



Cyberbullying

Parent - Family Newsletter



October 2011

What You Need to Know About Cyberbullying

Think cyberbullying isn't a concern in your family? **Think again.** A study commissioned by the National Crime Prevention Council found that more than four in 10 teens reported being cyberbullied in the previous year. Research conducted by leading cyberbullying expert Parry Aftab puts that figure closer to 85 percent. In one school she surveyed, 100 percent of students reported having been cyberbullied. And it's not just teens. Children as young as 7 or 8 are at risk of being cyberbullied if they're allowed on the Internet.

Equally disturbing is this statistic: Aftab found that among the same students who reported being cyberbullied, only 5 percent of them would tell their parents if they were targeted. "Most reasons relate to not trusting their parents not to blow things out of proportion or fearing that they will take the technology away from them," she points out on Aftab.com.

So what's a parent to do? Short of banning cell phones and Internet access, the best way to keep your kids safe from cyberbullying is to be informed. Knowledge is power. We hope you'll take a close look at the information we've assembled below on cyberbullying and what you can do to help prevent it.

What Is Cyberbullying?

Just like schoolyard bullies might use their fists or words as a weapon, cyberbullies use technology to tease, torment, harass or otherwise hurt their victims. Below are some common forms of cyberbullying:

- Malicious text messages sent directly to the victim.
- Hacking into a peer's social networking (Facebook) or email account and pretending to be the victim.
- Creating a fake social networking or email account and posing as the victim.
- Sending lewd or embarrassing photos of the victim via email or text without the victim's consent.
- Using a blog to post mean, embarrassing or false information about the victim.

For a complete list, see www.aftab.com/index.php?page=how-does-cyberbullying-work

Source: Aftab.com

What Are the Effects of Cyberbullying?

A study by the National Institutes of Health has found that cyberbullying victims reported significantly higher levels of depression than bullies and victims of physical beatings or name-calling. That's likely because cyberbullying has fewer limitations — it could happen anytime and any place. Home used to be a safe place where bullying couldn't happen. But as long as there's a computer



with Internet access or a mobile phone with text messaging, home is no longer a bully-free zone.

Another reason cyberbullying victims might suffer more than traditional bullying victims has to do with the fact that cyberbullying can be anonymous. "Unlike traditional bullying which usually involves a face-to-face confrontation, cyber victims may not see or identify their harasser," explains a study published last year in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*. "As such, cyber victims may be more likely to feel isolated, dehumanized or helpless at the time of the attack."



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Who is most at risk for cyberbullying?

While cyberbullying can occur in any age group that uses technology, "bullying behavior tends to increase when new groups of students are placed with each other," according to Nancy Willard, director of the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use. That means middle school students and new high schoolers are at greatest risk. And when it comes to gender, girls are more likely to engage in cyberbullying than boys.

How You Can Help Prevent Cyberbullying

- **Monitor your child's technology and mobile phone use:** Ask for passwords and set limits on when your child can use their phone or be on the Internet. Also, consider keeping the home computer in a shared space, and do not allow teens to have Internet access in their bedrooms.

- **Teach kids to be media savvy:** Being media savvy means never sharing their password with anyone but their parent or guardian. Also, reminds kids not to share anything through text, instant messaging or the Internet that they wouldn't want the public to see.

- **Don't be a bystander:** Preventing cyberbullying is a job for everyone, whether your child is directly involved or not. Lead by example and teach your kids to be "upstanders," not bystanders.

- **Respond quickly:** If your child is cyberbullied, act fast. Save and make a record of the messages or posts as proof that it is occurring. Then, try blocking the person sending the message. Parry Aftab details additional steps you should take (find them at www.aftab.com under "Information for Parents").

- **Educate yourself on the issue:** Reading this newsletter is a start, but there's so much more information out there. Check out these sites with specific resources for parents and children:

www.common sense media.org/cyberbullying

www.stopcyberbullying.org

csriu.org/cyberbully

www.facebook.com/stopbullyingspeakup

www.bullyingstatistics.org