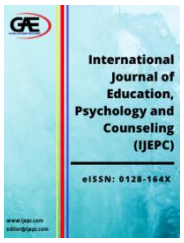
International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling
IJEPC
EISSN : 0128-164X
Volume 11 Issue 64 (September 2026) PP. 1218-1236



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY AND COUNSELLING (IJEPC)
https://gaexcellence.com/ijepc

PARENTAL STRATEGIES IN RESPONDING TO CHILD CYBERBULLYING: INSIGHTS FROM MALAYSIAN PARENTS' REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES

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Article Info:

Article history:
Received date: 07.07.2026
Revised date: 23.07.2026
Accepted date: 20.08.2026
Published date: 22.09.2026

To cite this document:

Zahari, N. S. I. M., Hamid, S. N. F. A., & Samad, S. A. (2026). Parental Strategies in Responding to Child Cyberbullying: Insights from Malaysian Parents' Real-Life Experiences. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counselling, 11*(64), 1218-1236.

Abstract:

As children spend more time on social media, online games, and messaging apps, cyberbullying has become a growing concern for Malaysia families. This study set out to examine how parents respond when their children experience cyberbullying. Adopting a qualitative interpretivist framework, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with eight Malay parents from Kedah, Terengganu, Negeri Sembilan, and Johor. Through thematic analysis, five key strategies came to light: maintaining open communication, keeping an eye on digital activities, offering guidance on online behaviour, practising authoritative parenting, and staying actively involved in children's lives. Among these, communication stood out as the most frequently used approach. Through regular conversations, parents were able to pick up on shifts in their children's emotions, create a space where kids felt comfortable opening up, offer reassurance, and advise on how to handle difficult situations. Monitoring, meanwhile, involved a mix of strategies; checking devices, setting time limits, keeping track of online interactions, and staying alert to any changes in behaviour. Parents also made a point of leading by example when it came to using technology responsibly, setting firm but fair boundaries, and reaching out to schools or professionals whenever extra support was needed. Taken together, the findings suggest that effective parenting in this area calls for a thoughtful blend of emotional warmth, attentive supervision, digital literacy education, and ongoing engagement, all of which help build children's resilience and keep them safer online.

International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling
IJEPC
EISSN : 0128-164X
Volume 11 Issue 64 (September 2026) PP. 1218-1236
DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.1164065 **Keyword:**
Child Cyberbullying, Digital Parenting, Parental Strategies

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Introduction

In today's globalised and modernised era, the widespread adoption of social media, gaming platforms, as well as instant messaging applications has reshaped the landscape of childhood environment. Undoubtedly, these tools bring benefits and positive development in technological skills to minors, they have also spawned myriad cyberbullying cases that transcends physical boundaries, inflicting far greater harm than traditional harassment. In this case, parents, who are among the closest persons to children, must serve as frontline guardians to protect their children, not only in physical environment but also in digital spaces which is recognised as "borderless world".

Like other countries, digital devices have rapidly become widespread among children in Malaysia, regardless their gender, ethnicity, races and cultures. It argues that things related to digital seems to be public concerns over youth online safety and have continued to escalate. Local studies separately corroborate two key findings: (1) where one verifies the harms of problematic online engagement and; (2) the other confirms the necessity for parents to maintain vigilant supervision and communication in their child-rearing (Abd Hamid et al., 2024; Wan Maizon, 2024). Due to these situations, parents adopt four types of measures to address these risks, monitoring their children's online activity, limiting daily screen time, providing emotional support, and coordinating with schools. The core factors that shape parents' implementation of these measures are parents' own digital literacy and personal parenting perceptions. Even though these measures seem cannot eliminate the risks completely, but it can reduce the possibility of children to be victimised. At the same time, it shows parents' concerns and responsibility towards their children.

There are many research have been conducted on cyberbullying all over the world since technology has been recognised as the main element in the country's development, including Malaysia. Until now, there are numerous core causes and various social impacts of this phenomenon have been discovered. Yet, no absolute solution is found—this is because to combat cyberbullying, it takes a village to protect the child. Meaning that, every single person, especially adults, have the responsibility to protect their children. However, two major research gaps remain underexplored by the academic community. Conducting research on parental coping strategies to fill these gaps carries critical value, and the current global policy sphere is also calling for the establishment of cross-stakeholder collaborative frameworks to address harms caused by emerging technologies. On the other hand, there is a question that can be pondered whereby 'what if parents or adults are the perpetrators in cyberbullying children?'. Thus, itt requires holistic research to be undertaken.

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EISSN : 0128-164X
Volume 11 Issue 64 (September 2026) PP. 1218-1236

This study is driven by the need to fill the research gaps in the field of family interventions for child cyberbullying in Malaysia. It focuses on coping strategies adopted by local parents, analyses their intervention practices, and aims to reveal digital family dynamics, refine digital parenting, and support the environment of local child protection policies.

Literature Review

This paper proposes that parents play a critical role in preventing and responding to their children's involvement in cyberbullying. Existing academic literature has sorted out four categories of intervention strategies: open communication, monitoring of online activities, active participation, and adaptive parenting styles. These strategies can help children achieve three positive values: online safety, emotional health, and resilience.

