

CYBERBULLYING

Kathy Masarie MD Parent and Life Coach

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1. **What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying involves the use of information and communication technologies such as e-mail, cell phone and pager text messages, instant messaging, defamatory personal Web sites, and defamatory online personal polling Web sites, to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group, that is intended to harm others. (#5)

Cyberbullying sometimes involves racial, religious or culture slurs. It can also be sexual in nature. It can involve someone your child knows or a complete stranger. Cyberbullying can include cruel jokes, malicious gossip, embarrassing information or photographs, and/or Web sites designed to target a specific child or teacher (#2)

"It's like an electronic Dodge City...People seem to be able to say whatever they want. You can be anonymous and that seems to make people feel very free."

Tim Drilling, Principal at Lakeridge HS, LO (#11)

2. *Why is it different from old-fashioned bullying?

The actions themselves - rumors, threats, gossip, humiliation - are nothing new. But among today's adolescents - a generation of instant messengers, always connected, always wired - bullies are starting to move beyond slam books and whisper campaigns to e-mail, websites, chat rooms, and text messaging. Cyberbullying is different from face-to-face bullying because the bully is removed from the immediate and tangible feedback of the victim. They don't "see" the harm they have caused or the consequences of their actions, which minimizes any feelings of remorse or empathy. This creates a situation where kids do and say things on the Internet that they would be much less likely to do in person. (#2)

While in some ways it's no worse than old-fashioned bullying, cyberbullying has a few idiosyncrasies. Websites and screen names give bullies a mask of anonymity if they wish it, making them difficult to trace. The pressure for kids to be always online means bullies can extend their harassment into their victims' homes. And the miracle of the Web means that

sharing an embarrassing photo or private note - with thousands of people - requires little more than the click of a key. (#2)

On top of all of this- it can be very hard to trace the origin (#11)

3. *What are some examples of cyber bullying?

- For one middle-school girl it was a rumor, circulated via text messaging, that she had contracted SARS while on a trip to Toronto. She returned to school and found nobody would come near her.
- For an overweight boy in Japan, it was cell phone pictures, taken of him on the sly while he was changing in the locker room and then sent to many of his peers.
- A high-school boy got text messages questioning his sexual orientation
- A middle-school girl who got a message: "Where did your mom get you those shoes? K-Mart?"
- Creating a website and circulating rumors, like asking students to vote on the ugliest or fattest kid in school, or focus on one individual.
- When Will, a middle-schooler in Kansas, broke up with his girlfriend, she created a website devoted to smearing him. She outlined vivid threats, made up vicious rumors, and described what it would be like to see him torn apart.
- A young woman had a falling out with a boy, who in a fit of anger, used photo-editing tools to paste her face onto a pornographic photo and sent it to his entire e-mail list (#6)
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- 17-year-old girl said people who were mad at her made a "hate page" about her.
- 14-year-old boy said that he received Instant Messages from someone who said he was hiding in the boy's house with a laptop. The boy was home alone at the time. He was very frightened.
- 14-year-old girl said kids at school found a note from her boyfriend. They scanned it, posted it on the World Wide Web, and sent it by E-mail throughout her school.
- 12-year-old girl said someone posted a note about her on the World Wide Web. The note included swear words and involved sexual name-calling. (# 3)

4. *How often does it happen?

Parry Aftab, director of the national WiredSafety (<http://www.wiredsafety.org>), the "world's largest online safety and help group" says that 55-60% of 1000 students ages 9-14 she polls each month, have been involved in a cyberbullying incident.(#11)

One in 17 kids ages 10 to 17 had been threatened or harassed online, and about one-third of those found the incidents extremely distressing, according to a 2000 study by the University of New Hampshire's Crimes Against Children Research Center. A study in Britain 2002 by NCH, a British children's charity, found that 1 in 4 students had been bullied online (#7)

The most common instances involve text messages via cell phone or instant messaging, or IM - the instantaneous chats that have spawned a lingo of their own and are a constant presence on most kids' computers. Bullies can send a mean or threatening IM with no identification beyond a selected screen-name. If that name gets blocked, they choose another.

