

CYBERBULLYING

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 one time 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 the charge of juvenile delinquency. Most of the time the cyber bullying does not go that far, although parents often try and pursue criminal charges. It typically can result in a child losing their ISP or IM (instant messaging) accounts as terms of service violation. And in some cases, if hacking or password and identity theft is involved, can be a serious criminal matter under state and federal law.

When schools try and get involved by disciplining the student for cyber bullying actions that took place off-campus and outside of school hours, they are often sued for exceeding their authority and violating the student's free speech right. They also, often lose. Schools can be very effective brokers in working with the parents to stop and remedy cyber bullying situations. They can also educate the students on cyber ethics and the law. If schools are creative, they can sometimes avoid the claim that their actions exceeded their legal authority for off-campus cyber bullying actions

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.

Direct attacks:

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

2. 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.

3. Blogs

Blogs are online journals. They are a fun way for kids and teens to message 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.

4. 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.

5. 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. After viewing the picture at a Web site, some kids have actually posted these often pornographic pictures on Kazaa and other web site photo programs for anyone to download.

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.

6. 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.

7. Interactive Gaming

Many kids today are playing interactive games on gaming devices such as X-Box Live and Sony Play Station 2 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 rumors about them or hacking into their accounts.

8. Sending Malicious Code

Some children 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.

9. Sending Porn and Other Junk E-Mail and IMs

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.

10. 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.

Cyber bullying by proxy

Cyber bullying by proxy is when a cyber bully gets someone else to do their dirty work. Most of the time they are unwitting accomplices and don't know that they are being used by the cyber bully. Cyber bullying by proxy is the most dangerous kind of cyber bullying because it often gets adults involved in the harassment.

"Warning" or "Notify Wars" are an example of cyber bullying by proxy. Kids click on the warning or notify buttons on their IM (instant message) screen or e-mail or chat screens, and alert the ISP or service provider that the victim has done something that violates their rules. If the victim receives enough warnings or notifications, they can lose their account. The service providers are aware of this abuse, and often check and see if the warning were justified. But all the cyber bully has to do is make the victim angry enough to say something rude or hateful back. Then, BINGO! It looks like the victim has started it. In this case, the ISP or service provider is the innocent accomplice of the cyber bully.

Sometimes the victim's own parents are involved unwittingly. If the cyber bully can make it look like the victim is doing something wrong, and the parents are notified, the parents will punish the victim.

Cyber bullying by proxy sometimes starts with the cyber bully posing as the victim. They may have hacked into their account or stolen their password. They may have set up a new account pretending to be the victim. But however they do it; they are pretending to be the victim and trying to create problems for the "real" victim with the help of others.

The most typical way a cyber bullying by proxy attack occurs is when the cyber bully gets control of the victim's account and sends out hateful or rude messages to everyone on their buddy list pretending to be the victim. They may also change the victim's

password so they can't get into their own account. The victim's friends get angry with the victim, thinking they had sent the messages without knowing they have been used by the cyber bully. But it's not always this minor. Sometimes the cyber bully tries to get more people involved.

For example...Mary wants to get Jennifer back for not inviting her to her party. She goes online and, posing as Jennifer, posts "I hate Brittany, she is so stupid, ugly and fat!" on buddyprofile.com. Mary may tell Brittany and her friends that she read the post on buddyprofile.com and blames Jennifer for being mean. Brittany and her friends now start attacking Jennifer, and may report her to buddyprofile.com or her school. They are doing Mary's dirty work for her. Mary looks like the "good guy" and Jennifer may be punished by her parents, lose her account with buddyprofile.com and get into trouble at school. And Brittany and her friends may start to cyber bully Jennifer too.

Sometimes it is much more serious than that. When cyber bullies want to get others to do their dirty work quickly, they often post information about, or pose as, their victim in hate group chat rooms and on their discussion boards. Cyber bullies have even posted this information in child molester chat rooms and discussion boards, advertising their victim for sex. They then sit back and wait for the members of that hate group or child molester group to attack or contact the victim online and, sometimes, offline.

Remember – be aware of where, when and who your child is talking to and spending time with online! Being aware of what types of cyber bullying can occur can help keep your children safe.

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