help is never tattling.

Growing up is always a challenge, but by practicing prevention skills at home with our children we can help them do their growing up safely and successfully.

CAP, the Child Assault Prevention program, is an international program sponsored locally by the Needham Community Council. CAP empowers Needham's 1st, 3rd, and 5th graders to protect themselves from bullying, stranger danger, and sexual assault by people they know. For more information, contact Cathy Wong at cwong@needhamcommunitycouncil.org.