One study showed 16% of young people received bullying or threatening text messages, 7% were harassed in Internet chat rooms and 4% by email. (#7) IM was not listed in this study- but was felt to be the most common form of bullying by another survey

5. *Where does it occur?

Cyberbullying can occur on and off campus. If it is off-campus, schools are limited as to what they can do to prevent it. They do get involved when an unofficial school website is created whose intent is to smear and make fun of other students.

Cyberbullying occurs easily away from the watchful eye of an adult, and MNet research shows that 50% of kids are online most of the time without adult supervision. Victims can be reached anytime and anyplace and frequently with complete anonymity. Many kids have bedrooms that are electronic centers with computers, Internet access, TV, video game equipment and cell phones- all away from the watchful eyes of their parents.

Children love the interactive elements of the Internet: the ability to send and receive instant messages, email or take part in chatrooms. Chatrooms can be misused. We know that some adult sexual predators are using chatrooms to contact young people, sometimes by masquerading as young people themselves. Notes can be posted by classmates that are derogatory, sexual, embarrassing. (#7)

And for Calabasas High School in California, it was a website - schoolsandals.com - on which vicious gossip and racist and threatening remarks grew so rampant that most of the school was affected. J. Guidetti, principal of Calabasas High School, did get involved, after comments on schoolsandals.com caused many of his students to be depressed, angry, or simply unable to focus on school. "It might have been happening off campus," says Mr. Guidetti, "but the effects carry on into the school day.... Our school had the most postings of any school in southern California. It became a snowball effect, like a real-life soap opera. It became this culture of its own, and got very hurtful very quickly. "The site has more than 30,000 members and any student can post a message. Guidetti first looked at schoolsandals.com after hearing about it from a parent. He was shocked to find some blatantly racist comments, threats, and even references to lynching certain students. His next step was a series of meetings - with parents, students, and faculty - to keep everyone informed. But getting the site stopped, he learned, wasn't easy. Talking to law-enforcement officials led nowhere; there are few rules governing what can get posted on the Internet. Eventually, a local radio station got involved and put enough pressure on the people running the site - a father-son duo - that they took it down in the spring. Already, there's a schoolsandals2 - relatively harmless, so far. Guidetti checks it regularly for offensive content, one of the ever-growing tasks of a 21st-century principal. (#6)

6. **What can parents do?

Parents are the primary character educators of our children, and bullying of any kind is a character issue

1. Be aware-GENERAL INTERNET INFORMATION/SAFETY

- a. Learn all you can about the new technologies children are using: Internet, blogs, instant messages, emails, down-loading videos and images from cell phones and camcorders, text messaging (#11)
- b. Talk often with children to find out whether they are being cyberbullied. Reassure them that they are not at fault because they have been targeted
- c. NetParents (<http://www.netparents.org>) for information on internet security and blocking devices (American Academy of Pediatric recommendation)
- d. GetnetWise (<http://www.getnetwise.org/>) is a public service brought to you by the Internet Industry corporations and public interest organizations to help ensure that families have safe, constructive and educational or entertaining online experiences. (#1)

- e. NetSmartz.org. www.netsmartz.org/ Online resource with interactive activities and games teaching children, teens, parents & educators safety on the Internet.
- f. Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use-
http://www.leasttern.com/Tech/ethics_safety.html) Oregon-based, Internet Law, Safety and Ethics offers a multitude of resources about most aspects of internet use. (#8)

Be aware-CYBERBULLYING INFORMATION

- g. Cyberbullying on www.cyberbullying.org
- h. Youth Internet Survey from 2000 (1,501 youth age 10-17) (#3)
http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/Victimization_Online_Survey.pdf
- i. Internet Bullying <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/1230/p11s01-legn.htm>
- j. Internet Safety FAQ <http://www.nch.org.uk/information>
- k. Bullying Goes into High-Tech in Cyberspace www.zwire.com
- l. [www. Wired-Safety.org](http://www.Wired-Safety.org): online safety group (#4)

