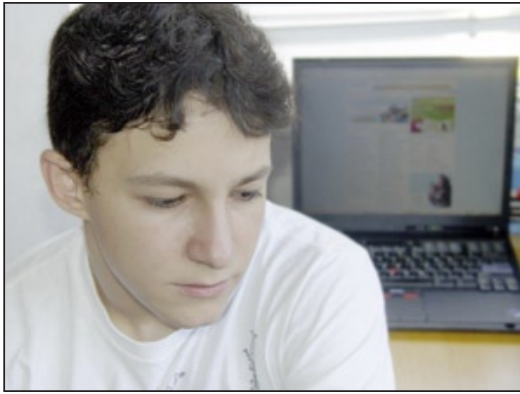


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Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Usually, it is repeated over time. Traditionally, bullying has involved actions such as: hitting or punching (physical bullying), teasing or name-calling (verbal bullying), or intimidation through gestures or social exclusion. In recent years, technology has given children and youth a new means of bullying each other.

Cyber bullying, which is sometimes referred to as online social cruelty or electronic bullying, can involve:

- Sending mean, vulgar, or threatening messages or images;
- Posting sensitive, private information about another person;
- Pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad;
- Intentionally excluding someone from an online group.

▶ How Common is Cyber Bullying?

Although little research has been conducted on cyber bullying, recent studies have found that:

- 18% of students in grades 6-8 said they had been cyber bullied at least once in the last couple of months; and 6% said it had happened to them 2 or more times.
- 11% of students in grades 6-8 said they had cyber bullied another person at least once in the last couple of months, and 2% said they had done it two or more times .
- 19% of regular Internet users between the ages of 10 and 17 reported being involved in online aggression; 15% had been aggressors, and 7% had been targets (3% were both aggressors and targets).
- 17% of 6-11 year-olds and 36% of 12-17-year-olds reported that someone said threatening or embarrassing things about them through e-mail, instant messages, web sites, chat rooms, or text messages .
- Cyber bullying has increased in recent years. In nationally representative surveys of 10-17 year-olds, twice as many children and youth indicated that they had been victims and perpetrators of online harassment in 2005 compared with 1999/2000.

▶ Who are the Victims and Perpetrators of Cyber Bullying?

In a recent study of students in grades 6-8:

- Girls were about twice as likely as boys to be victims and perpetrators of cyber bullying.
- Of those students who had been cyber bullied relatively frequently (at least twice in the last couple of months):
 - 62% said that they had been cyber bullied by another student at school, and 46% had been cyber bullied by a friend.
 - 55% didn't know who had cyber bullied them.
- Of those students who admitted cyber bullying others relatively frequently:
 - 60% had cyber bullied another student at school, and 56% had cyber bullied a friend.

Although there is little research yet on cyber bullying among children and youth, available research and experience suggest that cyber bullying may differ from more "traditional" forms of bullying in a number of ways, including:

- Cyber bullying can occur any time of the day or night;
- Cyber bullying messages and images can be distributed quickly to a very wide audience;
- Children and youth can be anonymous when cyber bullying, which makes it difficult (and sometimes impossible) to trace them;

What are the Most Common Methods of Cyber Bullying?

In recent studies of middle and high school students, the most common way that children and youth reported being cyber bullied was through instant messaging.

Somewhat less common ways involved the use of chat rooms, e-mails, and messages posted on web sites.

A study of younger children showed that they were most often bullied through e-mail, comments on a web site, or in a chat room.

Warning Signs

Possible warning signs that a child is being bullied:

- Comes home with torn, damaged, or missing pieces of clothing, books, or other belongings;
- Has unexplained cuts, bruises, and scratches;
- Has few, if any friends, with whom he or she spends time;
- Seems afraid of going to school, walking to and from school, riding the school bus, or taking part in organized activities with peers (such as clubs);
- Takes a long, "illogical" route when walking to or from school;
- Has lost interest in school work or suddenly begins to do poorly in school;
- Appears sad, moody, teary, or depressed when he or she comes home;
- Complains frequently of headaches, stomachaches, or other physical ailments;
- Has trouble sleeping or has frequent bad dreams;
- Experiences a loss of appetite; or
- Appears anxious and suffers from low self-esteem.



What Can Adults do to Prevent and Address Cyber Bullying?

Adults seldom are present in the online environments frequented by children and youth. Therefore, it is extremely important that adults pay close attention to the cyber bullying and the activities of children and youth when using these new technologies.

Tips to help prevent cyber bullying:

- Keep your home computer(s) in easily viewable places, such as a family room or kitchen.
- Talk regularly with your child about on-line activities he or she is involved in.
 - Talk specifically about cyber bullying and encourage your child to tell you immediately if he or she is the victim of cyber bullying, cyber stalking, or other illegal or troublesome on-line behavior.
 - Encourage your child to tell you if he or she is aware of others who may be the victims of such behavior.
 - Explain that cyber bullying is harmful and unacceptable behavior. Outline your expectations for responsible online behavior and make it clear that there will be consequences for inappropriate behavior.
- Although adults must respect the privacy of children and youth, concerns for your child's safety may sometimes override these privacy concerns. Tell your child that you may review his or her on-line communications if you think there is reason for concern.
- Consider installing parental control filtering software and/or tracking programs, but don't rely solely on these tools.