Based on reviewing previous research works, parent-child communication is one of the most commonly cited core strategies in the anti-bullying field. It lays a foundation of trust, openness, and emotional support, making children willing to proactively share their online experiences and concerns. In research undertaken by Offrey and Rinaldi (2017), they discovered that regular communication centered on children's daily activities, peer relationships, and online contacts can reduce two types of bullying risk which are denigration and harrassment. This is consistent with research conducted by Helfrich et al. (2020), whereby they cliamed that open communication fosters a safe atmosphere that supports children to proactively seek for help. This is because children are still young and fragile. They will not have enough capability and capacity to protect themselves; it is parents' and adults' responsibilities to protect them.

Within Malaysia's research context, driven by widespread societal-level concerns over cybersecurity and digital threats, most local parents adjust their parent-child communication behaviours. Multiple empirical studies have verified the protective value of relevant parent-child strategies: Abd Hamid et al.'s 2024 local Malaysian study of parents proposes that active communication and digital monitoring are core mechanisms for defending against online risks; Helfrich et al. (2020) found that parents can foster their children's resilience through three types of pathways; Kim et al. (2024) note that warm, supportive parent-child interactions can improve adolescents' self-esteem, reducing their probability of being involved in cyberbullying as either a victim or a perpetrator.

Parental monitoring of children's online activities is a core strategy to prevent children from encountering internet risks. This practice allows parents to track their children's online behaviours in real time and identify cyberbullying threats promptly. Helfrich et al.'s 2020 study divides online parental monitoring into two categories: active and restrictive. In discussing further these two concepts, active monitoring requires parents to participate and sometimes involve in their children's online activities, regularly communicate about digital information and instil awareness, as well as set a positive example such as write positive words and reactions to others. Through shared internet use and regular communication, parents cultivate their children's sense of digital citizenship, as well as help them make responsible choices about their online activities.

On the other hand, restrictive parental monitoring indicates the child-rearing practice of managing children's access to online platforms and applications through three types of measures, which are: (1) parental control tools; (2) privacy settings; and (3) screen time limits. While these measures can reduce the probability of children being exposed to harmful contents,

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EISSN : 0128-164X
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situations and consequences, they gradually lose effectiveness as children's technical abilities improve. For this reason, the academic community has proposed a balanced solution that combines monitoring and communication. A 2024 study by Kim et al. also corroborates this view: only sustained discussions centered on technology use and online risks can achieve both child safety and parent-child trust.

A 2024 Malaysian study led by Wan Maizon shows that excessive involvement of adolescents in harmful online activities undermines their physical and mental health. Based on this finding, parents should adopt active monitoring measures that are both supportive and protective. Beyond monitoring, interventions can also be implemented by setting rules for online conduct and clarifying the consequences of various problematic behaviours including cyberbullying. A 2020 study by Helfrich et al. corroborates this conclusion: such parental engagement can foster a trusting environment where adolescents feel comfortable proactively seeking help from their parents. In addition, this approach also allows parents to teach adolescents four specific, actionable strategies to cope with cyberbullying.

Malaysia has identified parental involvement as a core protective element to mitigate a range of online risks that children face, including harmful digital exposure and behavioural vulnerability. A 2024 study by Abd Hamid et al. shows that to respond to complex online threats, local parents are increasingly adopting protective, preventative digital parenting strategies. Parents can empower children by cultivating their problem-solving abilities; a 2024 study by Kim et al. corroborates that regardless of whether children are bullying victims or bystanders, mastering coping methods can strengthen their resilience. Parental involvement also includes three core components, among which are encouraging empathy.

Parenting style is another core variable that influences children's susceptibility to cyberbullying and their resilience. A 2019 study by Gómez-Ortiz et al. notes that authoritative parenting, which is characterised by high warmth, high support, and moderate control, acts as a protective factor. It helps children develop good emotional and social skills, reducing their likelihood of becoming either victims or perpetrators of cyberbullying.

In addition to the above discussion, authoritarian parenting which has been recognised and acknowledged as the core features which focused and emphasised on strict discipline and low emotional responsiveness, raises the risk of adolescents perpetrating or experiencing cyberbullying. Even though permissive parenting shows completely different style as compared to authoritarian, but parents who practiced this parenting style also create similar consequences. This is because permissive parenting style always being associated with insufficient supervision and unclear behavioural boundaries, increases adolescents' susceptibility to online risks. Furthermore, research undertaken by Gómez-Ortiz et al. in 2019 revealed the similar findings that stated, excessive psychological control worsens vulnerability to cyberbullying, while parental support can optimise adolescents' online experiences. This study believed that this situation also applicable in the context of children.

By reviewing a number of previous research, this study discovered that there are four effective parental intervention strategies to address children's cyberbullying, which are: (1) open communication; (2) moderate monitoring; (3) active participation; and (4) supportive parenting. These strategies not only help parents to identify and handle bullying incidents, but also strengthen children's resilience, digital skills, as well as their emotional health. As time

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goes by and technology has upgraded, these elements continue to serve as the core support for building a safe online environment for children, especially when they are in the digital world.

Method

In answering the objective of this paper, qualitative research has been conducted, involving eight Malay parents from Peninsular Malaysia, namely Kedah, Terengganu, Negeri Sembilan, and Johor. This study does not limit the participation involving parents from other ethnics; however, only Malay parents show interest and able to cooperate in this study. Informants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that they possessed live experiences and insights regarding parental responses to cyberbullying incidents involving their children. Further, this study was guided by an interpretivist research philosophy to explore and understand the current strategies employed by parents in addressing cyberbullying, including the approaches, practices, and support mechanisms utilised to protect and support their children from being the victims. Based on the demographic profile developed, this study has been participated by Malay parents aged between 25 and 50 years. In addition, to further ensure the systematic research process and accuracy of data, ethical considerations were prioritised throughout the research process. Therefore, this research was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) for approval. The REC reviewed the research objectives and research design to ensure compliance with ethical standards and the university's code of conduct.

