Kids and Tweens Cybersafety Guide: Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is bullying someone online and with cell phones, game devices and on game sites. It's when one kid or tween uses technology as a weapon to hurt another kid or tween.

Sometimes, when kids and tweens aren't careful or don't know enough about using a certain technology safely, they hurt others by accident. They might have been kidding around or they might have forgotten to include a ☺ or "jk" (for just kidding), and the other person took it seriously. Maybe they sent it to the wrong person and instead of their friend who would understand it was just a joke, it went to someone else on their buddy list or a stranger. The person who got it might not know it was only a joke and get scared or angry.

But most of the time it's on purpose. When kids and tweens are angry or hurt, they often send mean messages or do mean things to hurt others. They might think that it's okay because they didn't start it, but it's never okay to be mean online.

Many times kids and tweens will pretend to be someone else when they are doing mean things online. They might hack into someone's account or use their password without permission and say mean things to your friends pretending to be you. Or they may disguise their identity and not let you know who they are. You never know if they are your best friend or worst enemy.

One of WiredSafety's Tweenangels said that "cyberbullying hurts your heart." Her best friend got into a fight with her and was very hurtful to her online. Words can hurt a lot. If the cyberbully tries to make it look like you did something mean to your friends, it can cost you all your friends.

The best way to avoid being a cyberbully is to double check your IMs, text messages and emails before sending them. Did you address it to the right person? Did you leave out a word that changes the meaning of the message? Is it possible that they will think you were mean, even if you weren't trying to be mean? Treat each other with respect. Follow the WiredSafety "Internet Golden Rule" and never do anything online that you wouldn't do offline.

The best way to avoid being the target of a cyberbully is to protect your password, not share personal information that they could use to hurt you and to follow WiredSafety's Internet Golden Rule. By treating people the way you want to be treated, it is less likely that they will try and hurt you.

If you do everything you are supposed to do, but are being cyberbullied anyway, remember to Stop, Block and Tell! WiredKids.org and StopCyberbullying.org say to "Stop, Block and Tell!" if anything hurts your feelings or upsets you online. Stop – don't answer back, Block the person or message and Tell! a trusted adult (like your parents). Otherwise, you are feeding the bully! They want you to reply so they can be mean again.