

# Cyberbullying Quick Reference Guide for Parents

Patti Agatston, Ph.D.

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

## What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying (sometime referred to as Internet Bullying) is using the Internet or other digital devices to send or post negative and hurtful messages, images, or video clips about others.

Cyberbullying is bullying through the tools of technology.

## Forms of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can take many forms, including posting or sending mean or embarrassing comments and or images on chat rooms, message boards, websites, social networking sites, online gaming sites, cell phones, instant messages or e-mail.

## Why is cyberbullying a problem?

Cyberbullying is a form of emotional bullying (sometimes referred to as relational aggression) that causes feelings of fear, isolation, and humiliation among its targets. Research over the last decade confirms that traditional bullying can seriously affect the mental and physical health of children and their academic work. Children who are bullied are more likely than non-bullied children to be anxious, depressed, and to suffer from low self-esteem<sup>1</sup>. They also are more likely than other children to think about taking their own lives<sup>2</sup>. Preliminary research suggests that children who experience cyber bullying may have a similar experience and this may be intensified since cyberbullying can occur 24/7<sup>3</sup>.

## Prevention of Cyberbullying

Parents need to discuss cyberbullying with their children as part of their regular discussions about Internet Safety and responsible use of technologies. Parents can share that using technology to embarrass or hurt others' feelings is not part of their family values. Discussing the golden rule as it applies to using technology and socializing online can be very helpful. Discuss bystander behavior as well, encouraging children to report and/or speak out against cyberbullying they witness. In addition, parents need to set up guidelines for appropriate use for each new piece of technology that is brought into the home.

## Prevention Tips from Students

- **Set age-appropriate guidelines.**
- **Teach us how to deal with conflict.**
- **Monitor our use of the internet.**
- **Supervision, not snoopervision.**
- **Watch for warning signs)**
- **Don't blame the victim.**

(Kowalski, Limber & Agatston, 2012)

## Warning Signs of Cyberbullying

- **Child is visibly upset or angry during or after internet use or cell phone use.**
- **Withdrawal from friends or activities**
- **Drop in academic performance**
- **School avoidance**
- **Child is a target of traditional bullying at school.**
- **Child appears depressed or sad.**

(Kowalski, et.al. 2012, Willard, 2006)

### **Intervention Tips for Responding To Cyberbullying**

- Save the evidence. Print copies or take screen shots of messages, photos and websites.
  - First Offense (if minor in nature) – ignore, delete, or block the sender. Most social networking sites have blocking features and phone numbers can be blocked as well.
  - If a fake or offensive profile targeting your child is set up on a social networking site, report it to the site. The link for reporting cyberbullying and fake profiles can be found under the help sections of many websites. The cyberbullyhelp.com website also has a help center with links to report abuse to many of the social networking sites popular among youth.
  - Investigate your child's online presence. Set up an alert on Google, or search your child's name occasionally through a variety of search engines.
  - If the aggressor is another student, share evidence with the school counselor. Check to see if any bullying may be occurring at school.
  - If the aggressor is known and cyberbullying is continuing or severe contact the perpetrator's parents and share your evidence (if you are comfortable doing so.) Ask that they ensure that the cyberbullying stops and any posted material be removed.
  - If parent of the aggressor is unresponsive and behavior continues, parent of target may contact an attorney or send a certified letter outlining possible civil/legal options if the behavior does not stop or material is not removed.
  - Report the cyberbullying to the police or cyber crime unit in your area if the cyber bullying contains serious threats, intimidation or sexual exploitation.
  - If your child expresses emotional distress or thoughts of self-harm seek professional help immediately.
- (Kowalski, et.al. 20012)

#### References:

<sup>1</sup> Hawker, D. S. J., & Boulton, M. J. (2000). Twenty years' research on peer victimization and psychosocial maladjustment: A meta-analytic review of cross-sectional studies. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 41, 441-455; Olweus, D. (1978). Aggression in the schools: Bullies and whipping boys. Washington, DC.

<sup>2</sup>Rigby, K. (1996). Bullying in schools: And what to do about it. Briston, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

<sup>3</sup>Ybarra et al (2006). Examining characteristics and associated distress related to internet harrassment: findings from the second youth internet safety survey.' Pediatrics Vol. 118, no.4, pp. 1169-1177.

Kowalski, R., Limber, S. & Agatston, P (2012). Cyberbullying: Bullying in the Digital Age. Malden, MA. Blackwell Publishers.

Willard, N. (2006). A Parents Guide to Cyber Bullying, Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use.