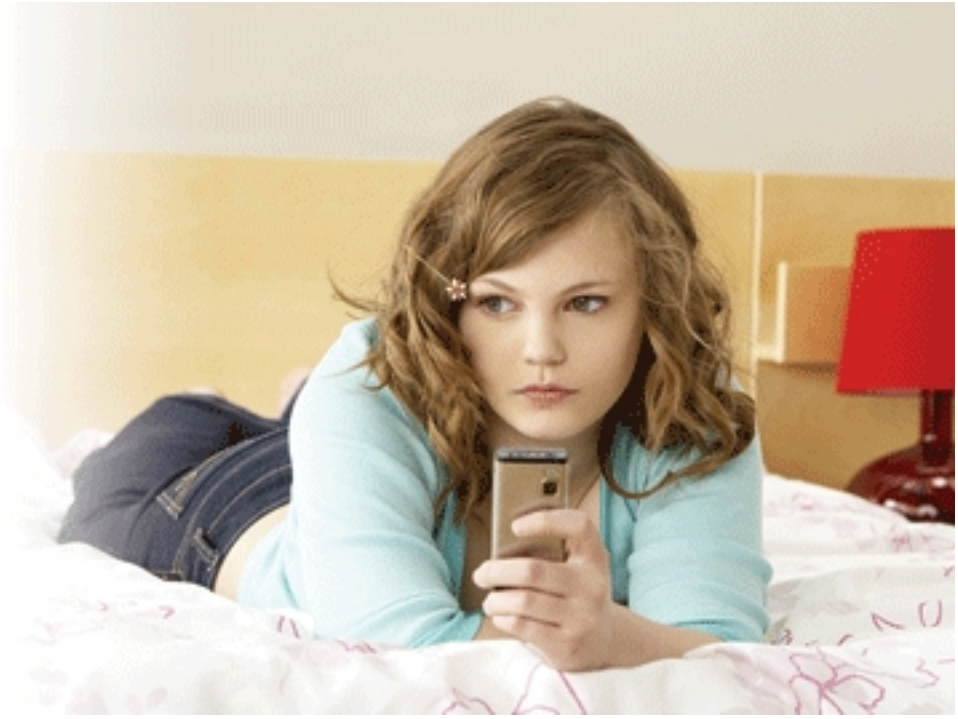

Most parents are familiar with traditional bullying that takes place at school and on the playground, but as life has gone digital, so has bullying.

“Cyberbullying, bullying that occurs through technology like computers and mobile devices, is often harder to detect than traditional bullying,” says pediatrician Dr. Gwenn Schurgin O’Keeffe of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). “The bully isn’t immediately visible and may not even be known to the victim.

“Because of this, cyberbullying is often more upsetting to victims, with even more profound and long-lasting effects,” said Dr. O’Keeffe.

While the anonymous nature of the digital world does pose a challenge to identifying cyberbullies, O'Keeffe notes, parents can take an active role toward combating this 21st-century problem.

Here are tips for parents to get a handle on cyberbullying, whether your child is a victim, a bystander or even participating in the bullying:

• Monitor your child's digital technology use. Be on the lookout for behaviors like quickly switching screens and having multiple passwords and accounts.

• Teach your child to come forward if he or she knows a friend is bullying others or being bullied. Being a bystander helps perpetuate the cycle and continue someone else's pain.

• You may think your child is safely using a digital device in the next room, but any child online is at risk for being bullied. Not all children are going to let you know if there's a problem, including teenagers. If your child is acting withdrawn, evasive or unusually sad — especially after using a digital device such as a computer, video game or mobile phone — ask if everything is okay. Regularly converse to open the line of communication.

• Cyberbullies may think they are acting anonymously, but they can be tracked by authorities. If your child is a victim, save the offending emails, IMs and texts, and get the school involved if possible.

• If you worry your child is in serious danger, or the other parents refuse to help end bullying, call the police.

• Find out what your child's school's policies are on bullying, cyberbullying and digital devices. If the rules are insufficient, talk to the teachers and principal about establishing sensible regulations.

• Don't raise a bully! Foster empathy by talking regularly about how actions and words affect others. Set a good example by always treating others with respect yourself, both online and offline.

• Help children develop constructive strategies for getting what they want that don't include teasing, threatening or hurting others.

• Don’t assume that a normally well-behaved child is guilt-free. The faceless digital world makes it easy for even good kids to sometimes be mean.

More information about cyberbullying can be found on the AAP parenting website, www.healthychildren.org.

— *Statepoint*