

Stay Smart and Stay Safe

I use social media all the time, and so there's probably way too much about me out there for others to find. I Google my name every now and then but there's gotta be more I can do to keep tabs on it all, right?

—Wyatt, 15, Montana

12 Tips for Protecting Yourself

If you've been cyberbullied, maybe you wonder if there was anything you could have done to keep it from happening—or anything you could do to keep it from happening in the future. Being cyberbullied is *never* your fault. But you *can* take steps to protect yourself. In this chapter, we give you **12 practical strategies** that can help reduce the chances that you'll be cyberbullied. All of these tips are related to the overall idea of thinking carefully and acting wisely regarding what you share with others and who you interact with online. You probably won't be able to prevent every single instance of harassment or mistreatment, but these suggestions will definitely reduce the likelihood of it happening.

**"I don't believe society understands what happens when everything is available, knowable, and recorded by everyone all the time."
—Eric Schmidt, Google**

1. Be Careful with Content

The next time you text, tweet, email, or post, take a minute to think about the fact that *anything* you do online could eventually be seen by *anyone*. Even though you may think that only certain people can see your content, you never really know for sure. Once a piece of information enters cyberspace, you lose control over it. If you take a picture of yourself and send it to someone or post it on your Tumblr feed or Facebook profile, you no longer have complete control over what happens to that picture. It might end up on your principal's desk, in the hands of a police officer, or even on the front page of your local newspaper. (Or we might end up using your post in one of our presentations—in front of thousands of your fellow teens—as an example of “what NOT to do”!)

If content does get into the wrong hands, it can have consequences that you never expected. You may have heard about embarrassing or incriminating pictures and videos that prevented teens from winning scholarships, getting into their chosen universities, or landing their dream jobs. You also probably know that there could be somebody out there who envies you or has a problem with you for some reason. That person might decide to use those pictures and videos (or any other content you share online) to make you look bad, make your life miserable, or both.

Obviously, you don't want to live in fear that every post or picture could lead to some sort of chain reaction that ruins your entire future. We don't want you to live that way, either. But it is smart to be thoughtful about what you put out there. Trust your gut, exercise wisdom, and learn about the various ways you can protect yourself.