

The Parent's Guide to Cyberbullies



What is a Cyberbully?

A cyberbully is someone who uses technology to harass, embarrass, intimidate, or stalk someone else. The methods used can include emails, instant messaging, text messages sent via cell phones, digital photos and all other means of electronic communications.

The types of content a cyberbully may send include the following:

- vulgar and argumentative message
- cruel, offensive, and insulting remarks
- threats and false promises

The methods a cyberbully could use to harass the victim include the following:

- posting of secrets or embarrassing information, including pictures, for everyone to see
- posting of gossip or rumors for the explicit purpose of damaging the person's reputation
- distribution of messages pretending to be the victim in an attempt to damage that person's friendships
- alienation of the victim from online groups

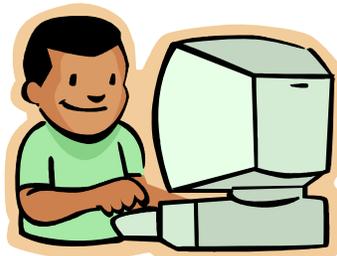
Who are Cyberbullies?

In some cases, a cyberbully can also bully in face-to-face encounters. Bullying over the computer may be a natural extension of their behavior.

Some people who become cyberbullies may be the victims of bullying and are taking out their anger and frustration in cyberspace. They may be targeting the people who bully them or they may have picked a different target.

Still others regard cyberbullying as a game -- nothing more than a fun thing to do.

Who are the Victims of Cyberbullies?



Most victims of cyberbullies are children, but there are also adults who are cyberbullying victims.

Generally, cyberbullies will know their victim, but occasionally they will pick victims they don't know. In these situations, the cyberbully is picking on someone based on a type of bias or prejudice. They may pick on people based on religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, or people who are deemed "not cool."

Other times, they will pick on someone based on a message that he/she has posted that the bully doesn't like.

Why Can Cyberbullying be as Harmful as Physical Bullying?

Many people erroneously assume that “words can never hurt.” In cyberspace, however, cyberbullies can strike anytime, anywhere, thanks to modern technology. As long as the victims are online, they can be vulnerable to cyberbullying.

Many bullies pick on people for the feeling of power that it gives them. Because the Internet seems to give anonymity, cyberbullying is often seen to have fewer consequences to the bullies, which can encourage them to be more aggressive.

Another aspect of cyberspace that can lead cyberbullies to be as harmful as a physical bully is that cyberbullies aren't physically there when they are harassing their victims. This can lead to a lessened empathy. Since the bullies cannot see how much they are hurting the victims, they may think they have not actually hurt them much or at all and may, therefore, continue the harassing behavior.

Some individuals may believe that there are no rules in cyberspace. They feel free to do whatever they wish. Moreover, they believe they have the RIGHT to do whatever they want in cyberspace without suffering any consequences.

Warning Signs Your Child may be a Victim of a Cyberbully

If your child exhibits the following, it may be a warning sign:

- displaying signs of depression, sadness, anxiety or fear – particularly if these signs intensify after your child uses the cell phone or after being online
- avoiding friends, activities, or school
- experiencing difficulty with school or a drop in grades for no apparent reason
- expressing subtle comments that indicate your child is disturbed or upset

What to do if a Cyberbully Targets Your Child



Retaliation may only escalate the problem. If you feel the need to respond to the cyberbully, help your child develop an appropriate response, asking the cyberbully to stop the behavior.

By filtering email, instant messages and text messages, you can cut off many of the ways the cyberbullies contact your child. By having your child avoid the sites and groups where the attacks occur, he/she can ignore the bully.

If the harassment continues, then you can change your child's email address, Internet account, and username(s).

If none of these steps are successful, you may need to take additional action, as follows:

- 1) Compile a copy of all harassing messages and postings. Save the addresses of web sites where other hostile information, embarrassing pictures or negative messages are posted. The more documentation you have the better.
- 2) Contact your child's school. Even if the cyberbullying is not occurring in school, officials might be able to assist.
- 3) If possible, contact the bully's parents. Send them a registered letter detailing the messages and asking them to make the bullying stop. They could be held liable for financial and emotional damages.
- 4) Finally, if the situation is not resolved, or if physical threats are made, contact the police.

Additional Sites for more Information about Cyberbullying

MS-ISAC: www.msisac.org/awareness/news/2007-01.cfm

US-CERT: <http://www.us-cert.gov/cas/tips/ST06-005.html>

Cyberbully.org: www.cyberbully.org

McGruff.org: www.mcgruff.org/advice/cyberbullies.php

Bully Online: www.bullyonline.org/related/cyber.htm

National Crime Prevention Council: www.ncpc.org/

National Cyber Security Alliance - StaySafe Online: <http://staysafeonline.org/>

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