Findings

As indicated earlier, this study interviewed eight Malay parents to explore and understand their live experiences in dealing with cyberbullying incidents involved by their children. Based on the interviews conducted, this study identified several key parental strategies employed in responding to incidents of cyberbullying involving their children. After an analysis conducted, the findings revealed that there are five major themes, namely communication, monitoring, digital conduct, authoritative parenting style, and parental involvement. These strategies reflect the various ways parents seek to protect, support, and guide their children when navigating cyberbullying experiences and online risks. This study also argued that parents have adopted both preventive and responsive approaches, combining emotional support, supervision, behavioural guidance, and active engagement to promote children's safety and well-being in digital environments. The detailed discussion has been presented in the following sub-sections.

Communication

The findings show that one of the most common strategies used by parents to address instances of cyberbullying involving their kids is communication. Many parents talked about how communication is already a part of their everyday lives, not just during the occurrence. Parents can better identify any problems early on by staying in touch with their children's experiences and feelings through regular contact.

A number of parents revealed that they routinely check in with their kids by asking straightforward questions about friends, instructors, and school. These discussions, which frequently take place after school or in casual settings, enable kids to progressively share their experiences. Some parents have made it a habit to constantly inquire about and closely monitor their child's day.The statements are exemplified below:

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> "So, in the morning before going to school, *we already tell him, 'Be good, be careful,' and so on.*" (Informant 1, female, 49 years old, Kedah).
>
> "Then when picking them up from school […] *'okay, what did you eat today? How was it? How was the teacher? What homework do you have? […] Did the teacher scold you?' So, we always ask."* (Informant 1, female, 49 years old, Kedah).
>
> *"Almost every day, when we pick them up from school, we will ask."* (Informant 2, female, 28 years old, Kedah).
>
> "*What did you do at school today? Are your friends okay? Are the teachers okay? So, every day we will check on them* […] It has become a routine […]" (Informant 2, female, 28 years old, Kedah).

The findings also demonstrate that parents typically promote honest, two-way communication with their kids. When they felt something wasn't quite right, some parents would ask detailed questions or make room for more in-depth conversations. Children feel more at ease discussing their experiences, including delicate topics, because to this open communication. The statements are exemplified below:

> "If they say everything is normal at school, *I will still ask from A to Z.*" (Informant 2, female, 28 years old, Kedah).
>
> *"So, we have a lot of open discussion about it* […] *discussion on bullying always happens."* (Informant 2, female, 28 years old, Kedah).
>
> *"I always ask him, 'Did anything happen today? Did anyone say anything to you?'"* (Informant 3, female, 25 years old, Terengganu).
>
> "I really *try to make it a habit to talk to my children every day* […] *sometimes during meals, in the car, or during relaxed moments.*" (Informant 6, male, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).

Additionally, parents use communication to help their kids comprehend cyberbullying and to clarify circumstances. To assist children, understand that bad behaviour from others is not their fault, parents typically offer straightforward and compassionate explanations. Additionally, they offer guidance on how to handle such circumstances, such as urging kids to better control their emotions or disregard hurtful remarks. The statements are exemplified below:

> *"I explain slowly to them what people show on the internet, that the bad things are not our fault."* (Informant 3, female, 25 years old, Terengganu)
>
> "He came to me. So, I discussed with my wife what we should say to him. *So, we communicated and advised him to calm down first; the video and everything, my wife and I deleted it.*" (Informant 4, male, 41 years old, Terengganu).
>
> "*We inform her that this is about cyberbullying*, but we don't want her to dwell too much on the issue […] the way to handle it is mostly we tell her to just ignore it." (Informant 5, female, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).
>
> *"I try to have open discussions about online safety* […] *how to handle his emotions and what to do if he faces this kind of situation*." (Informant 8, male, 30 years old, Johor).

In addition, parents utilise communication to offer encouragement and emotional support. They encourage their kids to remain resilient and not be unduly impacted by bad situations. In order to ensure that their children feel supported and not alone, several parents also advised their kids

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to constantly talk about their issues rather than keeping them inside. The statements are exemplified below:

> *"We try to give her back her motivation, so she doesn't feel down because of small issues like that."* (Informant 5, female, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).
>
> *"I always remind her to take care of herself, manage her emotions, and to tell me immediately if anything happens."* (Informant 6, male, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).
>
> "I told my child to inform me first […] *if she experiences something like cyberbullying, tell me immediately and don't keep it inside."* (Informant 6, male, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).

In some cases, parents also needed to adapt their communication approach depending on the child's emotional state. For example, when the child was not ready to talk, parents would wait until the child had calmed down before gently approaching them again. Some even used creative ways to encourage their child to open up, showing the effort taken to maintain communication. The statements are exemplified below:

> "When he has calmed down […] *only then we call him [...] we ask him several times [...] if he does not want to answer, we try to persuade him in other ways […] if he tells us, I give him ice cream [...] only then does he become brave enough to communicate."(*Informant 7, female, 28 years old, Johor).

