
Cyberbullying

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What Is Cyberbullying

- Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets.
- Cyberbullying can occur through SMS, Text, and apps, or online in social media, forums, or gaming where people can view, participate in, or share content.
- Cyberbullying includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation.

Unique Concerns

- Persistent – Digital devices offer an ability to immediately and continuously communicate 24 hours a day, so it can be difficult for children experiencing cyberbullying to find relief.
- Permanent – Most information communicated electronically is permanent and public, if not reported and removed. A negative online reputation, including for those who bully, can impact college admissions, employment, and other areas of life.
- Hard to Notice – Because teachers and parents may not overhear or see cyberbullying taking place, it is harder to recognize.

Prevalence

- Nationwide, about 21% of students ages 12-18 experienced bullying.

The 2015 School Crime Supplement - PDF (National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice Statistics)

- An estimated 14.9% of high school students were electronically bullied in the 12 months prior to the survey.

The 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

Warning Signs

- Noticeable increases or decreases in device use, including texting. A child exhibits emotional responses (laughter, anger, upset) to what is happening on their device.
- A child hides their screen or device when others are near, and avoids discussion about what they are doing on their device.
- Social media accounts are shut down or new ones appear.
- A child starts to avoid social situations, even those that were enjoyed in the past.
- A child becomes withdrawn or depressed, or loses interest in people and activities.

What can you do?

- Notice – Recognize if there has been a change in mood or behavior and explore what the cause might be. Try to determine if these changes happen around a child's use of their digital devices.
- Talk – Ask questions to learn what is happening, how it started, and who is involved.
- Document – Keep a record of what is happening and where. Take screenshots of harmful posts or content if possible. Most laws and policies note that bullying is a repeated behavior, so records help to document it.

What can you do?

- Report – Most social media platforms and schools have clear policies and reporting processes. If a classmate is cyberbullying, report it to the school. You can also contact app or social media platforms to report offensive content and have it removed. If a child has received physical threats, or if a potential crime or illegal behavior is occurring, report it to the police.

What can you do?

- Support – Peers, mentors, and trusted adults can sometimes intervene publicly to positively influence a situation where negative or hurtful content posts about a child. Public Intervention can include posting positive comments about the person targeted with bullying to try to shift the conversation in a positive direction. It can also help to reach out to the child who is bullying and the target of the bullying to express your concern. If possible, try to determine if more professional support is needed for those involved, such as speaking with a guidance counselor or mental health professional.

Steps to Take Immediately

- Don't respond to and don't forward cyberbullying messages.
- Keep evidence of cyberbullying. Record the dates, times, and descriptions of instances when cyberbullying has occurred. Save and print screenshots, emails, and text messages. Use this evidence to report cyberbullying to web and cell phone service providers.
- Block the person who is cyberbullying.
- Report Cyberbullying to Online Service Providers, Law Enforcement and Schools.

Preventing Cyberbullying

- Set clear expectations about digital behavior and online reputation.
- Educate about the harmful effects of cyberbullying, posting hateful speech or comments, sexting, and sharing naked photos of themselves or others (including potential legal issues).
- Be clear about what content can be viewed or shared.
- Identify which apps are appropriate for your child's use and which are not.
- Establish rules about the amount of time that a child can spend online or on their devices.
- Model positive, respectful digital behavior on your own devices and accounts.

References

stopbullying.gov

A federal government website managed by the
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W. Washington, D.C. 20201