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CYBERBULLYING

Young people are using new media technology, including cell phones, personal data assistants, and the Internet, to communicate with others in the United States and throughout the world. New communication avenues, such as text messaging, chat rooms, and social networking websites (e.g., MySpace and Facebook), have allowed youth to easily develop relationships, some with people they have never met in person.

New technology has many potential benefits for youth. It allows young people to communicate with family and friends on a regular basis. New technology also provides opportunities to make rewarding social connections for those teens and pre-teens who have difficulty developing friendships in traditional social settings or because of limited contact with same-aged peers. In addition, regular Internet access allows young people to quickly increase their knowledge on a wide variety of topics.

However, the recent explosion in technology does not come without possible risks. Youth can use electronic media to embarrass, harass or threaten their peers. Increasing numbers of teens and pre-teens are becoming victims of this new form of violence. Although many different terms-such as cyberbullying, Internet harassment, and Internet bullying-have been used to describe this type of violence, electronic aggression is the term that most accurately captures all types of violence that occur electronically. Like traditional forms of youth violence, electronic aggression is associated with emotional distress and conduct problems at school.

**Hertz MF, David-Ferdon C. Electronic Media and Youth Violence: A CDC Issue Brief for Educators and Caregivers. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control; 2008

In This Newsletter:

Electronic Aggression is an emerging public health problem. Like anything, there are both benefits and risks, and technology is not an exception. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health Division convened a panel of experts in Sept, 2006 to present their research and findings on electronic media and youth violence.** Following is a summary of their research, experience and guidelines.

Defining Cyberbullying

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.

Cyberbullying, 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 (Willard, 2005)

Children and youth can cyberbully each other through:

- Emails
- Instant messaging
- Text or digital imaging messages sent on cell phones
- Web pages
- Blogs
- Chat rooms or discussion groups
- Other information communication technologies

Cyberbullying may also differ significantly from more "traditional" forms of bullying in a number of ways (Willard, 2006):

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

Trends/Statistics

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

- 18% of students in grades 6-8 said they had been cyberbullied at least once in the last couple of months; and 6% said it had happened to them 2 or more times.[1]
- 11% of students in grades 6-8 said they had cyberbullied another person at least once in the last couple of months, and 2% said they had done it two or more times. [1]
- 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). [2]
- Cyberbullying 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.[3]

VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS

Kowalski et al [1] also found 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 cyberbullied relatively frequently (at least twice in the last couple of months):
  - 62% said that they had been cyberbullied by another student at school, and 46% had been cyberbullied by a friend.
  - 55% didn't know who had cyberbullied them.
- Of those students who admitted cyberbullying others relatively frequently:
  - 60% had cyberbullied another student at school, and 56% had cyberbullied a friend.

IMPACT OF BULLYING

Some research does show that the level of emotional distress experienced by a victim is related to the relationship between the victim and perpetrator and the frequency of the aggression. Young people who were bullied by the same person both on-line and off-line were more likely to report being distressed by the incident (46%) than were those who reported being bullied by different people on-line and off-line (15%), and those who did not know who was harassing them on-line (18%).[2] Victims who were harassed by on-line peers and did not know their perpetrator in off-line settings also experienced distress, but they were more likely to experience distress if the harassment was perpetrated by the same person repeatedly (as opposed to a single incident), if the harasser was aged 18 or older, or if the harasser asked for a picture.[4]

