Cyberbullying

(netbullying) is when kids bully, embarrass, threaten, or harass others over and over again using the Internet, cell phones, or other interactive technology.

Kids *(usually middle school girls)* cyberbully:
- to entertain themselves or their friends
- to purposefully hurt someone
- to get even
- because they are jealous of the victim

Cyberbullies use the anonymity of the Internet to say and do things they wouldn't normally do in person; spread cruel rumors, make threats, humiliate, and otherwise destroy another person's life. Whatever was said or shown can spread around cyberspace and school in minutes.

It's hard for victims to ignore or avoid cyberbullying. They can be traumatized and humiliated, experience anxiety, depression, sleeping problems, eating disorders, self-injury, and even consider suicide. Victims may be provoked into cyberbullying themselves in an effort to right the wrong.

Some kids may not realize that what they are doing is a form of bullying, while for others it is well thought out and calculated. Cyberbullying can go on under the noses of unsuspecting adults who might otherwise intervene. Many parents would be shocked and appalled at their children's technological correspondence.

Forms of Cyberbullying

The greatest Internet threat may not be sexual predators, but a child's classmates or friends. Kids use Web sites such as MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, and Zenga to share journals, post pictures, and make friends. Kids can locate *(target)* a victim easily because the sites are often searchable by school. Cyberbullying may start when kids check out each other's Web pages and blogs. Cyberbullies can steal passwords, lock victims out of their accounts, and take on the identity of the victim online. **Cyberbullies misuse technology including:**

E-mail – *popular with girls*

- use a password given out of friendship, access the victim's account, send out e-mails *(under the victim's name)* that may be derrogatory, sexually explicit, and/or misleading
- alter someone's sent message, then forward to someone it criticizes and all of their friends

40% of kids have had their password(s) stolen and changed by a bully.

90% of middle school students have had their feelings hurt online.

Instant Messaging (IMing) – *an Internet service where many people "buddies" can have real-time conversations all at the same time.*

- using a fake name
- stealing someone's name/identity and posting devious messages
- flirting conversations *(pretend sex talk)* that quickly turn sexual including sexual innuendoes, fantasies, and pornography

75% of kids have visited a Web site that attacked another student.

Create a Web site or post a message in a Chat Room, Bulletin Board, Blog (web log, online diaries), or Guestbook.

- create a Web site targeting a victim
- hack into a victim's Web site
- invite others to pitch in to hire a hit man to murder someone, "hit lists"
- list victims by name, describe them as fat, crybabies, or gay
- use Web cams *(video cameras hooked up to the computer)* and while chatting, talk the victim into talking negatively about someone else they are hiding from view
- create an online voting booth so others can vote for the ugliest, fattest, etc. victim
- post *(real or altered)* explicit photos or videos of themselves or others
- post messages to provoke a hate or predator group

Cell Phones/Cell Phone Cameras/Text Messaging - *Especially popular with girls. (Boys are more likely to bully through interactive online games.)*

- send hurtful or vicious messages, pictures, and videos which can also be sent to others through Web sites, e-mail, IMing, and blogs
- forward voyeuristic videos or provacative and revealing messages about drunken parties, sexual free-for-alls, girl fights
- sending, receiving, or forwarding revealing or nude photos **("sexting")** of anyone or to anyone underage is illegal
- blackmail *(using phone photos and videos)*
- misuse of 3-way calling feature; encourage the person on the other line to talk about a silent third party and allowing her to listen
- keep their cell phones on to record others or to eavesdrop

Chat rooms are among the most dangerous places online.

1 in 3 teens and 1 in 6 pre-teens received threats online.

Take Action

Something said online can be violating and hurtful, but may not be illegal. Check with a lawyer before taking any action or enforcing policy.

States are considering legislation making cyberbullying a crime. Very few law enforcement departments are equipped to deal with cyberbullies/harrassment. Because most cyberbullying occurs at home, schools are unable to act. Some schools have asked parents and students to sign an Acceptable Use Policy, against bullying and harassment.

Cyberbullying situations are unique and have different motives. Repetition and the type of communication, increases the threat. According to recent information 60% of messages are about a victim's relationships; 38% were about physical appearance; and the others were about race, religion, or sexuality.

42% of kids have been bullied online.

58% of those never told their parents.

1. **Report** threats of serious bodily harm or death to law enforcement immediately.
2. **Install** monitoring software to record all communications including IMs.
3. **Identify** the bully and motives, if possible. Notify the bully's parents, school, or anyone effective in stopping the attacks.
4. **Alert** your ISP *(Internet Service Provider)*. Most cyberbullying violates their terms of service. Forward any correspondence to them. They can shut down the bully's account.
5. **Contact** Web sites such as WiredSafety.org or CyberLawEnforcement.org, who can provide information.

Parental Control

Kids may try to deal with cyberbullying on their own by blocking the correspondence, but that doesn't guarantee it will stop. Determined bullies may use another screen name and continue.

Parents are often told only when the bullying has gotten out of control. Kids are often afraid their parents will overreact; talk to the school, talk to the bully's parents, confront the bully; or blame them. All making the situation worse.

Never downplay interactive communication between kids.

- **"Google" or search your child's name on a regular basis.** See what information is available about him online: physical or e-mail addresses, screen names, telephone numbers, and images.
- **Monitor your child's online correspondence** using easy-to-install computer monitoring software.
- **Have your child choose genderless, boring nicknames.** A descriptive or provactive name might attract pedophiles, stalkers, harassers, or bullies.
- **Never provide personal information for chat room and forum profiles.** Never post a photo.
- **Teach your child to think before hitting the "send" button.** Children are impulsive and reactionary. *They can't take it back once it's sent.*
- **Remind your child that anything said online can be made public.** Talk to your child about words that hurt. Teach him empathy.
- **Know your child's passwords.** Encourage him to change them often and not to share them with anyone, even close friends.
- **Check to see where your child goes online.** Is there a MySpace account? Can you access it? Does she have her own page?
- **Make sure MySpace (or other) accounts are set to private.** If it is, can you try to trick her into allowing you access?