Monitoring

Although communication was the main finding, parental monitoring techniques are frequently used in conjunction with it. The results show that one of the most important tactics used by parents to control their kids' online behaviour is monitoring, particularly following instances of cyberbullying. Many parents talked about regularly monitoring their kids' internet use, either by watching how they behave online or by examining their devices. This surveillance is frequently carried out to make sure kids aren't exposed to dangerous situations and to stop similar instances from occurring in the future.

Several parents shared that they regularly check their children's phones, including messages, social media interactions, and browsing history. This allows them to stay informed about who their children communicate with and what kind of content they are exposed to. The statements are exemplified below:

> "For WhatsApp*, I myself will check their WhatsApp and their Telegram."* (Informant 1, female, 49 years old, Kedah).
>
> "Mostly*, we will check [...] check her WhatsApp, what she is chatting about with her friends."* (Informant 5, female, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).
>
> *"We check her Google search [...] TikTok as well, we look at what content she reacts to [...]"* (Informant 5, female, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).
>
> *"For sure I frequently check his phone, what he searches in history, and also look at it [...] messages from friends, we also need to check."* (Informant 8, male, 30 years old, Johor).

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In addition, some parents implement stricter control by limiting access to devices and applications. This includes not allowing children to own personal phones, restricting usage to certain platforms, and setting time limits for screen use. These measures are taken to reduce the child's exposure to potential online risks. The statements are exemplified below:

> *"I have not given him any phone yet. Whatever he needs, he will just use my phone."* (Informant 3, female, 25 years old, Terengganu).
>
> *"Only YouTube Kids is allowed […] If he wants to play, I set it for another 5 minutes, then it stops […] By 9 o'clock, it is already turned off."* (Informant 3, female, 25 years old, Terengganu).
>
> *"My wife and I do monitor, and we set time limits for phone or tablet use. We can also set passwords if they want to access other apps."* (Informant 4, male, 41 years old, Terengganu).

Furthermore, parents also monitor their children by physically supervising their online activities. May prefer their children to use devices in shared or open spaces, allowing them to observe their behaviour directly. Some parents would stay close to their children while they are using gadgets or playing games, ensuring that they can intervene if needed. The statements are exemplified below:

> *"When using the internet, it must be in an open area. He is not allowed to use it alone in the room."* (Informant 3, female, 25 years old, Terengganu).
>
> *"If he plays games, he must sit in front of me… we give 2 hours of play time […] that is how we monitor him."* (Informant 1, female, 49 years old, Kedah).
>
> *"I will always monitor it […] every time he is using it, I try to stay close to him."* (Informant 7, female, 28 years old, Johor).
>
> *"Then we also supervise by checking whether he has any video recordings left or anything like that."* (Informant 4, male, 41 years old, Terengganu).

Monitoring is not limited to digital activities alone but also includes observing the child's emotional and behavioural changes. Some parents mentioned that they became more alert after the incident, paying closer attention to their child's mood, silence, or unusual behaviour, which may signal underlying issues. The statements are exemplified below:

> *"After that incident, I became more alert […] I am more aware now[…] I observe her mood, her behavioural changes […]"* (Informant 6, male, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).
>
> *"When he is playing and suddenly becomes quiet, I will ask, 'what's wrong, boy?'"* (Informant 1, female, 49 years old, Kedah).

Digital Conduct

As part of their preventive strategy, parents reported monitoring as well as controlling and directing their kids' online behaviour. In addition to establishing guidelines, parents also set an example of proper behaviour, demonstrating how children's daily routines and parental guidance influence their digital behaviour.

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Modeling proper gadget usage, particularly during family interactions, is one of the most important aspects of digital conduct. In order to set a positive example for their kids, parents stressed the significance of cutting back on screen time and being present during important occasions, such mealtimes.The statements are exemplified below:

> "What my wife and I usually practice is*, during mealtimes there must be no phones.* Whether it is me or my wife*, no one is allowed to use phones. If the children ask us to read books or anything, I will not use my phone. We want them to see that we are focusing on them."* (Informant 4, male, 41 years old, Terengganu).
>
> *"When it is family time, all phones are put aside […] we want to show a good example."* (Informant 5, female, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).
>
> "For example, *during meals, we try to reduce phone usage […] If we ourselves do not control it, it is difficult to ask the children to follow… I believe children also observe how we live."* (Informant 6, male, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).
>
> *"I also do not use my phone during meals […] we show good role models in front of our children […] no gadget uses during eating time."* (Informant 7, female, 28 years old, Johor).

Parents also practiced setting limits on digital usage to ensure that children do not become overly dependent on devices. This includes controlling screen time and encouraging children to engage in offline activities as part of a balanced lifestyle. The statements are exemplified below:

> *"We give 2 hours of play time […] When they are at school, they can use it, but when they come back, I no longer use the phone."* (Informant 1, female, 49 years old, Kedah).
>
> *"We will ask them to do chores […] 'boy, help sweep the rubbish,' […] so we are not always on the phone."* (Informant 1, female, 49 years old, Kedah).
>
> *"For YouTube, we can set a timer […] around 15 minutes to 30 minutes […]"* (Informant 7, female, 28 years old, Johor).

Furthermore, the findings show that digital conduct is also reflected through guidance on appropriate online behaviour, where parents actively remind their children to think before posting and to manage their emotions in digital spaces. The statements are exemplified below:

> *"If you want to post anything […] think first […] Is it necessary to reply?"* (Informant 2, female, 28 years old, Kedah).
>
> *"If you feel angry or sad, do not immediately post based on emotions."* (Informant 6, male, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).

