

## **Cyber Bullying**

A workshop by educators for students in middle and high schools

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### **What is Cyber bullying?**

Cyber bullying is any intentional, aggressive behavior in which a person uses an electronic medium to demean, embarrass, harass, intimidate, or threaten others.

To understand the impact of Cyber Bullying, researchers Sameer Hinduja, PhD., and Justin Patchin, PhD in 2005 conducted a survey in the U.S. of approximately 1,500 adolescents who used the internet, asking them about their experiences with cyber bullying. [Hinjuja 05]

- 80 percent reported that cyber bullying occurred when they were online.
- 32 percent of the males and 36 percent of the females reported experiencing cyber bullying.
- 12 percent reported that they were threatened.
- 5 percent reported they were scared about their personal safety.

### **In what forms can cyber bullying occur?**

Cyber bullies aim to put psychological pressure on others by harassing them via an electronic medium. For example, cyber bullies can use the internet or cell phones to leave verbal messages, write text, or post images. Cyber bullying takes various forms:

- Anonymity – posting threatening comments in a chatroom, via email, or to some other cyber location using an alias
- Harassment – offensive messages directed against one or more teenagers
- Cyber stalking – sending threatening or intimidating messages, or sending offensive comments to other teenagers frequently
- Flaming – posting offensive or vulgar language against a teen or a group on a news group, chatrooms, email and other location
- “Outing” – public display, posting, or forwarding of personal communication or images, especially communication that contains sensitive personal information or images that are sexual in nature. [Bamford 04]
- Exclusion – including certain teenagers in a group and making others outcasts
- Cyber threats – sending threatening messages via Instant Messaging (IM), email, text messages, or via blogs. One unfortunate example was the case of one of the boys who shot people at Columbine High School in the U.S. who posted a hate list on a website previous to his attack.

## What type of electronic mediums are used in cyber bullying?

The most common electronic mediums used in cyber bullying include the following:

1. Email – electronic messages transmitted over communications networks. Cyber bullies can use email to post or send threats, insults, or embarrassing images. They can try to damage a person's reputation by sending this misinformation in email or as an attachment to an email message. They can also send these negative messages to one or more users, or send them out as spam.
2. Online chatroom – a virtual room where a live conversation takes place, either through typing text or speaking using voice-recognition software. Chat rooms are used by cyber bullies to insult, threaten, spread rumors, or share an embarrassing image or picture for view by anyone in the chat room.
3. Instant messages (IM) – a technology that enables you to create a private, electronic connection with another person in order to communicate in real time over the internet. A cyber bully can send threatening messages via instant messaging instantly and anonymously.
4. Cell phones – a mobile telephone that can send various kinds of data over the communication networks. A cyber bully can use a cell phone to send messages to one user or to multiple users to insult, threaten, or harass others.
5. Web logs – records of the actions someone has taken while web surfing, such as a list of sites they visited. A cyber bully can post potentially humiliating information from a person's web log for public display.
6. Web site – a page containing content located on the web. Home pages are the first page a person sees when they visit a web address. A cyber bully can use a web site to post cruel or false information about others.
7. MUD rooms – multi-user domains, often games, where individuals take on the identity of various characters, such as in World of Warcraft or the Laguna beach game. A cyber bully can use a MUD room to defame and harass other users in the same room. [Shariff 05]
8. Blogs – online journals posted to web pages, used to share stories, files and photos over the internet. A cyber bully can use a blog to spread misinformation or harass others in various ways. An example would be a cyber bully posing photos from a gymnasium locker room with harassing comments.
9. Xangas – online personal profiles where some children and teenagers create lists of people they do not like or share other personal information about their lives. A cyber bully can create an online list of teenagers' names, photos, and other personal information in order to mock, harass, or threaten them. [Shariff 05]
10. Social networking – posting a personal profile and linking it to profiles belonging to your friends on sites such as MySpace. A cyber bully can use a social networking site to post inappropriate or made-up information to insult and humiliate another teenager.

To better understand how cyber bullies use electronic media, watch this video about a real story posted on [www.netsmartz.org](http://www.netsmartz.org). Titled *You Can't Take it Back*, the video shows a true story about a boy who rated girls from school on web sites, thinking it was a

private joke between him and his friends. Here are some questions to consider while you watch the video.

- What forms of cyber bullying does this story present?
- Who is the victim?
- How private is the information posted on the internet?
- What impact did the behavior of the teenager and his friends have on the girls?
- Do you feel empathy towards this teenager or his younger sister? Why or why not?
- What were the consequences of their behavior?
- What would you do, if you had friends who were rating other students in your school or posting negative or false information about them online?

To understand the impact of cyber bullying, consider the following questions and answers:

### **1. Who are cyber bullies?**

Cyber bullies are individuals who are acting in a deliberately cruel way using an electronic medium. They may have various motives: they may have a cruel streak in their personality, be seeking attention, or be acting from a desire for revenge.

Cyber bullies do not have any specific identity, appearance, or shared characteristic. Consider the following:

- They could be male or female. Females often prefer the anonymous interaction they can have on the internet because it allows them to avoid discrimination and retaliation based on their gender, where males generally prefer to express their authority by being confrontational.
- They can be of any age, provided they can use a computer or other electronic device.
- They can live anywhere. Cyber bullies can reach potential victims anywhere in the world an electronic network can reach, which makes cyber bullying an international crime.
- Cyber bullying victims are vulnerable as long as they are accessing networks or carrying electronic devices.
- The cyber bully can take many aliases and remain anonymous, or can impersonate others.
- Once posted, insulting or malicious information is very difficult to delete as long as the cyber bully keeps up the activity.
- Cyber bullies could be cyber victims themselves. Oppressed or bullied students could decide to get even or take their anger or frustration out on the bullies or, conversely, victims could become bullies themselves.

