



CYBERBULLYING

<http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/adults/cyber-bullying.aspx>

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Usually, it is repeated over time. Traditionally, bullying has involved actions such as: hitting or punching (physical bullying), teasing or name-calling (verbal bullying), or intimidation through gestures or social exclusion. In recent years, technology has given children and youth a new means of bullying each other.

Cyberbullying, which is sometimes referred to as online social cruelty or electronic bullying, can involve:

- Sending mean, vulgar, or threatening messages or images
- Posting sensitive, private information about another person
- Pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad
- Intentionally excluding someone from an online group (Willard, 2005)

Children and youth can cyberbully each other through:

- Emails
- Instant messaging
- Text or digital imaging messages sent on cell phones
- Web pages
- Blogs

- Chat rooms or discussion groups
- Other information communication technologies

How Common Is Cyberbullying?

Although little research has been conducted on cyberbullying, recent studies have found that:

- 18% of students in grades 6-8 said they **had been cyberbullied** at least once in the last couple of months; and 6% said it had happened to them 2 or more times (Kowalski et al., 2005).
- 11% of students in grades 6-8 said they **had cyberbullied** another person at least once in the last couple of months, and 2% said they had done it two or more times (Kowalski et al., 2005).
- 19% of regular Internet users between the ages of 10 and 17 reported being involved in online aggression; 15% had been aggressors, and 7% had been targets (3% were both aggressors and targets) (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004).
- 17% of 6-11 year-olds and 36% of 12-17-year-olds reported that someone said threatening or embarrassing things about them through email, instant messages, web sites, chat rooms, or text messages (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2006).
- Cyberbullying has increased in recent years. In nationally representative surveys of 10-17 year-olds, twice as many children and youth indicated that they had been victims and perpetrators of online harassment in 2005 compared with 1999/2000 (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006).

Who Are The Victims and Perpetrators of Cyberbullying?

In a recent study of students in grades 6-8 (Kowalski et al., 2005):

- Girls were about twice as likely as boys to be victims and perpetrators of cyber bullying.
- Of those students who had been cyberbullied relatively frequently (at least twice in the last couple of months):

- 62% said that they had been cyberbullied by another student at school, and 46% had been cyberbullied by a friend.
- 55% didn't know who had cyberbullied them.
- Of those students who admitted cyberbullying others relatively frequently:
 - 60% had cyberbullied another student at school, and 56% had cyberbullied a friend.

What Are The Most Common Methods of Cyberbullying?

In studies of middle and high school students, (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2006; Kowalski et al., 2005; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006) the most common way that children and youth reported being cyberbullied was through instant messaging. Somewhat less common ways involved the use of chat rooms, emails, and messages posted on Web sites. A study of younger children (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2006) showed that they were most often bullied through email, comments on a Web site, or in a chat room.

Where Are Children and Youth Cyberbullied?

In a telephone survey of preteens (6-11 year-olds) and teens (12-17 year-olds) (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2006):

- 45% of preteens and 30% of teens who had been cyberbullied received the messages while at school.
- 44% of preteens and 70% of teens who had been cyberbullied received the messages at home.
- 34% of preteens and 25% of teens who had been cyberbullied received the messages while at a friend's house.

Do Children Tell Others If They Are Cyberbullied?

According to one telephone survey of preteens and teens (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2006):

- 51% of preteens but only 35% of teens who had been cyberbullied had told their parents about their experience.

- 27% of preteens and only 9% of teens who had been cyberbullied had told a teacher.
- 44% of preteens and 72% of teens who had been cyberbullied had told a friend.
- 31% of preteens and 35% of teens who had been cyberbullied had told a brother or sister.
- 16% of preteens and teens who had been cyberbullied had told no one.

How Does Cyberbullying Differ From Other Traditional Forms of Bullying?

Available research and experience suggest that cyberbullying may differ from more “traditional” forms of bullying in a number of ways (Willard, 2005), including:

- Cyberbullying can occur any time of the day or night.
- Cyberbullying messages and images can be distributed quickly to a very wide audience.
- Children and youth can be anonymous when cyberbullying, which makes it difficult (and sometimes impossible) to trace them.

What Can Adults Do To Prevent and Address Cyberbullying?

Adults may not always be present in the online environments frequented by children and youth. Therefore, it is extremely important that adults pay close attention to cyberbullying and the activities of children and youth when using these newer technologies.

Suggestions for Parents: Tips To Help Prevent Cyberbullying:

- Keep your home computer(s) in easily viewable places, such as a family room or kitchen.
- Talk regularly with your child about online activities that he or she is involved in.
- Talk specifically about cyberbullying and encourage your child to tell you immediately if he or she is the victim of cyberbullying, cyberstalking, or other illegal or troublesome online behavior.

View the Campaign's **Webisodes** with your child and discuss in particular **Webisode 5** that addresses cyberbullying.