At the same time, parents also emphasised values such as respect, empathy, and responsibility when interacting online. This reflects an effort to shape children's moral understanding in digital environments, particularly in avoiding behaviours that may harm others. The statements are exemplified below:

> *"We must be moderate. Respect others […] If we watch any videos that humiliate someone, do not laugh."* (Informant 3, female, 25 years old, Terengganu).

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"If a friend makes a face or image […] do not mock or post it […] We must think before doing anything." (Informant 6, male, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).

"I teach him to respect others on the internet […] If we do not like false information about us, then we should not spread stories about others out there." (Informant 8, male, 30 years old, Johor).

"I remind him to behave well with others." (Informant 7, female, 28 years old, Johor).

Authoritative Parenting Styles

In addition to controlling digital behaviour, some parents have taken on more authoritative roles in establishing explicit guidelines and standards for online conduct. The findings generally show that the majority of parents use an authoritative parenting approach, which is defined by a harmony of warmth, direction, and control. Since parents typically blend firmness with open communication when dealing with cyberbullying situations, there was no evidence to imply the existence of entirely authoritarian or permissive approaches. Many parents take a balanced approach to controlling their kids' online behaviour, setting explicit guidelines while keeping lines of communication open and encouraging. Setting boundaries, such as restricting screen time and controlling phone usage, and making sure that these rules are constantly followed with family members is something that parents frequently emphasise. The statements are exemplified below:

"Yes, there must be time off for all of that." (Informant 1, female, 49 years old, Kedah).

"For example, when we go out to eat, phones should not be brought […] If brought, they are allowed, but must not be used […] When we say, 'okay, stop using the phone,' we also stop using ours […] Alhamdulillah, they follow because they are already used to it." (Informant 1, female, 49 years old, Kedah).

"We cannot allow children to be too absorbed in their phones." (Informant 5, female, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).

In addition, parents also demonstrated a strong emphasis on guiding their children to think before acting, particularly in online interactions. Rather than imposing strict control, they encourage their children to reflect on their behaviour, especially when dealing with emotions such as anger. The statements are exemplified below:

"Yes, I always remind them, if they want to post anything […] think first […] Is it necessary to reply? Is it driven by emotion?" (Informant 2, female, 28 years old, Kedah).

"If at that moment they are feeling angry, put the phone aside first […] Because when we speak with emotions […] we may say things that we will later regret […]" (Informant 2, female, 28 years old, Kedah).

The findings also show that parents priorities open communication and emotional support, allowing children to express their thoughts and feelings while still maintaining parental guide. This reflects a nurturing environment where children feel heard but are still guided by appropriate limits. The statements are exemplified below:

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"We are not too strict, not too indulgent […] I choose to be gentle but still set limits." (Informant 3, female, 25 years old, Terengganu).

"I explain things to him properly […] I also give him space to express what he feels…" (Informant 3, female, 25 years old, Terengganu).

"I really try to make it a habit to talk to my children every day […]" (Informant 6, male, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).

At the same time, some parents described their approach as situational, where flexibility is applied depending on the context while still maintaining consistent boundaries. This shows that authoritative parenting is not rigid but adaptive to the child's needs and circumstances. The statements are exemplified below:

"I feel like I'm 50-50 […] sometimes we are more relaxed, but even in that relaxation, there is still firmness." (Informant 5, female, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).
"It's not like I need to hold her phone all the time […]" (Informant 6, male, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).

"During school days I am very strict […] but it depends on the timing […] During school holidays I am more relaxed and open […]" (Informant 7, female, 28 years old, Johor).

"I wouldn't say I am very strict because I prefer to be open with my children. But I still set clear rules." (Informant 7, male, 30 years old, Johor).

Involvement

Lastly, direct parental participation reinforces these tactics. The results show that when their children experience cyberbullying, parents eventually become more involved in helping and guiding them rather than remaining passive observers. Parents regularly interact with their children to help them make sense of their experiences, and this involvement is frequently demonstrated through ongoing conversation and emotional support. Some parents, for example, made an effort to reassure their kids and urge them to avoid internalizing criticism. The statements are exemplified below:

"So, I told him, 'Just ignore it, it's only a game, why take it to heart so much." (Informant 1, female, 49 years old, Kedah).

Similarly, another parent emphasised the importance of self-worth, reminding the child that external opinions should not define their identity:

"Whatever people say about us, only we know ourselves […] just keep to yourself […] just let people talk." (Informant 1, female, 49 years old, Kedah).

At the same time, involvement also takes the form of guiding children to better understand what constitutes cyberbullying. Some parents highlighted that children themselves may not always recognise harmful behaviours, and therefore require parental explanation and clarification:

> *"Like okay, what her friends are doing […] so we ask about it, sometimes children themselves do not realise that it is actually a form of bullying."* (Informant 2, female, 28 years old, Kedah).

Parents also demonstrated involvement by being physically present and engaging together with their children during digital activities. This shared engagement creates a sense of safety and allows parents to provide immediate guidance we needed:

> *"If he wants to watch, he will watch together with me."* (Informant 3, female, 25 years old, Terengganu).
> *"We will use gadgets together […] there is companionship when they are using it."* (Informant 7, female, 28 years old, Johor).

