**Cyber bullying**

**Definition**

Cyber bullying is the repeated use of information technology, including e-mail, instant messaging, blogs, chat rooms, pagers, cell phones, and gaming systems, to deliberately harass, threaten or intimidate others. Unlike physical bullying, where the victim can walk away, technology now allows for continuous harassment, from any distance, in a variety of ways. It involves an imbalance of power, aggression and negative action that is repeated.

**Common Forms of Cyber bullying**

**Harassment:** repeatedly sending rude or offensive messages

**Denigration:** distribution of derogatory information via email, IM or posting or sending altered pictures of someone

**Flaming:** Online fighting; sending electronic messages with angry vulgar language

Impersonation: breaking into someone’s email or social networking account and using that person’s online identity to send or post vicious about others

**Outing:** (trickery) tricking someone into to sharing personal/embarrassing info and then forwarding to others

**Cyber stalking:** sending repeated messages that include threats of harm, and or intimidation, or making someone fear for their safety

**Characteristics** *(different from traditional bullying)*

C**yber bullying** *is fr*equently anonymous. Not knowing who the bullied is can lead to emotional distress

**Accessibility:** Traditional bullying usually occurs during school hours. In cyber bullying, the bullier can wreak havoc, anytime, day or night 24/7.

**Punitive Fears:** Victims of cyber bullying usually do not report it. The fear of retribution, if they know the perpetrator and report them, or the fear of losing access to their communication devices.

**Bystanders:** Bullying usually occurs in the presence of other witnesses. They are usually guilty of forwarding emails or texts they have received. In cyber, this is not a classroom full of students but it can reach into the millions very quickly

**Disinhibit ion:** The anonymity of the Internet can lead children to have a false sense of security. They are more likely to be engaged in behavior that they would not do in a face-to-face setting

**How common is cyber bullying?**

18% of students in grades 6 -8 indicate they have been bullied in the last month; 6% indicated that it was repeated 2 or more times

2% of students indicate they have been the bullier in the last month

19% of students, ages 10 – 17, admit they have been involved in online aggression; 15% admit to being the aggressor; 7% are targets; 3% are targets and aggressors

17% of 6 – 11 year olds and 36% of 12 – 17 year olds reported that someone posted threatening or embarrassing things about them via email, IM, web sites, texts or chats

45% of preteens and 30% of teens report being cyber bullied at school

44% of preteens and 70% of teens report receiving the messages at home

34% of preteens and 25% of teens receive message while at a friend’s house

**Who are the victims?**

Girls are almost twice as likely as boys to be the victims and the perpetrators

Among those who admit cyber bullying, 60% indicate that it is be another student at school; and 56% say they were cyber bullied by a friend. ([www.education.com](http://www.education.com))

**What are some of the signs of cyber bullying?**

The signs of cyber bullying may be similar to the signs of bullying. While there will be no outward physical signs, there may be emotional effects.

Student may appear sad, moody or anxious

Skips school

Withdraws or shows lack of interest in social activities

Shows signs of being upset after using a device

Drop in grades or academic performance

May use drugs or alcohol

May experience health issues

Low self-esteem

When asked to identify the main reasons cyber bullying results in higher incidents and levels of depression, Parry and WiredSafety’s “KidDoc”, pediatrician and Vanderbilt University faculty member, Dr. Deanna Guy agreed.

1. It is persistent. Once posted or shared, digital communications and content have a life of their own. Parry’s most frequently repeated quote, “what you post online stays online – forever” underscores the caching, publication, and viral nature of digital information.

2. Victims tend to revisit the scene of the cybercrime, re-reading text messages, logging in to view hijacked accounts, viewing hurtful images and seeing the latest postings. Each time they do, they are being revictimized. Each time is a renewed hurt.

3. The written or multimedia message has tremendous power. It enables a single post to spread to thousands of students.

4. It brings groups together. Messages among students at the victim’s old school come to the attention of students at the new school. Teens from camp connect with teens from church. What was private to a few becomes public and never-ending.

5. It is credible. After having read and re-read the messages and view and reviewed the images, the victim starts to believe that the cyber bullies have merit.

6. This is especially the case when a “mean girls” cyber bullying campaign gains traction with active possess, bystanders and rumor-mongers joining in. These campaigns persist long after the original cyber bullies have lost interest.

7. Cyber bullying is a renewable resource. New groups or individuals pick up the campaign when the victim comes to their attention, and old cyber bullying campaign members renew it when bored or the victim does something noteworthy.

8. The anonymity of cyber bullying (more than 2/3s of cyber bullying occurs anonymously or through the use of fake accounts or accounts that have been taken over by the cyberbullies) contributes to the problem in two ways – more students cyber bully knowing that there is a limited risk of being exposed and the victims don’t know if the cyber bully is their best friend or worst enemy. They become paranoid about not knowing who can be trusted. This isolates them further.

