

How to Spot and Deal with the Different Forms of Cyberbullying

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Cyberbullying can be defined as an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, through the use of communication technologies such as the internet and social networking sites. It is a repeated behavior that occurs over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself; therefore such a victim feels intimidated and harassed. Cyberbullying is different and more dangerous than the traditional form of bullying because the victim can be followed everywhere, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, whether at home or in school. This is possible because of the increase in the use of electronic communication devices such as computers and mobile phones, and communication platforms such as the internet by everyone including young adults.

Cyberbullying is alarmingly common among adolescents and teenagers, and could be the most painful and most traumatizing thing that they can ever experience. According to cyberbullying statistics from i-SAFE foundation, over half of adolescents and teens have been

bullied online and about the same number have engaged in cyberbullying (Bullying Statistics, 2013). More than 1 in 3 young adults have experienced cyber threats online and over half do not tell their parents or guardians when cyberbullying occurs (Bullying Statistics, 2013). This form of bullying can be very emotionally damaging to teens and can also have legal consequences for them and their parents (Smith-Ross, Esmail, Omar, & Franklin, 2014).

Remember the story of Rehtaeh Parsons, the 17-year old Cole Harbour district high school student whose death was as a result of cyberbullying. The Anonymous group involved itself in investigating the incidents that led to Parsons' suicide. In its news release, Anonymous blamed the death on "school teachers, administrators, the police and prosecutors, those who should have been role models in the late Rehtaeh's life" (CBC News, 2013). Therefore, it is essential for individuals to be able to identify cases of cyberbullying and render assistance to victims as soon as possible.

Forms of cyberbullying include the following:

- *Cyberstalking*: This involves the bully sending offensive and malicious messages targeted at an

individual or a group and are often repeated multiple times. These messages are sent at odd times of the day and even at night to harass the individual. Often times, cyberstalking may include threats of physical harm. An example of such a message could be “I will shoot you”.

- *Flaming*: Flaming is similar to harassment, but it refers to an online fight or fierce argument that takes place through emails, instant messaging or chat rooms. It is a sort of public online bullying which is supplemented with images and harsh languages in order to add emotions to the messages communicated.
- *Exclusion*: This occurs whenever someone is intentionally singled and left out of an online group such as a chat room. This group will then do whatever they can online to taunt the excluded person through impolite messages, malicious comments and nasty emails.
- *Outing*: Outing is the public display or forwarding of unique personal and private information of someone such as pictures and videos as well as conversations such as text messages, emails, or instant messages. Most times it involves

sexual information about the victims which may result in psychological damage (Smith-Ross et al., 2014).

- *Masquerading*: Masquerading is a form of cyberbullying where the perpetrator pretends to be someone they aren't. They might create fake identities to bully their victim. Another way is to impersonate someone and use that person's identity to send out malicious messages with the aim of spoiling the owner's reputation.
- *Pseudonyms*: This involves the use of a fictitious name such as a nickname, alias, or pen name for the purpose of haunting someone else online. This is in a bid to conceal identity and create a different online presence so that the victim is more hurt by not knowing who the bully is.

Anonymity is a major issue in cyberbullying because when the perpetrators' individuality is hidden, it is impossible to identify and stop them. However, it is easier to identify the victim.



How to Spot Cyber-Bullying

Victims of cyberbullying have a higher risk of experiencing the following: depression, nervousness, low self-esteem, social anxiety, loneliness, sadness, isolation, school absenteeism, academic problems, and suicide attempts. Unfortunately, these issues can follow people into their adult lives unless treated by a mental health professional.

Statistics on cyber bullying in Canada show that bullies and their victims are more likely to use alcohol and drugs. Cyber-bullies are also more likely to participate in criminal activity and exhibit aggressive behaviours. 60 percent of elementary school bullies have criminal records by the time they are 24 years old (No bullying, 2015).

Dealing with Cyberbullying

It is essential to engage an active effort to promote awareness of the dangers of cyberbullying among young

adults, and also educate them about the need for a responsible online presence. We should also be vigilant to look for warning signs that will enable adults to determine if a child is a victim or the perpetrator of cyberbullying. Although teens may find it irritating, it is necessary to monitor their use of technology and establish policies that will limit actions leading to cyberbullying. Also, reporting of cyberbullying and related activities should be encouraged so that the situation is quickly addressed before more harm is done. In case of an occurrence of cyberbullying, an administrator may do the following:

- Talk to them (victim and perpetrator) - Let them know that they can trust you and that they shouldn't deal with any form of bullying alone.
- Help them:
 - Document the incidence;
 - Negotiate resolution between affected people (if known);
 - Report unwanted text messages to their telephone service provider, or cyberbullying to social media sites;
 - Report the evidence to school authority; and
 - Report criminal offences, such as threats, assaults, harassment

and sexual exploitation to the local police department.

Remember just because a child or teen does not exhibit the above mentioned traits does not mean that he or she is not being bullied; therefore vigilance and observation are key.

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