Beyond supervision, some parents took a more educative role by teaching their children appropriate ways to interact online, particularly in promoting kindness and respectful communication:

> *"I always teach him how to be kind on the internet […] how to treat others properly."* (Informant 3, female, 25 years old, Terengganu).

Furthermore, parental involvement also extends to seeking external support when necessary. In more serious cases, parents reported taking proactive steps such as informing teachers or seeking professional help to address the situation.

> *"We also informed the teacher […] we also took action, brought [the child] to the hospital […]"* (Informant 5, female, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).

> *"If this continues, the mother may go to the school […]"* (Informant 5, female, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).

At a more personal level, some parents emphasised the importance of consistently checking in on their child's emotional condition, showing concern and openness in communication:

> *"I ask about her condition more frequently."* (Informant 6, male, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).

According to LPPKN, one of the core strategies parents should adopt involves actively overseeing their children's digital activities while also providing structured guidance through both regulation and education. This means setting reasonable time limits on device use, making use of parental controls, and teaching kids about online ethics and staying safe in digital spaces. The statements are exemplified below:

> *"Children's digital usage also needs to be monitored and guided through time limits, screen time settings, parental control, and education on online ethics and safety. That is important. If parents attend workshops, children should also be exposed to this information."* (LPPKN, Kuala Lumpur).

This suggests that effective parenting in the digital age isn't just about restricting access, it's also about giving children the understanding and awareness they need to navigate online spaces confidently. To that end, LPPKN has rolled out practical programmes aimed at encouraging healthier digital habits within households. One such effort is the "No Mobile During Dinner"

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initiative, which nudges families to step away from their screens and reconnect with one another in person. The statements are exemplified below:

> *"LPPKN introduced the 'No mobile during dinner' programme [...]* meaning they collaborated with several restaurants. So, for example, *when parents go to participating restaurants, they are provided with a box where they place all their mobile phones during meals, and during that time they are not allowed to use them."* (LPPKN, Kuala Lumpur).

These kinds of initiatives highlight the value of setting clear boundaries around technology use while also carving out space for genuine family connection. LPPKN further stresses that awareness alone isn't enough, it has to be woven into everyday routines and upheld consistently. The statements are exemplified below:

> "Many programmes have been delivered, but what is lacking is that *parenting systems need to be improved from the beginning.* Awareness comes after programmes are delivered, *but awareness must be sustained and practiced consistently. It cannot be that after attending a programme today, we do not practice it tomorrow."* (LPPKN, Kuala Lumpur).

Beyond monitoring and sticking to routines, the findings also underscore just how crucial emotional closeness and communication are when it comes to reducing cyberbullying risks. LPPKN observed that while parents may still care deeply for their children, a lack of genuine interaction and quality conversation has strained relationships. The statements are exemplified below:

> *"What is lacking in them? Attention. In the past, love was still there because bonding existed. There was more communication, more storytelling—does bedtime storytelling still exist? No, it does not*." (LPPKN, Kuala Lumpur).

This points to a worrying trend: without meaningful engagement, like shared talks or bedtime stories, children may be less likely to open up to their parents if they're dealing with cyberbullying. That's why prioritising quality time and strengthening emotional ties matters so much. The statements are exemplified below:

> *"That is why we emphasise bonding and quality family time. Even 10 seconds of meaningful interaction can help regulate 'happy hormones' and reduce cortisol. Positive emotions increase again. That is why family relationships and communication need to be strengthened*." (LPPKN, Kuala Lumpur).

LPPKN also highlighted the need for a parenting style that's both supportive and measured. Parents are encouraged to be a source of reassurance rather than fear, since being overly controlling or reacting harshly might push adolescents away. The statements are exemplified below:

> "Even as parents, *our role is to be there to support and listen.* Adolescents will understand this. *But why do adolescents' distance themselves from parents? Possibly because they feel they will be monitored or scolded. So, you have to build a good*

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relationship with your children first, and then discipline can be applied appropriately. Briefing must start from early childhood." (LPPKN, Kuala Lumpur).

This reinforces the idea that a balanced approach, one that blends emotional support, open dialogue, and firm but fair discipline, needs to start from an early age. Additionally, LPPKN has developed structured educational resources aimed at both parents and children. Among these are the PEKA module, which focuses on building early awareness through interactive learning, and the KASIH module, which centres on instilling values like empathy, respect, and healthy communication. The statements are exemplified below:

> *"Various programmes and modules have been developed* to educate children and parents about the dangers of cyberbullying and online safety. *We use the PEKA module, which is an early awareness education program delivered through interactive activities.* (LPPKN, Kuala Lumpur).

> *"Then there is the KASIH module,* which is designed to cultivate values of love, empathy, and so on. Within the KASIH module itself, we emphasise positive communication. Why is positive communication important? *Because sometimes as parents, we think we are communicating, but is it actually positive communication?* Are we only giving instructions or punishing? *Communication style, emotional awareness, and mutual respect, children must also be respected.* That is important. This includes online and offline integrity, and healthy relationships within family and community." (LPPKN, Kuala Lumpur).

Discussion

The empirical study conducted in this paper takes as its core goal the exploration of the current coping methods that parents adopt when their children encounter cyberbullying. The study analyzes and summarises five core parental coping strategies, all of which integrate the logic of proactive prevention and reactive response, to protect children from cyberbullying and its potential negative impacts.