9. There is no safe place to escape to; no place to hide from cyber bullies. Offline bullies need offline environments to do their damage - playgrounds, the walks to school, school buses, locker rooms or hallways. The devices and technologies used by teens to cyber bully others are designed to provide access to users 24/7/365. It can come at victims in the middle of the night, on vacation or in the security of their bedroom.

10. Cyber bullies often pose as a trustworthy friend, causing conflict and further isolating the victim from those who could help them address the attacks. Students have told Parry that they don’t know if the cyber bully is their best friend or worst enemy – they become paranoid

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11. Parents are rarely effective in helping students handle offline bullying, largely because it is hidden from them. But even those parents who learn of the cyber bullying are rarely prepared to address cyber bullying.

One student told Parry that she wouldn’t bother telling her parents since they would be “clueless” about the issue and “worthless” in providing help or support.

Sadly, the same digital communication tools and devices that allow the students to stay in touch and receive support from their friends are now seen as a source of pain.
The problem is exacerbated by the fact that there are more cyber bullies than bullies.

Cyber bullying attracts equal opportunity offenders. Everyone can be a cyber bully, no matter how small, shy or physically-challenged they are. They can act out their fantasies. They can act on impulse with technologies designed to be used impulsively. They aren’t really mean and nasty students, just playing one online. They can masquerade as others harassing friends of that student, providing two victims for the price of one. It is entertainment. It’s fun. It’s empowering. And it rarely involves serious risk of exposure.

Traditional forms of bullying involve physical violence, verbal taunts, or social exclusion. Cyber bullying, or electronic aggression, involves aggressive behaviors communicated over a computer or a cell phone.

**What parents and teachers need to know?**

While more than 80% of teens maintain Facebook and Twitter accounts. This is by no means the extent of their online activity. Most teens maintain these accounts appropriately and allow adults to view their online activities. However, there are numerous other online outlets and the teens are the first to know about them and use them without parental knowledge or adult oversight.

**Other sites that teens might be using**

Instagram (share Photos

Tumblr (blogging platform) most users under the age of 25

Kik (smartphone messaging system; exchange, search or share videos. 30 million users

Vine: (system similar to Instagram) Share videos like on Youtube

Pheed: Users are age 14 – 25 Number app purchase for the iPhone; can share audio. Restricted to 420 characters or less

Pinterest:

Reddit: (submit links for others to rate)

SnapChat: send pix to friends) unlike Facebook they are not archived and are deleted after received and viewed

Wanelo: (we need love) Allows users to post latest purchases

**What should we tell our students?**

* If you feel you are being bullied by email, text or online, do **talk** to someone you trust.
* **Never** send any bullying or threatening messages. Anything you write and send could be read by an adult.
* Serious bullying should be **reported** to the police - for example threats of a physical or sexual nature.
* Keep and save any bullying emails, text messages or images.
* If you can, **make** a note of the time and date bullying messages or images were sent, and note any details about the sender.
* You could **change** your mobile phone number and only give it out to close friends.
* **Contact** the service provider (mobile phone company, your internet provider) to tell them about the bullying. They may be able to track the bully down.
* **Use** blocking software - you can block instant messages from certain people or use mail filters to block emails from specific email addresses.
* **Don't** reply to bullying or threatening text messages or emails- this could make matters worse. It also lets the bullying people know that they have found a 'live' phone number or email address. They may get bored quite quickly if you ignore them.
* **Don't** give out your personal details online - if you're in a chatroom, watch what you say about where you live, the school you go to, your email address etc. All these things can help someone who wants to harm you build up a picture about you.
* **Don't** forward abusive texts or emails or images to anyone. You could be breaking the law just by forwarding them. If they are about you, keep them as evidence. If they are about someone else, delete them and don't reply to the sender.
* **Don't** ever give out passwords to your mobile or email account.
* **Remember** that sending abusive or threatening messages is against the law.

**What can educators do?**

Create a team that will be responsible for cyber bullying

Write an action plan for each school

Be sure to educate everyone in your school about cyber bullying

Host meetings with parent groups to inform them of your process

Host assemblies and share regular info with staff and students

Review schools discipline policies to make sure that it clearly addresses antibullying

Develop a plan of action for cyber bullying at your school

*Identify the people and the process for reporting, investigating and communicating to all parties involved. Consider an online tool for anonymous reporting.*

Develop a plan of action regarding when cyber bullying occurs off-campus

*Develop and communicate a definition of when an off campus occurrence is defined as a “substantial disruption” of the school’s environment*

Establish a protocol for monitoring student use of computers at school

Consider a filtering and tracking software on all school computers

Investigate all reports of cyber bullying, making sure that there is clear communication about how the issue is resolved

Contact law enforcement if cases involve: threats of violence, extortion, obscenity, harassing phone calls or texts, stalking, hate crimes or pornography