

# How Can Parents Prevent Bullying and Monitor Kids' Tech Activity?

Dr. Michele Borba



**D**r. Michele Borba is the parenting expert on NBC's "Today" show. Her 23 books include *Building Moral Intelligence* and *The Big Book of Parenting Solutions*. Her proposal, "Ending School Violence and Bullying," was signed into California law in 2002. See [www.micheleborba.com](http://www.micheleborba.com).

**Tom Lickona:** *What are three things parents can do to raise kids who are kind?*

**Michele Borba:** First, consciously model kind behavior. Whenever you do a kind act, tell your child how good it makes you feel.

Second, be explicit about your expectations: "Unkindness is hurtful. I expect you to treat everyone kindly."

Third, look for opportunities for your child to be kind and then acknowledge it: "That was a very kind thing to do."

**How can parents help schools reduce bullying?**

**MB:** Go to your school's website or handbook and review the rules on bullying with your kids. Ask them to teach you the bullying prevention skills they're learning at school, for example, what to do when they see somebody being bullied. If the school has a speaker about bullying, try to be there and then discuss at home what you learned.

**What if your child is accused of bullying?**

**MB:** Don't be quick to say, "Not my kid!" Get the facts. Ask your child to describe what the behavior in question looked like. What type of behavior are you dealing with—fighting, put-downs, excluding, threatening, racial slurs?

Set up a conference with the teacher or counselor. Talk to people who see your child in different settings. Are they observing the bullying behaviors?

If you conclude that your child is bullying, get expert help—the school counselor, a psychologist, or an outside person. You need a specific plan to stop this behavior. Your child needs to know you will be monitoring him or her.

Most of all, take it seriously. Norway's Dan Olweus found that 60% of males who were bullies in grades 6-9 were convicted of at least one crime as adults. Nearly four in ten had three or more convictions by age 24.

**What about cyberbullying?**

**MB:** As soon as kids are going online, teach them to communicate with other people online *in the same way* they would face-

to-face—with respect. That's the way they would want to be treated. As one mom said, "The difference between right and wrong is the same on the Internet as it is in real life."

Teach kids the repercussions of whatever they say on the Internet. An offhand comment can be instantly forwarded to dozens of classmates with the click of a button.

If kids think they're being cyberbullied, they should share this information right away with a parent, teacher, or other adult they trust.

**How can parents monitor their kids' use of social media?**

**MB:** Get educated about your child's virtual world. Take a course or workshop or ask the school's technology expert. You can't monitor what you don't understand.

## Parenting Practices That Foster Bullying

- Lack of warmth and involvement
- Permissive attitude toward child's abusive behavior
- Reliance on physical punishment

D. Olweus, "Bully/Victim Problems in School: Facts & Intervention," *European Journal of Psychology of Education* 9, no. 4 (1997): 495-510.

Know all family passwords, user/screen names, and accounts. Know how to log onto your kids' sites, create personal profiles to "friend" them, and use the browser so you can visit and check their online world.

Microsoft recommends that with kids under 10, you *sit with them* when they use the Internet. Their recommended age to sign up for social web sites is usually 13 and over.

**W**ith kids using the Internet on their own, announce up-front that you will check their online activity. Tell them to let their friends know this. When kids know that they're being monitored, they're less likely to engage in hurtful behaviors.

**What specific rules or guidelines would you recommend to parents?**

**MB:** These are my "6 P's of Internet Safety":

1. **Parental Presence:** A parent will check your online activity.
2. **Public:** The computer is public; anyone

and everybody can see what you write. You are representing yourself and our family online by where you go and what you say. Your password and accounts will be public to your parents, and we will monitor your online presence together.

**3. Posts:** There are no "take-backs," so don't click unless you want the world—including Grandma—to see your post.

**4. Privacy:** Insist that your children *not* share personal information such as their real name, address, phone number, or passwords with people they meet online. Encourage kids to *keep their passwords secret*—even from friends. Don't store passwords in your backpack, wallet, or on a file in your computer. Criminals look there first. Never provide your password over e-mail.

**5. People:** NEVER physically meet anyone offline that you've met online. In real life, people may be very different from what they seem like online.

**6. Please tell:** If you ever feel uncomfortable about something online, please tell me.

**How can parents hold kids accountable to family rules about the Internet?**

**MB:** *Have kids sign a pledge* to follow the rules. Have frequent chats to follow up.

**Daily Internet time limits.** Give Internet freedom based on your child's past trustworthiness and age. Increase those limits slowly as you verify trust.

**"Walk-By" Rule.** Announce that if *at any time* your child covers the screen, closes programs, or quickly turns off the computer, Internet privilege is lost. Do walk-bys as often as needed.

**"Collect and Drop."** Have your teens drop personal cell phones, iPads, laptops, etc. into a designated basket each night. Review personal posts, texts, or emails periodically—reading only enough so your teen knows you're checking often and that you will limit or remove online privileges if warranted.

**Axe the page.** As a last resort, you can contact the social website your child uses and ask them to remove the page. Check out Internet filtering tools, such as Windows Live Family Safety, as a complement to parental supervision. ■