



SOCIAL BULLETS

The Proactive Parent's Cyberbullying Handbook

Prevention & Intervention Tools for You
To Keep Your Kids Safe

Presented by

Stand for the Silent

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**"I WANT THERE
TO BE A **SAFE SPACE**
FOR PEOPLE WHO
ARE LIKE ME,
WHO DIDN'T
GROW UP BEING
THE POPULAR KID."**

— Nick, *Grade Shaming Survivor*

INTRODUCTION

While social media offers a platform for distributing information and helping people to maintain connections, the *Social Bullets* video you just watched portrays the stark realities of its dark side: the pervasive and damaging impact that cyberbullying wreaks on today's youth and potentially many generations to come.

THE DATA IS STAGGERING, AND THE TOLL ON YOUNG LIVES CANNOT BE MEASURED IN STATISTICS.

As a parent, the increased awareness of cyberbullying's dangers immediately triggers protective instincts asking "What can I do to keep my child safe? What is the crucial information I need? How do I begin a conversation? How do I get others involved?"

The Proactive Parent's Cyberbullying Handbook allows you to begin taking active steps to put a stop to cyberbullying. *The Guide* was developed as a ready-to-use tool for raising awareness, engaging youth and preventing the devastating effects of cyberbullying on mental health and physical well-being.



The pages that follow were written to help you SEE SOMETHING of youth's vulnerability, equip you to SAY SOMETHING, encourage them to reveal experience(s) with cyberbullying, and provide practical tools that assist you in DOING SOMETHING to not only reinforce resilience, trust, and hope, but also serve as a model youth can draw on to grapple with other dilemmas they will inevitably face.

The content is divided into sections, each covering the SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING, DO SOMETHING objectives, which address the three aspects of preventive intervention:

- + **The SEE SOMETHING section** provides a summary of additional information necessary for recognizing and tuning into when youth may be struggling with cyberbullying.
- + **The SAY SOMETHING section** offers a guided pathway to walk you through the often challenging task of engaging youth in difficult conversations about cyberbullying, through creating a safe, supportive, and non-judgmental atmosphere. The information in this section is designed to assist with holding off the immediacy of wanting "to fix" and "to rescue." Instead you will find a gradually probing approach with more easily digestible "bites" of questions, conversation starters, and tips for reaching youth who respond with silence.

Perhaps surprising will be the discovery of just how much distance can be traveled by looking, listening, and asking questions that are constructed and sequenced to invite, instead of overwhelm. Through this format, you will teach and empower youth to "make sense" of what they experience and develop skills to counter cyberbullying—all strategies that can be used with other challenging circumstances they encounter. In addition, your attuned guidance affirms that there are trustworthy adults they can turn to.

- + **The DO SOMETHING section** tackles the broader context of cyberbullying through illustrating ways to join in a cooperative effort with those individuals and organizations that serve youth. Once again, the suggestions are readily accessible actions parents can take to build momentum in communities toward the elimination of cyberbullying.

We must not forget that youth who participate in cyberbullying today are often the highly insecure survivors of some form of past abuse, neglect or bullying. Our current mission is to prepare as many parents as possible to play a part in breaking the cycle of cyberbullying, so that youth can grow up benefitting, rather than being harmed, in their world of peers.



**"BRINGING
AWARENESS TO
[CYBERBULLYING]
CAN MAKE A
HUGE IMPACT."**

— Kumasi, Culture Shaming Survivor

SEE SOMETHING

Changes in youth appearance, demeanor, and behavior are often the tell-tale signs of experiencing challenges they are unprepared to manage. While emotional, social and behavioral shifts are common among youth, noticing a new pattern or cluster is a potent opportunity as a parent to intervene before more urgent signs of difficulty appear. The information and series of steps below are designed to prepare parents to recognize and consider cyberbullying as a possible explanation for emerging concerns. In addition, youth are highly influenced by the reactions of parents and significant others to their distress. Feeling more informed as a parent can help in maintaining a calm and reassuring manner when talking with them.

