

CYBER BULLYING

(www.stopcyberbullying.gov)

What is cyber bullying, exactly?

Cyber bullying is when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, preteen or teen using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones.

It has to have a minor on both sides, or at least have been instigated by a minor against another minor. Once adults become involved, it is plain and simple cyber-harassment or cyber stalking. Adult cyber-harassment or cyber stalking is NEVER called cyber bullying.

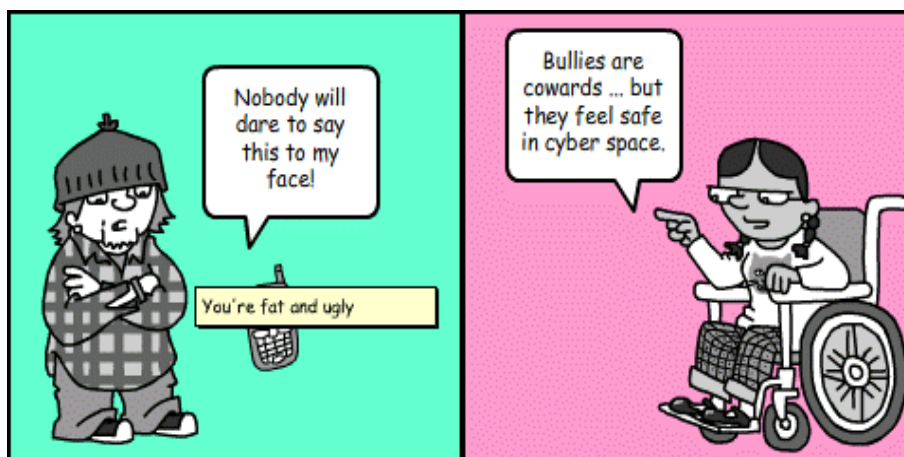
It isn't when adult are trying to lure children into offline meetings, that is called sexual exploitation or luring by a sexual predator. But sometimes when a minor starts a cyber bullying campaign it involves sexual predators who are intrigued by the sexual harassment or even ads posted by the cyber bullying offering up the victim for sex.

The methods used are limited only by the child's imagination and access to technology. And the cyber bully one moment may become the victim the next. The kids often change roles, going from victim to bully and back again.

Children have killed each other and committed suicide after having been involved in a cyber bullying incident.

Cyber bullying is usually not a onetime communication, unless it involves a death threat or a credible threat of serious bodily harm. Kids usually know it when they see it, while parents may be more worried about the lewd language used by the kids than the hurtful effect of rude and embarrassing posts.

Cyber bullying may arise to the level of a misdemeanor cyber harassment charge, or if the child is young enough may result in a charge of juvenile delinquency.



How cyber bullying works

There are two kinds of cyber bullying, direct attacks (messages sent to your kids directly) and cyber bullying by proxy (using others to help cyber bully the victim, either with or without the accomplice's knowledge). Because cyber bullying by proxy often gets adults involved in the harassment, it is much more dangerous.

Instant Messaging/Text Messaging Harassment

a) Kids may send hateful or threatening messages to other kids, without realizing that while not said in real life, unkind or threatening messages are hurtful and very serious.

b) Warning wars - Many Internet Service Providers offer a way of "telling on" a user who is saying inappropriate things. Kids often engage in "warning wars" which can lead to kicking someone offline for a period of time. While this should be a security tool, kids sometimes use the Warn button as a game or prank.

c) A kid/teen may create a screen name that is very similar to another kid's name. The name may have an additional "i" or one less "e". They may use this name to say inappropriate things to other users while posing as the other person.

d) Text wars or text attacks are when kids gang up on the victim, sending thousands of text-messages to the victim's cell phone or other mobile device. The victim is then faced with a huge cell phone bill and angry parents.

e) Kids send death threats using IM and text-messaging as well as photos/videos.

Stealing passwords

a) A kid may steal another child's password and begin to chat with other people, pretending to be the other kid. He/she may say mean things that offend and anger this person's friends or even strangers. Meanwhile, they won't know it is not really that person they are talking to.

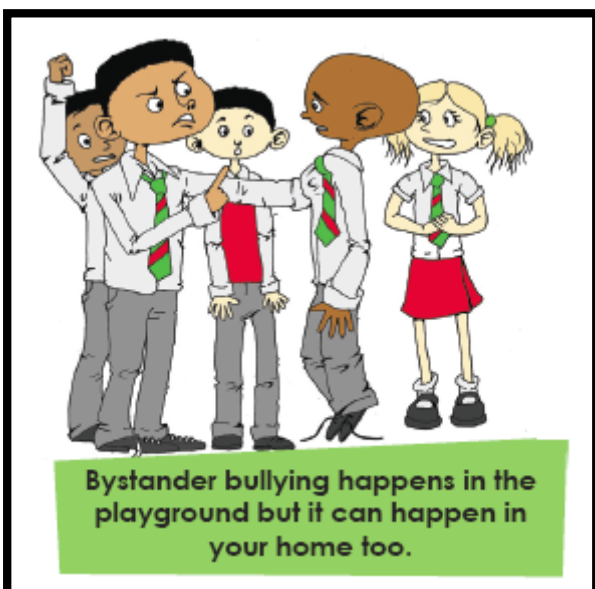
b) A kid may also use another kid's password to change his/her profile to include sexual, racist, and inappropriate things that may attract unwanted attention or offend people.

c) A kid often steals the password and locks the victim out of their own account.

d) Once the password is stolen, hackers may use it to hack into the victim's computer.

