Talk to Your Kids

Why would someone say that about me?

Some facts
- 43% of kids age 13-17 have been cyberbullied.
- Most victims know the person bothering them.
- 53% of teens admit sending a hurtful message.
- Only 10% of bullying victims tell their parents.
- Several states have made cyberbullying a crime.

Hurting someone with a simple click.
A second at the keypad can cause long-lasting damage. As more and more kids discover new ways to share information, they have unfortunately found more and more ways to harm each other. Just as nasty comments in a playground can cause a lot of pain, cyberbullying can really hurt our kids.

What is cyberbullying?
It happens when kids use their phones or the Internet to create and send harassing or humiliating messages and images. Nasty comments, lies, and embarrassing photos, videos, and polls can be spread widely through instant messaging (IM) or phone texting, and by posts on social networking sites. It can happen anytime – at school or home – and can involve large groups of kids. The combination of the boldness created by being anonymous and the desire to be seen as "cool" can cause a kid who normally wouldn't say anything mean face-to-face to show off for other kids.

Why it matters
Nothing crushes kids' self-confidence faster than humiliation. And just imagine a public humiliation sent instantly to everyone they know. Sadly, hurtful information posted on the Internet is extremely difficult to prevent or remove, and millions of people can see it. Most cyberbullying happens when adults aren't around, so parents and teachers often see only the depression or anxiety that results from being hurt or bullied. This emotional damage can last a lifetime.

Common Sense says:
- Give them a code of conduct. Tell them that if they wouldn't say something to someone's face, they shouldn't text it, IM it, or post it.
- Ask your kids if they know someone who has been cyberbullied. Sometimes they will open up about others' pain before admitting their own.
- Keep online socializing to a minimum.
- Explain the basics of correct cyber behaviour. Tell your kids that things like lying, telling secrets, and being mean still hurt in cyberspace.
- Tell kids not to share passwords with their friends.
- Monitor their use. See what they're posting, check their mobile messages.
- Tell your kids what to do if they're harassed. They shouldn't respond or retaliate, they should block bullies immediately, and they should tell you or an adult they trust. They shouldn't delete the messages because in persistent cases, the content should be reported to a cell or Internet Service Provider.
- If your kid is doing the bullying, establish strict consequences and stick to them. That goes for mean or sexual comments about teachers, friends, and relatives.
- Remind them that all private information can be made public. Posts on friends' walls, private IMs, intimate photos, little in-jokes can all be cut, pasted, and sent around. If they don't want the world to see it, they better not post or send it.
- Tell kids to think before they reveal. Kids experiment with all sorts of activities, many of which should not be made public. Remind your teens that anything they post can be misused by someone else.
- Remind them they aren't too old to ask for your help. There are things some kids can handle on their own, but sometimes, they just need help. Coming to their parents isn't baby-ish, it's safe