GETTING READY

1. Watch the video one more time to more fully digest the content and your own reactions. Remember that the video appears in two forms, one with modified and less disturbing content and one without editing potentially unsettling material. Watch both versions, and then decide which best suits your child's level of maturity and tolerance. If uncertain, begin with the modified version and then determine based on the reaction, whether to show the uncensored form.
2. Recall the many forms of cyberbullying:

Rumors	False posts	Fake profiles	Illicit photos
Threats	Advocating self-harm	Accusations	Embarrassing posts

ALL ARE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR USING TECHNOLOGY TO HUMILIATE

3. Know the signs, so you will be more likely to notice the indicators of potential cyberbullying
 - + Stops using technology, despite previous enjoyment
 - + Secrecy about being online or phone
 - + Turns off or changes screen when parent is nearby
 - + Appears nervous and jumpy when using technology
 - + Alludes to or speaks in vague terms about cyberbullying
 - + Avoids usual activities, school, recess, accompanied by complaints of feeling ill

3. Youth don't tell because they are attempting to deny the emotional pain, feel fear or shame about their reactions or are afraid of how others will respond:


- + They don't recognize cyberbullying as inappropriate and/or don't know how to handle
- + They maintain silence while trying to figure out what to do
- + They fear telling will make it worse
- + They regard negative attention as better than none
- + They fear losing online or phone privileges

UNDERSTAND WHAT'S AT STAKE:

Cyberbullying goes straight to the heart of self-respect, self-esteem, self-empowerment, and lifelong resilience!

Cyberbullying, like other forms of abusive behavior, can arouse feelings of powerlessness, shame, anger, guilt, inadequacy and isolation all of which are recognized as contributing to what is known as the experience of trauma. Research has repeatedly linked trauma with self-harming behavior, substance abuse, severe mental health difficulties and significant impairment of relationships. Youth are particularly susceptible as they have not yet had time to develop more mature coping mechanisms, in connection to the fact that their bodies and brains have not yet reached adult levels of development.





**“PARENTS
DEFINITELY
NEED TO ASK
THEIR KIDS,
ARE YOU OKAY?
ASK THEM
HOW THEY’RE
FEELING, ASK
THEM ARE
PEOPLE BEING
MEAN TO YOU?”**

— **Caleigh, Body Shaming**

SAY SOMETHING

Speaking calmly to youth about difficult subjects and sharing observations goes a long way toward reassuring them that their suffering is not invisible, being ignored or is so painful to others that it cannot be addressed. It is important to remember that besides whatever is upsetting them, feeling alone can elevate the circumstances from being troubling to traumatizing.

Also, be aware that all the discussion points are not likely to be covered in one conversation or flow according to plan. Allowing breaks during any of the conversations in this section or the next may be necessary to relieve excess tension, integrate what has been discussed, or regain composure. If the need for a respite is evidenced through impasses in the discussion or signs of emotional exhaustion, describe what is happening and suggest that the conversation be continued at another time, which the parent can insure occurs.

1. **Introduce the video:** Say you have seen a video about how youth create painful drama and harass others through using technology. Explain that you are seeking their opinion about whether it is an accurate portrayal and whether showing it to others could be beneficial.
2. **Watch twice through and observe** facial reactions and posture. Does the youth seem to be avoiding eye contact with the video, looking sad or tearful, holding their arms tightly around the body, curling the body into a

hunched up sitting position, shifting in the seat, fidgeting, changes in reaction between the first and second viewing, slumping shoulders? When speaking about these observations, it is important to only describe, rather than interpret what was seen, and then ask the youth to explain its meaning.

3. **Ask open-ended questions** that convey to youth that their thoughts, opinions and reactions are welcomed and valued. Youth require a lot of support in expressing themselves. Repeat back in your own words what was heard, check whether all has been understood, and then ask for further elaboration. Refraining, from over-reacting in facial expression, tone of voice and posturing, is more likely to encourage open discussion.

QUESTIONS THAT START CONVERSATION:

- + Do you think this really happens?
What makes you say this?
- + How did you feel while watching the video?
- + Do you know people who have encountered these situations?
- + What were their experiences?
- + How did they feel?
- + How did you feel when you heard about or saw their experiences?
- + What do you think causes some youth to be targeted?
- + Do you know youth who do these harmful behaviors?
- + Why do you think they do it?
- + Has anyone you know ever asked you for advice about what to do?

SAY SOMETHING (cont.)