Blogs

Blogs are online journals. They are a fun way for kids and teens to send messages for all of their friends to see. However, kids sometimes use these blogs to damage other kids' reputations or invade their privacy. For example, in one case, a boy posted a bunch of blogs about his breakup with his ex-girlfriend, explaining how



she destroyed his life, calling her degrading names. Their mutual friends read about this and criticized her.

She was embarrassed and hurt all because another kid posted mean, private, and false information about her. Sometimes kids set up a blog or profile page pretending to be their victim and saying things designed to humiliate them.

Web sites

a) Children used to tease each other in the playground; now they do it on Web sites. Kids sometimes create Web sites that may insult or endanger another child. They create pages specifically designed to insult another kid or group of people.

b) Kids also post other kids' personal information and pictures, which put those people at a greater risk of being contacted or found.

Sending Pictures through E-mail and Cell Phones

a) There have been cases of teens sending mass e-mails to other users that include nude or degrading pictures of other teens. Once an e-mail like this is sent, it is passed around to hundreds of other people within hours; there is no way of controlling where it goes.

b) Many of the newer cell phones allow kids to send pictures to each other. The kids receive the pictures directly on their phones, and may send it to everyone in their address books.

c) Kids often take a picture of someone in a locker room, bathroom or dressing room and post it online or send it to others on cell phones.



Internet Polling

Who's Hot? Who's Not? Who is the biggest slut in the sixth grade? These types of questions run rampant on the Internet polls, all created by yours truly - kids and teens. Such questions are often very offensive to others and are yet another way that kids can "bully" other kids online.

Interactive Gaming

Many kids today are playing interactive games on gaming devices such as X-Box Live and Sony Play Station Network. These gaming devices allow your child to communicate by chat and live Internet phone with anyone they find themselves matched with in a game online. Sometimes the kids verbally abuse the other kids, using threats and lewd language. Sometimes they take it further, by locking them out of games, passing false rumours about them or hacking into their accounts.

Sending Malicious Code

Many kids will send viruses, spyware and hacking programs to their victims. They do this to either destroy their computers or spy on their victim. Trojan Horse programs allow the cyber bully to control their victim's computer remote control, and can be used to erase the hard drive of the victim.

Sending Pornography and Other Junk E-Mail and Instant Messaging

Often cyber bullies will sign their victims up for e-mailing and IM marketing lists, lots of them,

especially to porn sites. When the victim receives thousands of e-mails from pornographers their parents usually get involved, either blaming them (assuming they have been visiting porn sites) or making them change their e-mail or IM address.

Impersonation

Posing as the victim, the cyber bully can do considerable damage. They may post a provocative message in a hate group's chat room posing as the victim, inviting an attack against the victim, often giving the name, address and telephone number of the victim to make the hate group's job easier. They often also send a message to someone posing as the victim, saying hateful or threatening things while masquerading as the victim. They may also alter a message really from the victim, making it appear that they have said nasty things or shared secrets with others.

Why do kids cyber bully each other?

Who knows why kids do anything? When it comes to cyber bullying, they are often motivated by anger, revenge or frustration. Sometimes they do it for entertainment or because they are bored and have too much time on their hands and too many tech toys available to them. Many do it for laughs or to get a reaction. Some do it by accident, and either send a message to the wrong recipient or didn't think before they did something.

Because their motives differ, the solutions and responses to each type of cyber bullying incident has to differ too. Unfortunately, there is no "one size fits all" when cyber bullying is concerned. Only two of the types of cyber bullies have something in common with the traditional schoolyard bully. Experts who understand schoolyard bullying often misunderstand cyber bullying, thinking it is just another method of bullying. But the motives and the nature of cyber communications, as well as the demographic and profile of a cyber bully differ from their offline counterpart.

Preventing cyber bullying

Educating the kids about the consequences (losing their ISP or IM accounts) helps. Teaching them to respect others and to take a stand against bullying of all kinds helps too.



How can you stop it once it starts?

Because their motives differ, the solutions and responses to each type of cyber bullying incident has to differ too. Unfortunately, there is no "one size fits all" when cyber bullying is concerned. Only two of the types of cyber bullies have something in common with the traditional schoolyard bully. Experts who understand schoolyard bullying often misunderstand cyber bullying, thinking it is just another method of bullying.

Parents need to be supportive of your child during this time. You may be tempted to give the "stick and stones may break your bones, but words will never hurt you" lecture, but words and cyber attacks can wound a child easily and have a lasting effect. These attacks follow them into your otherwise safe home and wherever they go online. And when up to 700 million accomplices can be recruited to help target or humiliate your child, the risk of emotional pain is very real, and very serious. **Don't brush it off.**

Let the school know so the guidance counsellor can keep an eye out for in-school bullying and for how your child is handling things. You may want to notify your paediatrician, family counsellor or clergy for support if things progress. It is crucial that you are there to provide the necessary support and love. Make them feel secure. **Take it seriously.**