Among the five types of parent-child online intervention measures analyzed in this study, daily communication is the most frequently adopted. It breaks the misconception that parent-child discussions of children's online lives are only used to respond to crises and serve as a routine parent-child interaction embedded in everyday life. This form of communication enables parents to track their children's emotional states, identify early warning signs of risks, and foster a safe environment where children are willing to share actively. It falls under the active parental intervention model proposed by academia, whose core is to help children understand online risks without undermining parent-child trust and emotional intimacy. Previous studies (Clements et al., 2024; Ademiluyi et al., 2022) have confirmed that open communication can act as a buffer against cyberbullying and boost children's psychological resilience. A recent study (Doty et al., 2024) also corroborates that active intervention can support sustained media monitoring and promote communication-focused parenting. Close parent-child bonds, clear communication, and attentive supervision are all effective safeguards against cyberbullying.

This study finds that parent-child communication serves three core functions when children navigate cyberbullying: providing children with emotional comfort, clarifying their experience of being bullied, and guiding them to master coping methods. If parents adopt practices such

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as informing their children that they bear no responsibility for the bullying they experience and encouraging them to cope actively, this aligns with the responsive parenting style that centers on prioritizing emotional support over punishment. Research by Clements et al. (2024) corroborates that strong parental support can alleviate the anxiety and depression triggered by cyberbullying, and boost children's coping confidence and ability. Accordingly, it is recommended that stable parent-child communication habits be established as early as possible; a trusting parent-child relationship will motivate children to actively seek help when they encounter difficulties.

Beyond parent-child communication, parental monitoring is another core line of defense that protects children from online harm, encompassing common practices such as checking children's electronic devices, reviewing their online communication records, setting limits on internet usage time, and blocking specific applications or websites. These observations align with the conclusions of previous studies: a 2024 study by Doty et al. found that parental regulation is clearly associated with digital parenting awareness, active mediation, and targeted content restrictions; a 2022 study by Teriba and Dawson noted that adolescents who receive insufficient parental guidance on screen time and data sharing face a significantly higher risk of cyberbullying than groups with high levels of parental involvement. This study further expands the connotation of monitoring: rather than only focusing on children's device usage, it also requires tracking changes in children's moods or behaviours that may signal emerging problems. Effective monitoring is layered and must cover multiple dimensions of children's lives: the digital, physical, and emotional domains.

This study finds that to guide children's online behaviour, it is necessary to abandon the traditional practice that only focuses on setting rules and conducting monitoring. Instead, four values should be taught to children: empathy, respect, sense of responsibility, and self-control. Three requirements must also be clearly defined: pausing before posting, managing one's emotions, and avoiding actions that harm others. Parents need to model prudent technology for use within the family. This conclusion aligns with the digital citizenship literacy framework put forward by Ademiluyi et al. in 2022, which is the core leading direction in the field of cyberbullying research. Preventing problematic online behaviour is inherently a long-term process of ethical cultivation and cannot be achieved through supervision and regulation alone. This study finds that the group of parents participating in this empirical research generally prefer the authoritative parenting style, whose core characteristics are setting clear behavioural boundaries and rule standards while providing children with warm emotional support and maintaining open communication. A 2024 study by Clements et al. notes that this parenting style can effectively prevent cyberbullying by fostering trust and emotional safety between parents and children, building children's self-control, and sustaining appropriate parental oversight. A study by Doty et al. published the same year also corroborates this finding: care combined with reasonable monitoring can reduce the likelihood that children will perpetrate cyberbullying, and active mediation can strengthen their self-regulation abilities. Very few parents in this study's sample adopted the extreme parenting styles of being overly strict or overly permissive. The former leaves children afraid to open up to others when they face online harassment, while the latter raises children's level of exposure to digital risks. Authoritative parenting is precisely a sound middle path that balances child protection with the development of children's independence.

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This study proposes that parental involvement is another core supporting force that helps adolescents cope with cyberbullying. This argument breaks the stereotypical perception that parents are only passive observers of online incidents. Parents can proactively take four types of actions: accompanying their children, sorting out details of bullying incidents, participating in their children's digital activities, and seeking external support when necessary. They should also treat bullying as an issue requiring long-term attention, rather than a one-time emergency. A 2022 study by Ademiluyi et al. confirms that this type of involvement can cultivate adolescents' resilience, digital awareness, and online problem-solving abilities.

The relevant findings of this study are anchored within the analytical framework of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the core of which centers on three fundamental psychological needs: relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Parents satisfy the need for relatedness by building trusting connections through open communication and emotional support; they meet the need for competence by empowering children via teaching internet behavioural norms and cyberbullying coping strategies; and they flexibly adjust the intensity of their supervision to reserve sufficient independent space for children, ultimately laying a solid foundation for children's self-regulatory abilities and their resilience when encountering cyberbullying.

The digital parenting observation findings of this study fully align with the TECH Parenting Framework, which includes four core dimensions: technology, engagement, control, and habits. We matched every type of observed parental behaviour to these dimensions one by one. Drawing on the 2022 study by Ademiluyi et al., we propose that effective digital parenting requires balancing four core elements: support, supervision, education, and responsible technology management.

This study finds that Malaysian parents should not rely on a single strategy to cope with cyberbullying. Only by implementing an integrated, holistic multi-strategy approach that combines communication, monitoring, guidance, authoritative parenting, and active engagement can parents both immediately protect their children from harm and cultivate their children's core competencies such as digital resilience over the long term. This finding not only supplements existing relevant academic understanding but also provides support for digital parenting policies and intervention programs.