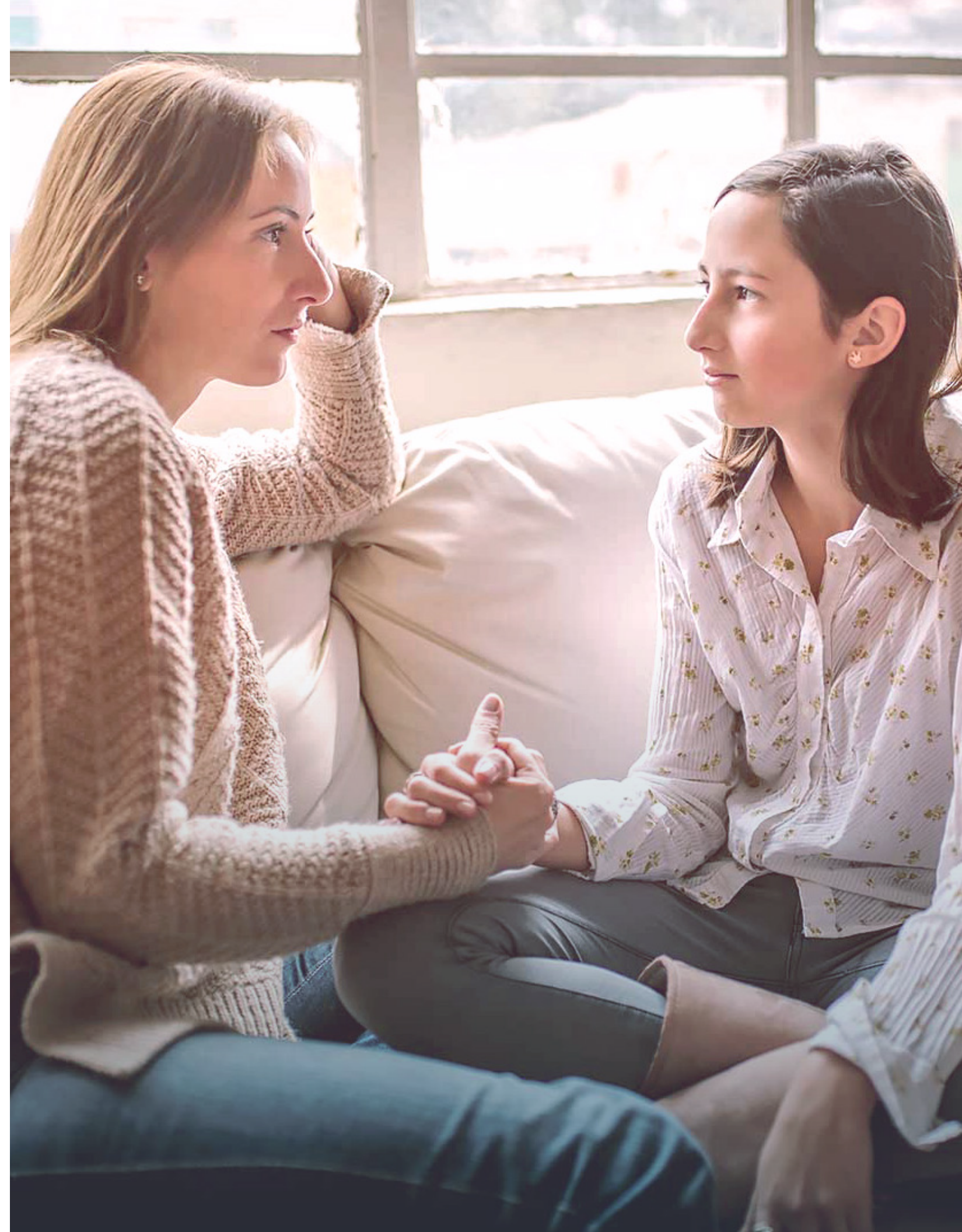
- + Did the youth seek help and what assistance they receive?
- + Has anything like this ever happened to you? (Give examples of body shaming, culture shaming, grade shaming, sex shaming)

IF YOUR YOUTH REFUSES TO TALK, and you have seen warning signs, err on the safe side and trust your well-earned intuition. The risk of possible conflict does not outweigh the missed opportunity to prevent further harm, as well as to build trust and skills in relating to one another. The following are recommended steps for approaching youth who maintain silence, in an unintentionally misguided way to protect themselves or you. **DO NOT expect this conversation to go smoothly.** Your goal is to communicate your unwavering commitment to safety and well-being and to demonstrate this by remaining respectful and non-reactive in your communication.

- + Remind youth of the depth of your care for their health and that a major role of being a parent is to offer protection and safety, as well as act as a resource for helping them learn to provide these measures for themselves.
- + Advise youth that in the end they can choose to speak or remain silent. Your request that they listen to what you have to say and consider relieving themselves of carrying the burdens and possible dangers that come with silence.

- + Restate your specific observations and say you know these are indicators of stress that youth, and even adults, encounter.
- + Ask that they re-evaluate the obstacles or risks in talking with you. Propose at least testing out a possible conversation by sharing their concerns with you about speaking.
- + Explain that you recognize that what you identify as next steps will feel like a violation of their privacy, but that at this point your concerns for their safety take priority. Also raise that your concerns are about situations no one should have to handle alone, not even adults.
- + Request calmly that they allow you access or show you their text messages, email, internet history, and deleted messages. Clarify you are only looking for danger signals that stand out and not to delve into their personal communications.