## **2. Why does cyber bullying happen?**

This is a complex question that has many answers, but for the purpose of this workshop, the focus is on the motives of children who become cyber bullies in middle school. They may act from a variety of motives:

1. Failure – a sense of under-achievement leads to frustration which could cause negative emotions and behavior.
2. Fitting in – students could act in a certain way to seek acceptance, to become part of a group, or to gain popularity.
3. Values – there could be a conflict in values considered acceptable in a certain family, group, and society and this could motivate students to others they consider different or wrong from their point of view.
4. Feeling different – when adolescents perceive discrimination against them from their peers due to physical, mental or behavioral difference, they could act out against them.
5. Oppression – constant attack, humiliation, or demeaning behavior by others could push the oppressed individual to act the same way to other students in turn.
6. Sense of isolation – individuals who feel rejected, have a sense of isolation and anger that can lead to problematic behavior.
7. Psychological distress – individuals who suffer from psychological problems or mental illness may react with strong emotions in response to an upsetting incident or action, which could lead to problematic behavior.

## **3. How can I protect myself from cyber bullies?**

- Never share your password with anyone, no matter how close the friend. A password is like a key to your home – and you need to be equally careful about whom you share it with.
- Make sure to create a password that is not easy to guess. You can do this by using a random mix of letters, numbers, and symbols.
- Never give out personal information online, whether it is via email, instant messaging, text messaging, blogs, or on websites.
- Never delete or discard electronic messages from cyber bullies. You may need them as evidence.
- Never respond to a cyber bully and do not believe anything they post online.
- Never agree to meet someone you've met online.
- Never send an impulsive message when you are angry.
- Never hide your feelings from your parents or a trusted adult in school if you receive an email or electronic message that makes you feel uncomfortable. Communicate and share your online experiences with adults you trust.
- Never install programs without asking your parents or teacher if it is alright to do so.

- Always respect other people’s right online, and learn about internet “netiquette” which is the art of being polite while communicating on a network.
- Report cyber bullying to the appropriate authorities.

**4. Can I tell if a friend of mine was cyber bullied even if they do not talk about it?**

You might notice some signs if they are upset, and if you care about your friend, see if you can help. Some of the signs are if your friend

- stops using the computer unexpectedly
- when an instant message or email appears, gets nervous or jumpy
- appears to be angry, depressed, or frustrated after using the computer
- appears uneasy about going to school or outside in general
- avoids discussion about what they are doing on the computer
- becomes abnormally withdrawn from their friends and family

**5. What can I do to make a difference?**

- Communicate and share with others what you know about cyber bullying, including your family members.
- Do not sit idle if you witness cyber bullying or participate in it in any way. “NO” and “STOP” are two powerful words to use.
- Report and encourage students, friends, and family members to report cyber bullying.
- Form an anti-cyber bullying committee at your school, place of worship, and community center.
- Be part of the campaign in your school against cyber bullying.
- Understand the responsible use of technology along with your friends and family members.
- Be an advocate against cyber bullying.

In conclusion, let’s watch another video of a true story. It is on [www.netsmartz.com](http://www.netsmartz.com) and titled *Broken Friendship*. It is the story of a girl who shared her password with her best friend. Watch what happens.

1. Which action is considered cyber bullying?
2. Who was the cyber bully in this story? Why?
3. Whom do you feel sad for? Why?
4. If it were you, what would you have done differently?
5. Do you know any one who experienced a similar incident?

## References

[Bamford 04] Bamford, Anne, PhD. "Cyber-Bullying." University of Technology Sydney. AHISA Pastoral Care National Conference. Melbourne, Australia. September 2004.

[www.coc.edu.au/site/\\_documents/ahisaconference-bamfordcyberbullying.pdf](http://www.coc.edu.au/site/_documents/ahisaconference-bamfordcyberbullying.pdf)

[Hinjuja 05] Hinjuja, Sameer, PhD, Florida Atlantic University & Patchin, Justin W. PhD, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Online Survey. 2005.

[http://www.cyberbullying.us/cyberbullying\\_victimization.pdf](http://www.cyberbullying.us/cyberbullying_victimization.pdf)

[Shariff 05] Shariff, Shaheen & Goulin, Rachel. "Cyber-Dilemmas: Gendered Hierarchies, Free Expression and Cyber-Safety in Schools." Oxford Internet Institute conference. Oxford, U.K. September 2005.

[http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/cybersafety/extensions/pdfs/papers/shaheen\\_shariff.pdf](http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/cybersafety/extensions/pdfs/papers/shaheen_shariff.pdf)

[Strom 04] Strom, Paris, Auburn University & Strom, Robert, Arizona State University. "Bullied by a mouse."

<http://www.childresearch.net/RESOURCE/RESEARCH/2004/MEMBER35.HTM>

## Resources

[www.cyberbullying.us/resources.php](http://www.cyberbullying.us/resources.php)

[www.greatschools.net](http://www.greatschools.net)

[www.mysecurecyberspace.com](http://www.mysecurecyberspace.com)

[www.netsmartz.com](http://www.netsmartz.com)

[www.uscert.gov](http://www.uscert.gov)

[www.weopedia.com](http://www.weopedia.com)