2. Educate your Children and set standards of internet use

- a. Talk about your values: respect, caring, trustworthiness, responsibility, fairness.
- b. Use Family Activity: Instant Cruelty
<http://www.mindohfoundation.org/bullying.htm>
This activity/lesson plan will allow you and your children to define cyberbullying, explore their knowledge, attitudes and experience with it and determine your Personal Internet Standards. (#2)
- c. Communicate often with your child about activities you permit and do not permit online, and especially with whom your child can communicate online.
- d. Basic Internet Use Guidelines
 - i. Set limits on the amount of time a child spends on line each day or week. Consider using an alarm clock or timer in case your child loses track of time.
 - ii. Do not let the Net take the place of homework, playing outside or with friends or pursuing other interests.
 - iii. Never use a credit card on line without permission
 - iv. Never use bad language or send mean messages online
 - v. Check out Internet Literacy Safe Surfing in the Online World
<http://www.mediathink.org/internet.pdf> by Northwest Media Literacy Center <http://www.mediathink.org/>
- e. Basic Internet Safety Rules (Net Smart Rules and other info)
 - i. Do not give out any personal information – last name, address, cell phone #, password, email address, race, school name or location, friends names. This includes filling out details to “win a prize.”(Email addresses are automatically posted on many forums and chat rooms)
 - ii. Never share passwords- even with friends (They could post vicious rumors/ derogatory photos under your name)
 - iii. Never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone online, unless your parent approves the meeting and is with you to meet him or her. Teens are particularly at risk.
 - iv. Make sure you are aware that people on line are not always who they say they are and that on-line information is not necessarily private.
 - v. Be careful of any advice given to you on a website, especially if you are advised to not “tell anyone” or keep it a secret. If you are upset, depressed, having a bad time in a relationship or at school, you need the

best help you can get and that might be face-to-face with a counselor, parent or other trusting adult.

- f. Protocol if your child receives a possible cyberbully message
 - i. Never respond to a message that makes you feel confused or uncomfortable
 - ii. If you receive messages that upset or frighten you-don't put up with it! Always tell someone you trust what is happening: Mom, Dad, a teacher or a friend - and try to find a way to stop it
 - iii. Do not erase it. Make a record of the dates and times you received them, and Consider changing your number or email address if you do get bullied report them to the police
 - g. Conflict in Cyberspace: <http://www.rider.edu/~suler/psycyber/conflict.html> How to Resolve Conflict Online by Kali Munro, Psychotherapist (#9)
- 3. Use Tracking/Blocking Devices:** Parental control software can control who your child might send emails to or receive them from and also block access to all or some chatrooms
- a. As a first step, put the computer in a public area of the house (not in the child's bedroom) As your youth enters high school and exhibits responsible behavior it can be moved conditionally into his/her room. For complete clarity, have him/her sign a contract about safe internet use that you both agree to before the computer goes in his/her room.
 - b. Consider moderated (supervised) chatrooms: many parents may want to make sure their children use only moderated chatrooms, where either a trained adult is present whenever the chatroom is open and authorized to intervene to stop any exchanges which take an inappropriate turn; or some other system is in place to monitor activity. Ask your Internet service provider if they provide moderated chat services and, if they do, ask about policies enforced in the chatroom, and about the training given to and checking done on the backgrounds of the people who are employed by them as moderators. This is especially recommend for younger children.
 - c. Internet filtering and monitoring software
 - i. Net Nanny (<http://www.netnanny.com/>) parental control software that protects kids against hate literature, pornography, pedophiles, and other inappropriate information or persons on the Internet obscene material on the Internet with monitoring, filtering, blocking, time limits and email informational updates.(#4,13)
 - ii. CyberPatrol (<http://www.cyberpatrol.com>) specifically developed to help protect children online, (#13)
 - iii. CyberSitter (<http://www.cybersitter.com>) CYBERSitter for a family friendly internet, won PC-Magazine "Editors' Choice" for 2003 (#13)
 - iv. Spyware (www.microsoft.com/athome/security/spyware/software/default.mspx) Find out how to use the new Microsoft Windows AntiSpyware (Beta) to detect and remove **spyware** and other unwanted software that can track every move you make (#13)
 - v. WallFly (http://www.smartguardsoftware.com/sgs_product_wallfly.htm) is a parental control application that can limit the daily time of computer and game use. (#13)