Tips for dealing with cyber bullying that your child has experienced:

Because cyber bullying can range from rude comments to lies, impersonations, and threats, your responses may depend on the nature and severity of the cyber bullying. Here are some actions that you may want to take after-the-fact.

- Strongly encourage your child not to respond to the cyber bullying.
- Do not erase the messages or pictures. Save these as evidence.
- Try to identify the individual doing the cyber bullying. Even if the cyber bully is anonymous (e.g., is using a fake name or someone else's identity) there may be a way to track them through your Internet Service Provider. If the cyber bullying is criminal (or if you suspect that it may be), contact the police and ask them to do the tracking.
- Sending inappropriate language may violate the "Terms and Conditions" of e-mail services, Internet Service Providers, web sites, and cell phone companies. Consider contacting these providers and filing a complaint.
- If the cyber bullying is coming through e-mail or a cell phone, it may be possible to block future contact from the cyber bully. Of course, the cyber bully may assume a different identity and continue the bullying.
- Contact your school. If the cyber bullying is occurring through your school district's Internet system, school administrators have an obligation to intervene. Even if the cyber bullying is occurring off campus, make your school administrators aware of the problem. They may be able to help you resolve the cyber bullying or be watchful for face-to-face bullying.
- Consider contacting the cyber bully's parents. These parents may be very concerned to learn that their child has been cyber bullying others, and they may effectively put a stop to the bullying. On the other hand, these parents may react very badly to your contacting them. So, proceed cautiously. If you decide to contact a cyber bully's parents, communicate with them in writing -- not face-to-face. Present proof of the cyber bullying (e.g., copies of an e-mail message) and ask them to make sure the cyber bullying stops.

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- Consider contacting an attorney in cases of serious cyber bullying. In some circumstances, civil law permits victims to sue a bully or his or her parents in order to recover damages.
- Contact the police if cyber bullying involves acts such as:
 - Threats of violence
 - Extortion
 - Obscene or harassing phone calls or text messages
 - Harassment, stalking, or hate crimes
 - Child pornography
- If you are uncertain if cyber bullying violates your jurisdiction's criminal laws, contact your local police, who will advise you.



► What to Do if you Suspect that Your Child is Being Bullied

If your child shows any of the above warning signs, this does not necessarily mean that he or she is being bullied, but it is a possibility worth exploring.

What should you do?

1. Talk with your child and talk with staff at school to learn more. 1. Talk with your child. Tell your child that you are concerned and that you'd like to help. Here are some questions that can get the discussion going:

Some direct questions:

- "I'm worried about you. Are there any kids at school who may be picking on you or bullying you?"
- "Are there any kids at school who tease you in a mean way?"
- "Are there any kids at school who leave you out or exclude you on purpose?"

Some subtle questions:

- "Do you have any special friends at school this year? Who are they? Who do you hang out with?"
- "Who do you sit with at lunch and on the bus?"
- "Are there any kids at school who you really don't like? Why don't you like them? Do they ever pick on you or leave you out of things?"

2. Talk with staff at your child's school. Call or set up an appointment to talk with your child's teacher. He or she will probably be in the best position to understand the relationships between your child and other peers at school. Share your concerns about your child and ask the teacher such questions as:

"How does my child get along with other students in his or her class?"

"With whom does he or she spend free time?"

"Have you noticed or have you ever suspected that my child is bullied by other students?" Give examples of some ways that children can be bullied to be sure that the teacher is not focusing only on one kind of bullying (such as physical bullying).

Ask the teacher to talk with other adults who interact with your child at school (such as the music teacher, physical education teacher, or bus driver) to see whether they have observed students bullying your child.

If you are not comfortable talking with your child's teacher, or if you are not satisfied with the conversation, make an appointment to meet with your child's guidance counselor or principal to discuss your concerns.

If you obtain information from your child or from staff at your child's school that leads you to believe that he or she is being bullied, take quick action. Bullying can have serious effects on children.

If, after talking with your child and staff at his or her school, you don't suspect that your child is being bullied, stay vigilant to other possible problems that your child may be having. Some of the warning signs above (e.g., depression, social isolation, and loss of interest in school) may be signs of other serious problems. Share your concerns with a counselor at your child's school.

courtesy of: Stop Bullying Now!

For more extensive information on these topics and many others, please visit your online Health & Wellness Library

Smart Selections



Prevention Workshop Videos

<http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/adult/indexAdult.asp?Area=videoworkshops>

Video workshops that offer tips, strategies and information about the best practices in bullying prevention.

Cyber Bullying Terms

http://www.cyberbullying.us/cyberbullying_glossary.pdf

A helpful document specifying definitions for terms and phrases related to cyberbullying.

Network Query Tool

<http://www.cyberbullying.us/nqt.php>

This tool can be used to identify the Internet Service Provider associated with the Internet Protocol (IP) address of a cyberbully.

The Cyber Law Enforcement Organization

<http://www.cyberlawenforcement.org/>

A network of law enforcement officers, who specialize in cybercrime investigation, training other law enforcement officers and who assist cybercrime victims online.