In the event that youth continue to take a self-protective posture, matter-of-factly state that you are going to exercise your role as parent and take whatever steps are possible to gain entry and temporarily block access to devices, again emphasizing that their safety takes priority over school work and recreation. **REFRAIN** from getting engaged in argumentative and guilt inducing reactions from youth, as these are generally reflexive reactions based on fear.



DO SOMETHING

Helping youth address cyberbullying provides an opportunity to teach that “doing something” is about acting in a way that bolsters self-respect and contributes to creating the possibility for change. Youth need to be clear that no one controls another person’s choices and behavior, as well as that success of an action is not measured solely by the other person’s response.

FIRST STEPS FOR PARENTS

These next steps set the stage for a calming and supportive atmosphere in which to hold the discussion of details and reach understandings. They also work best for enhancing the learning, options and decision-making in the next section.

- + **Continue to Observe** body language and **Listen Carefully** to verbal language used to describe **Thoughts and Feelings**.
- + **Validate** by paraphrasing and letting youth know that their thoughts and feelings are in line with how a person feels when abused. Use this opportunity to reinforce that thoughts and feelings do not define who or what a person is.
- + **Clarify** by asking questions---“I’d like to understand more about.....Could you tell me more about.....?”
- + **Review** unacceptable technology behavior (refer to the *Social Bullets* video and to information contained in these pages).
- + **Reassure** that youth experiencing cyberbullying are not to blame for the hurtful behavior of others toward them and disrespect is never justified.
- + **Record details, save, and print** copies of actual event(s), in case they are needed in connection with further action. Particularly if legal authorities need to be involved, the authentic messages are crucial in substantiating verbal reports.

STEPS TO TAKE WITH YOUTH PARTICIPATION

The purpose of listing alternatives for action is to assist youth in learning to identify options, develop skills, and evaluate potential outcomes/consequences. Parents retain responsibility for the final decision(s) based on severity of the incident(s) and the youth’s capabilities. Remind youth that each step taken provides information and wisdom for determining the need for next steps, which is a critical understanding when it comes to decision-making.

Below is a listing of possible choices that parents can review with youth, in order to determine a plan for intervening in episodes of cyberbullying:

- + **Youth ignores without retaliating action.** Parent talks with youth about ways to shield themselves from cyberbullying through the use of breathing techniques, relaxation skills and positive reminder statements.
- + **Youth rehearses request to stop**, either by drafting an email or text or by practicing a verbal statement to those who cyberbully, including a brief, but firm request to stop so that everyone can move forward without inevitably negative outcomes. The

statement is best worded in a positive tone, (e.g. “This behavior ends up hurting and causing trouble for all of us”). Let’s start now by ending it and moving forward with our lives. We don’t have to be friends, but we can respect each other’s need to go about our lives without harm.” Potential pushback and soothing emotional reactions in-the-moment is anticipated prior to any action taken. Assure of parent availability for follow-up discussions to tend feelings and determine if additional or revised plans are necessary.

- + **Youth warns cyberbullies** that parents have seized computer/phone and are taking action that youth does not have any control over.
- + **Use technology tools** to protect accounts and block posts.
- + **Inform technology company** of infraction.
- + **Contact school principal or guidance counselor** (most states laws require schools to have reporting protocols).
- + **Contact parents of offending youth** using non-accusatory language (e.g. “Something has come to my attention that I want to share with you that involves our children, and I am hoping we can figure out together how we want to approach it.”)
- + **Contact police** and make a report in situations where there are threats of violence, sexually explicit photos, violation of privacy, stalking or hate crime.
- + **Consult a mental health clinician, physician, or school based professional** to receive further guidance in circumstances to avert further escalation and possible crisis



MOVING INTERVENTION BEYOND THE HOME

Cyberbullying is not just a problem existing between individual youths, and will not end only with attempts to resolve situations one-by-one. As the *Social Bullets* video depicts, the problem is already widespread. Efforts to prevent current and future generations from suffering the debilitating consequences start with raising awareness and spreading the necessary information to others, so they too can join in the campaign to end cyberbullying. At the same time, we know that as a parent your life is already full of competing demands and never enough time, so in this section and the one following, we are providing manageable action steps and pre-prepared emails that can be sent to key community based organizations working with youth.