REFERENCES

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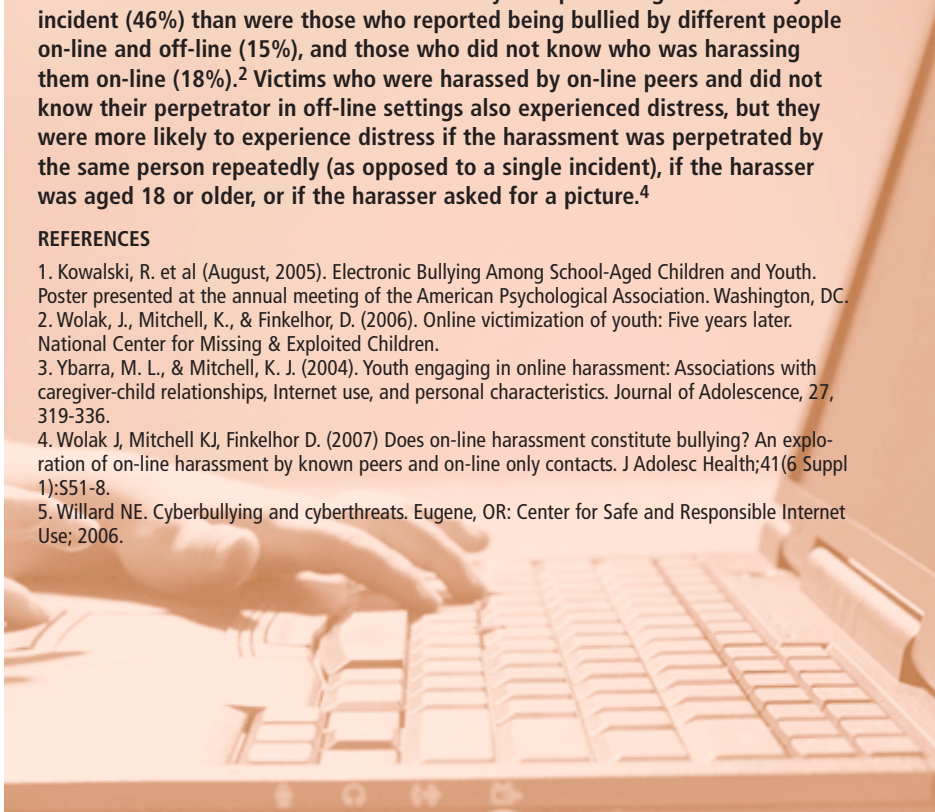
Cyberbullying Guidelines for Parents

Adults may not always be present in the online environments frequented by children and youth. Therefore, it is extremely important that adults pay close attention to cyberbullying and the activities of children and youth when using these newer technologies.

TO HELP PREVENT CYBERBULLYING:

Keep your home computer(s) in easily viewable places, such as a family room or kitchen.

Talk regularly with your child about online activities that he or she is involved in.

- **Talk specifically about cyberbullying** and encourage your child to tell you immediately if he or she is the victim of cyberbullying, cyberstalking, or other illegal or troublesome online 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 cyberbullying 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 online 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.

TO HELP DEALING WITH CYBERBULLYING THAT YOUR CHILD HAS EXPERIENCED:

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

Strongly encourage your child not to respond to the cyberbullying.

Do not erase the messages or pictures. Save these as evidence.

Try to identify the individual doing the cyberbullying. Even if the cyberbully 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 cyberbullying 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 email services, Internet Service Providers, Web sites, and cell phone companies. Consider contacting these providers and filing a complaint.

If the cyberbullying is coming through email or a cell phone, it may be possible to block future contact from the cyberbully. Of course, the cyberbully may assume a different identity and continue the bullying.

Contact your school. If the cyberbullying is occurring through your school district's Internet system, school administrators have an obligation to intervene. Even if the cyberbullying is occurring off campus, make your school administrators aware of the problem. They may be able to help you resolve the cyberbullying or be watchful for face-to-face bullying.

Consider contacting the cyberbully's parents. These parents may be very concerned to learn that their child has been cyberbullying 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 cyberbully's parents, communicate with them in writing — not face-to-face. Present proof of the cyberbullying (e.g., copies of an email message) and ask them to make sure the cyberbullying stops.

Consider contacting an attorney in cases of serious cyberbullying. 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 cyberbullying involves acts such as:

- **Threats of violence**
- **Obscene or harassing** phone calls or text messages
- **Extortion**
- **Harassment**, stalking, or hate crimes
- **Child pornography**