- vi. WiredSafety (<http://www.wiredsafety.org>), online safety and help group
- d. Peer-to-Peer blocks or P2P blocks
 - i. Blockster (http://www.smartguardsoftware.com/sgs_product_blockster.htm) is a parental control software that restricts music or software downloading from P2P (peer-to-peer) applications. (#13)
- e. Internet Content Rating Association (<http://www.icra.org/>) The Internet Content Rating Association is an independent, non-profit organization whose mission is to protect children from potentially harmful material.
- f. Parents' Information Network (<http://www.pin.org.uk>) established in 1994 and provides a wide range of guidance on computers and education for parents with children of toddler age through to 18.
- g. Software for Parents: <http://www.software4parents.com/>

4. Know Where to Report Incidents and Sleuth the Problem

- a. Internet Service Provider
 - i. Check with them about blocking chat room use if it is a problem
- b. Schools: first need to add cyberbullying to their school harassment policies. Many, many teens start “unofficial high school websites” to slam people until they are “found out.” Then the teens close it and start another one.
- c. Police or FBI
- d. Reporting sites for violent, hateful, racists, or offensive materials online
 - i. CyberTipline (<http://www.cybertipline.com/>) From the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at 1-800-THE-LOST (843-5678)
 - ii. Network Abuse Clearinghouse (www.abuse.net) or write to abuse@host.com
 - iii. CyberCrimes (www.cybercrimes.net) Univ of Dayton School of Law for tracing crimes against persons using cyberbullying and cyber-stalking
 - iv.
- e. Check out legitimacy of any website
- f. To find the site owner: www.geektools.com- click on the section “who is” and type the name of the website to bring up the name of the site registrant and the owner’s address. It will also give you the name of the internet host which you can then report to the authorities. (#4)

5. Change social norms

- a. Educate school staff and other adults involved with youth of the definition, pervasiveness, and severity of cyberbullying.
- b. Find out the Internet use policies are your child’s school or your local library.
- c. Share resources on how to track cyberbullying
- d. Lobby schools to be more active in fighting cyberbullying, including adding cyberbullying to their school harassment policies
- e. Pass state legislation that requires schools to add cyberbullying to their school harassment policies (as Senator Jeanne Kohl-Welles, D-Seattle is trying to do in Washington State) (#11)

7. What are some local events happening that can help educate the media and me about bullying?

"Impact of Media on our Children: How Much is Too Much?"

When: Apr-29-2005 5:45-7:45 PM

Where: Children's Museum

Kathy Masarie MD, Parent and Life Coach coach@kathymasarie.com www.kathymasarie.com
 Business phone (503) 292-4162 Cell Phone (503) 516-3755

Cost: \$5 suggested donation at the door
Description: Panel discussion during "TV Turn-off Week" with Kathy Masarie MD: research proven impact of the media, Jerald Block, MD: solutions to inappropriate games and internet; Pam Crow, LCSW: impact of media on play and creativity; Sandra Taylor, LCSW promoting media literacy followed by 1 hour question and discussion period
Sponsored by: Oregon Psychoanalytical Center (www.oregonpsychoanalytic.org), Northwest Media Literacy Center <http://www.mediathink.org/>, Full Esteem Ahead (www.fullesteemahead.org) and Kathy Masarie MD Parent and Life Coach (www.kathymasarie.com)

"Addressing Verbal and Relational Aggression Workshop"

When: Apr-22-2005 8:30 AM- 1:00 PM Friday
Where: Doll Gardner Gallery 8470 SW Oleson Road
Cost: \$69.00 Register at (503) 644-5781 #10
Description: Half day workshop on Addressing Verbal and Relational Aggression (Kathy Masarie MD, co-presented with Jennifer Linder PhD Linfield College and Trudy Ludwig, author of My Secret Bully)
Sponsored by Full Esteem Ahead (www.fullesteemahead.org) and Lewis and Clark Department of Professional Development (professional credit hours available)