ACTIONS FOR INVOLVING SCHOOLS

Because schools bring youth together for extended periods of time, under circumstances that many students find intimidating and overwhelming, the environment unintentionally can serve as breeding ground and spreading point for cyberbullying. At the same time, parents are often in a better position than school personnel to discover that cyberbullying is occurring. Collaborative efforts between parents and schools, rather than either working individually hold much more promise for effective prevention and intervention.


- + **Forward** *Social Bullets* video to PTA President, **Request** follow-up meeting, **Suggest** committee to address cyberbullying.

- + **Send** *Social Bullets* video to school principal and guidance counselor, **Inquire** about cyberbullying policies, data collection and monitoring, and **Schedule** meeting to focus on increasing awareness and implementing policies.
- + **Propose** classroom or school wide parent meeting about awareness and action steps.

ACTIONS FOR INVOLVING COMMUNITY

The statement “it takes a community to raise a child” is a commonly accepted truth among those whose lives bring them into contact with youth. By taking part in raising awareness, engaging energy, and focusing action on cyberbullying, parents can contribute to the likelihood that their own child and the youth they interact with will not be caught in a downward spiral of cyberbullying in the community.

- + **Forward** *Social Bullets* video to at least three other parents, and make follow-up calls to initiate further discussion.
- + **Post** interest in forming a planning group of parents to increase community awareness and identify next steps.
- + **Invite** members of police department and school personnel to a neighborhood parent meeting concerning the rise in cyberbullying.
- + **Send** *Social Bullets* video with an email to the attention of city or county council chairperson to increase awareness and inquire about plans for action.



**“CHECK IN...
TRULY CHECK
IN, ASK THEM:
HOW ARE YOU?
HOW ARE
YOUR KIDS?”**

— Epiphany, *Sex Shaming Survivor*

Are you left wondering if there is more to learn or where to get immediate assistance? These additional resources can add to your understanding and ability to intervene.

ONLINE ORGANIZATIONS

- + Centerforparentingeducation.org
- + [Common Sense Media](http://CommonSenseMedia.org)
- + Connectsafely.org
- + Cyberbullying.org
- + OnGuardOnline.gov
- + [PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center](http://PACER'sNationalBullyingPreventionCenter.org)
- + StandForTheSilent.org
- + Stopbullying.gov

BOOKS

- + [*25 Myths about Bullying and Cyberbullying*](#) | By Elizabeth K. Englander
- + [*Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard*](#) | By Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin
- + [*It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*](#) | By Danah Boyd

GETTING IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE

- + 911 for Imminent Danger
- + [CRISIS TEXT LINE: Text "HOME" to 741741](#)
- + [National Alliance of Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#)
- + [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255](#)
- + State or County Community Mental Health Associations
- + State or County Crisis Center phone numbers

ABOUT STAND FOR THE SILENT

Stand for the Silent, a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization, was founded in 2010 by a group of high school students in Oklahoma City, OK, after they heard about the loss of Kirk and Laura Smalley's son Ty Field-Smalley. At eleven years old, Ty died by suicide after being suspended from school for retaliating against a student who had bullied him for over two years. Stand for the Silent exists as a platform to allow the Smalley's to honor their son's memory, while carrying out their mission of raising awareness, offering education and providing tools to prevent other families from experiencing tragedies similar to theirs.

Since May 2010, Kirk and Laura Smalley have visited 1,593 schools and addressed 1,620,000 students. Their program, Stand for the Silent, uses the assistance of student leaders to engage students in absorbing factual information alongside the emotional realities and painful consequences of bullying. On March 10, 2011, Kirk and Laura met privately with President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama at the White House before participating in the first White House Conference on bullying. With the rapid rise of self-harm related to cyberbullying, the Smalley's want to ensure that this injurious behavior receives the wide-ranging attention it deserves.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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For the past 45 years, Karen has provided psychotherapy and related mental health services to children, teenagers, adults, couples and families. In addition to her private practice, she served as the Clinical Director for the Family Support Center, a non-profit agency that offered services to students, parents, and schools. In her role as Clinical Director, she clinically supervised mental health practitioners in 150 public and private schools in Washington, DC and the surrounding localities in Maryland and Virginia. Prior to starting a private practice, she worked in a variety of settings, including child welfare, schools, hospitals and family service agencies. Karen completed her Master's Degree at the University of Michigan and currently lives in the Washington Metropolitan area. She is also the parent of two grown children with whom she spent innumerable hours guiding challenging conversations.

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SocialBullets.org

Stand for the Silent

For more information about the *Social Bullets* campaign or other Stand for the Silent Programs, email us at info@standforthesilent.org, or visit standforthesilent.org