Conclusion

This study reveals that cyberbullying in Malaysia is taking on increasingly organized forms, frequently originating from school settings and flourishing on platforms such as WhatsApp and Roblox. Although this research offers an in-depth look at experiences of 8 families, it also makes clear that relying on parental strategies alone falls short when it comes to tackling cyberbullying effectively. The findings highlight institutional backing, for example from schools, counselling services, and relevant agencies who play a significant part in shaping how parents handle cyberbullying incidents. When these support systems are both accessible and responsive, parents tend to feel more assured in taking proactive steps, such as reporting cases, seeking professional advice, and working collaboratively with schools and authorities to resolve issues. That said, weaknesses in institutional coordination and limited awareness of available resources may undermine the effectiveness of parental responses.

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The digital landscape offers countless opportunities, but for young people, ot has also become a space filled with hidden dangers. As the findings suggest, safeguarding children calls for more than just technologies solutions, it requires the collective effort of parents, teachers, schools, and policymakers to spot warning signs early and join forces in response. Robust agency support systems are essential for ensuring timely intervention, providing emotional care for victims, and upholding cyber safety policies consistently. Recognising that even a seemingly minor act, like a sticker of an ignored message, can constitute a form of serious aggression allows us to step in more effectively and protect the emotional health of the younger generation.

Despite the richness of the findings, several limitations should be acknowledged:

Methodological Approach: This study relied entirely on a qualitative design. While this approach yielded deep, nuanced insights into parental experiences, the findings remain descriptive and cannot be used to draw statistical conclusions about the broader Malaysian population.

Participant Demographics: The sample consisted largely of mothers. Fathers, often occupied with work commitments as primary earners, were less available for interviews. As a result, although the study offers a thorough understanding of maternal strategies, the paternal viewpoint is notably absent.

Topic Sensitivity: Cyberbullying carries a certain social stigma. Many parents experienced feelings of embarrassment or shame, which made recruitment challenging and may have affected how openly they shared their experiences during interviews.

To address the growing complexity of this issue, the following recommendations are proposed:

Integration of Cyberbullying Education into the National Curriculum: A crucial long-term strategy involves formally embedding digital citizenship into Malaysia's school syllabus. The country could look to international models, such as Australia's Safety Commissioner Framework or Finland's "New Literacies" programme, both of which treat digital ethics as a foundational skill on par with literacy and numeracy. In the Malaysian setting, this might involve updating Civic or Moral Education subjects to include "Digital Empathy," helping students grasp the tangible consequences of their online behaviour, while also strengthening ICT or Asas Sains Komputer (ASK) subjects to address the legal dimensions of digital footprints and privacy settings.

Future Research Directions: To gain a more comprehensive picture, future studies should consider adopting a mixed-method approach. Combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews would enable researchers to gather large-scale data and track trends across different regions. Moreover, future work should strive for a more balanced gender representation among participants and possibly incorporate longer engagement periods to build the trust needed for discussing sensitive family matters.

Ultimately, the fight against cyberbullying is not one that parents can win on their own. As technology continues to evolve, our educational and support frameworks must move beyond reactive disciplinary measures. By cultivating a proactive culture of digital respect through schools and national policy, we can help ensure that our children develop the emotional intelligence they need to navigate the online world safely and responsibly.

Acknowledgements: The authors acknowledge the support of Universiti Teknologi MARA and funding from Ministry of Higher Education under Sponsorship File Number: FRGS/1/2024/SS10/UITM/03/2 (RMI File Number: 600-RMC/FRGS 5/3 (059/2024); Project Code: 286419240007).

Funding Statement: This study was funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia under the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) (Grant No. FRGS/1/2024/SS10/UITM/03/2; RMI File No. 600-RMC/FRGS 5/3 (059/2024); Project Code: 286419240007). Administrative support was provided by Universiti Teknologi MARA. The funder had no involvement in the study design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, manuscript preparation, or publication decisions.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. All authors have contributed to this work and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission to the International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling (IJEPC).

Ethics Statement: The interview questions underwent expert and professional review through the approval process conducted by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) at both the university and faculty levels of Universiti Teknologi MARA. The review involved academics and professionals with expertise in child cyberbullying, parental coping strategies, qualitative research, and ethical research practices. Their evaluation focused on the clarity, relevance, comprehensiveness, and cultural appropriateness of the interview questions to ensure alignment with the research objectives and the Malaysian sociocultural context. This process enhanced the validity and credibility of the research instrument by ensuring that the questions were ethically appropriate and capable of effectively addressing the core issues explored in the study.

Author Contribution Statement: This manuscript was developed as part of Nurul Shafiza Izzuana Mohd Zahari's Master by Research and represents a collaborative effort between the master's candidate and the supervisory team. Nurul Shafiza Izzuana Mohd Zahari conducted the research, including data collection, data analysis, interpretation of the findings, and manuscript drafting. Dr. Siti Nur Fathanah Abd Hamid, the main supervisor, contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, supervision, and critical revision of the manuscript. Dr. Suhaimi, the co-supervisor, provided methodological guidance, scholarly input, and critical review of the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to submission.

International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling
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EISSN : 0128-164X
Volume 11 Issue 64 (September 2026) PP. 1218-1236

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