Monthly Support Group for Wise TV Watching

When First Monday of each month 6:30-7:45 PM
Where Hillsdale Branch Library 1525 SW Sunset Boulevard
Cost: Free
Description A support group for parents who want to learn more about raising children with limits on television (and/or video games). Ellen Curry Wilson (503) 267-1852 runs these meetings
Sponsored by Northwest Media Literacy Center (<http://www.mediathink.org/>)

8. REFERENCES (#__ above refer to these references)

1. www.cyberbullying.org
2. Cyberbullying Resources for Youth, Families and Educators
<http://www.mindohfoundation.org/bullying.htm>
3. Online Victimization: http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/Victimization_Online_Survey.pdf
Youth Internet Survey (1,501 youth age 10-17) 2000 study by the University of New Hampshire's Crimes Against Children Research Center.
4. Staying Safe in Cyberspace in the UK
http://www.bullying.co.uk/children/internet_safety.htm
5. Cyberbullying <http://gumption.typepad.com/blog/2004/02/cyberbullying.html>
6. Internet Bullying <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/1230/p11s01-legn.htm>
7. Internet Safety FAQ <http://www.nch.org.uk/information>
8. Bullying Goes into High-Tech in Cyberspace www.zwire.com
9. Conflict in Cyberspace: How to Resolve Conflict Online
<http://www.rider.edu/~suler/psycyber/conflict.html>
10. Family Activity "Cyberbullying: Instant Cruelty"
http://www.mindoh.com/docs/FamilyActivity_CyberBullying.pdf
11. "You've Got Hate Mail" Living Section Oregonian, March 22, 2005
12. The Internet and Your Family" brochure by the American Academy of Pediatrics (www.aap.org)
13. Jerald Block MD psychiatrist who has developed a computer game blocking device

Other Related Questions

9. What are the benefits for children of using the Internet?

The educational possibilities of the Internet are tremendous. It is widely used in schools and colleges. The Internet is a vast library you can bring into your home and is very easy to use. People with little or no knowledge or previous experience of computers can quickly learn the basics. Children use the Internet to help with homework, and also for all kinds of fun and games, and to communicate with friends. (#7)

10. Why do parents need a guide to Internet safety?

The Internet is a huge technological achievement, promising great benefits to society in general and to children and young people in particular, especially in education and entertainment. However, as with many new or emerging technologies, the Internet has brought unfamiliar problems. Some of these can create potential dangers for children, and while we do not want to exaggerate dangers, they do exist. Parents and caretakers need to know about possible hazards to children on the Internet and how to deal with them, (#7)

11. Should I stop my child from spending too much time on the computer?

Excessive time online can lead to children neglecting homework, and outdoor or other social activities. They may also run up heavy telephone bills. There are no hard and fast rules about what is and is not excessive. It will vary from child to child and on the circumstances from week to week. If a child has a lot of research to do for some homework, they might need to make more use of the computer and the Internet on some days than others. Each family or class needs to have its own understanding and approach. Computers can be used for so many different things it is quite easy for a child to switch rapidly from one activity to another, making it hard for parents to know if their child is really doing homework or just playing games. (#7)

12. Are the safety measures to protect my child foolproof? (#7)

The best screening device is between the ears of your child- educate and internalize control. They can always change their account or go to a friend's house- out of the control of safety devices.

A determined (and computer savvy) child might be able to get round any protective software or security measures. If parents keep passwords and PIN numbers secure, then safety measures should be watertight. However, there may be occasions when the protective software is not working: check that it isn't switched off. Your children may use computers elsewhere that do not have parental safety controls, e.g. at friends' houses or in Internet cafes. Friends might come to visit and bring discs with them containing material which would otherwise have been picked up and blocked or diverted, or your children might swap discs at school or elsewhere. It is very easy to obtain CDs, which will automatically and immediately establish a new Internet account. This could mean that any parental control software previously installed make not work with the new account. Some of the more undesirable elements on the Internet might find ways to evade the security systems you or your Internet service provider have installed. However if the children in your care know and observe Internet Safety Rules listed above, even if the parental control software is turned off, they should come to no harm on the Internet. And they will have a lot of fun!