

## Parents, elders can help kids overcome cyberbullying: Expert

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Cyberbullying, a downside of technology and the digital world, aggravated by the covid-19 pandemic, could be overcome with parents and other older family members being the role models for their children or wards. "Set healthy boundaries for tech at home. Come up with an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) for the home. One that you as mum and dad will adhere to as well, and build it together as a family," said Barry Lee Cummings, co-founder of Beat the Cyberbully.

He also said: "Teach your children not to respond to cyberbullying and report these. Cyberbullying is power shit. If you react and respond, you give the power straight back to the aggressor, with the message that he is getting to you, which, of course, encourages him." Cummings established the initiative Beat the Cyberbully in 2014 in the UAE with his business partner Wayne Denner.

It is a support to families encountering the evils of cyberbullying. The initiative's goal is to achieve Internet safety, primarily by opening up healthy communication channels between the youth, their families and everyone they interact with.

Cyberbullying that include spejorative/prejudicial language and rumours via the internet was discovered by the Light online harassment monitoring organisation, to have worsened by 70 percent within the first four months of the on going pandemic with 40 percent toxicity in on line gaming, 900 percent hate speech against China and the Chinese via Twiter, and 200 percent traffic to the hate sites.

Cummings discussed children's protection against cyberbullying as it is this age group which are the easy prey: "As we move further into the digital age, the questions about how much our children should be online become less and less clear. The reality we currently face is that our children have no choice but to be online. This means that the likelihood of encountering cyberbullying is almost guaranteed." For this, youth empowerment becomes the norm. Implementing agreed upon AUPS (home Internet usage rules) are among the fundamentals, for "long gone are the days of "do as you are told." With youth empowerment comes open communication channels where judgement and punishment are non-existent for children at times need the listening ear on "whatever is in their minds, positive or negative; be that outlet."

That listening ear covers parent-induced conversations on what the children know in the digital world from which their creativity and inventiveness may be discovered and consequently honed: “Be teachable too.” These conversations also reveal the bad elements they receive and imbibe from unregulated or excessive online platforms. For this, Cummings said it is a must for parents with online gamer-children to impose the “No headphones policy.”

“It might be annoying for them and you, but you would be surprised at some of the language used on shared gaming servers. If you allow your 11-year-old to play Call of Duty online, they will be online with people of all ages and all backgrounds. Aside from the potential bad language used, these shared servers are also known as places that predators target young people,” he cited.

The parental listening ear, Cummings argued, shall help children generate healthy personal social interactions or relationships and therefore avoid cyberbullying.

Relative to Cummings’ suggestion is the 2014

“The Long-term Cost of Bullying” at the web site of the UK’S Economic Social and Research Council. It discusses a study by University of Warwick Developmental Psychology and Individual Differences Prof. Dieter Wolke. Among the key conclusions are: “harsh and over protective parenting, and poor sibling relationship increase the risk of being bullied at school; and, “mothers of bullied children experienced stress during their pregnancies compared to the non-bullied, suggesting that antenatal factors may alter how children react to peer stress.”

On the AUPS, Cummings said: “We have to model what we want from our children. It is not a bad thing either, as many of us also need to redress our own tech usage.”

He said another AUP is the “No devices inside the bedrooms” which means no Internet toxicities and temptations that have been found to impact relationships among family members: “Create a charging station at the living room or kitchen for all the smart devices including laptops. It is better for the whole family.”