- Encourage your child to tell you if he or she is aware of others who may be the victims of such behavior.
- Explain that cyberbullying is harmful and unacceptable behavior. Outline your expectations for responsible online behavior and make it clear that there will be consequences for inappropriate behavior.
- Although adults must respect the privacy of children and youth, concerns for your child's safety may sometimes override these privacy concerns. Tell your child that you may review his or her online communications if you think there is reason for concern.
- Consider installing parental control filtering software and/or tracking programs, but don't rely solely on these tools.

Tips For Dealing With Cyberbullying That Your Child Has Experienced:

Because cyberbullying can range from rude comments to lies, impersonations, and threats, your responses may depend on the nature and severity of the cyberbullying. Here are some actions that you may want to take after-the-fact.

- Strongly encourage your child not to respond to the cyberbullying.
- Do not erase the messages or pictures. Save these as evidence.
- Try to identify the individual doing the cyberbullying. Even if the cyberbully is anonymous (e.g., is using a fake name or someone else's identity) there may be a way to track them through your Internet Service Provider. If the cyberbullying is criminal (or if you suspect that it may be), contact the police and ask them to do the tracking.
- Sending inappropriate language may violate the "Terms and Conditions" of email services, Internet Service Providers, Web sites, and cell phone companies. Consider contacting these providers and filing a complaint.
- If the cyberbullying is coming through email or a cell phone, it may be possible to block future contact from the cyberbully. Of course, the cyberbully may assume a different identity and continue the bullying.

- Contact your school. If the cyberbullying is occurring through your school district's Internet system, school administrators have an obligation to intervene. Even if the cyberbullying is occurring off campus, make your school administrators aware of the problem. They may be able to help you resolve the cyberbullying or be watchful for face-to-face bullying.
- Consider contacting the cyberbully's parents. These parents may be very concerned to learn that their child has been cyberbullying others, and they may effectively put a stop to the bullying. On the other hand, these parents may react very badly to your contacting them. So, proceed cautiously. If you decide to contact a cyberbully's parents, communicate with them in writing — not face-to-face. Present proof of the cyberbullying (e.g., copies of an email message) and ask them to make sure the cyberbullying stops.
- Consider contacting an attorney in cases of serious cyberbullying. In some circumstances, civil law permits victims to sue a bully or his or her parents in order to recover damages.
- Contact the police if cyberbullying involves acts such as:
 - Threats of violence
 - Extortion
 - Obscene or harassing phone calls or text messages
 - Harassment, stalking, or hate crimes
 - Child pornography

If you are uncertain if cyberbullying violates your jurisdiction's criminal laws, contact your local police, who will advise you.

Suggestions For Educators

- Educate your students, teachers, and other staff members about cyberbullying, its dangers, and what to do if someone is cyberbullied.
- Be sure that your school's anti-bullying rules and policies address cyberbullying.
- Closely monitor students' use of computers at school.

- Use filtering and tracking software on all computers, but don't rely solely on this software to screen out cyberbullying and other problematic online behavior.
- Investigate reports of cyberbullying immediately. If cyberbullying occurs through the school district's Internet system, you are obligated to take action. If the cyberbullying occurs off-campus, *consider what actions you might take* to help address the bullying:
 - Notify parents of victims and parents of cyberbullies of known or suspected cyberbullying.
 - Notify the police if the known or suspected cyberbullying involves a threat.
 - Closely monitor the behavior of the affected students at school for possible bullying.
 - Talk with all students about the harms caused by cyberbullying. Remember — cyberbullying that occurs off-campus can travel like wildfire among your students and can affect how they behave and relate to each other at school.
 - Investigate to see if the victim(s) of cyberbullying could use some support from a school counselor or school-based mental health professional.
- Contact the police immediately if known or suspected cyberbullying involves acts such as:
 - Threats of violence
 - Extortion
 - Obscene or harassing phone calls or text messages
 - Harassment, stalking, or hate crimes
 - Child pornography

References

- **Kowalski, R. et al** (August, 2005). *Electronic Bullying Among School-Aged Children and Youth*. Poster presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association. Washington, DC.
- **Opinion Research Corporation** (2006). *Cyber bully pre-teen*. Available at: www.fightcrime.org/cyberbullying/cyberbullyingpreteen.pdf.
- **Opinion Research Corporation** (2006). *Cyber bully teen*. Available at: www.fightcrime.org/cyberbullying/cyberbullyingteen.pdf.
- **Wolak, J., Mitchell, K., & Finkelhor, D.** (2006). *Online victimization of youth: Five years later*. *National Center for Missing & Exploited Children*.
- **Ybarra, M. L., & Mitchell, K. J.** (2004). Youth engaging in online harassment: Associations with caregiver-child relationships, Internet use, and personal characteristics. *Journal of Adolescence*, 27, 319-336.

