Cyberbullying

A conversation guide for parents and kids.

All illustrations created by cyberbullying victims aged 11 to 18.

Norton by Symantec

Contents

What Is Cyberbullying?

Bullying victims can face threats beyond physical violence or face-to-face encounters. These days, bullying has evolved and spread to every corner of the online world.

Cyberbullying occurs when a bully targets a victim using electronic communication methods, such as texting on cell phones or posting on social media websites.

In 2015, the National Center for Education Statistics began collecting data on electronic bullying separately from in-school bullying. Cyberbullying was defined as "when willful and repeated harm is inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, or other electronic devices."[1]
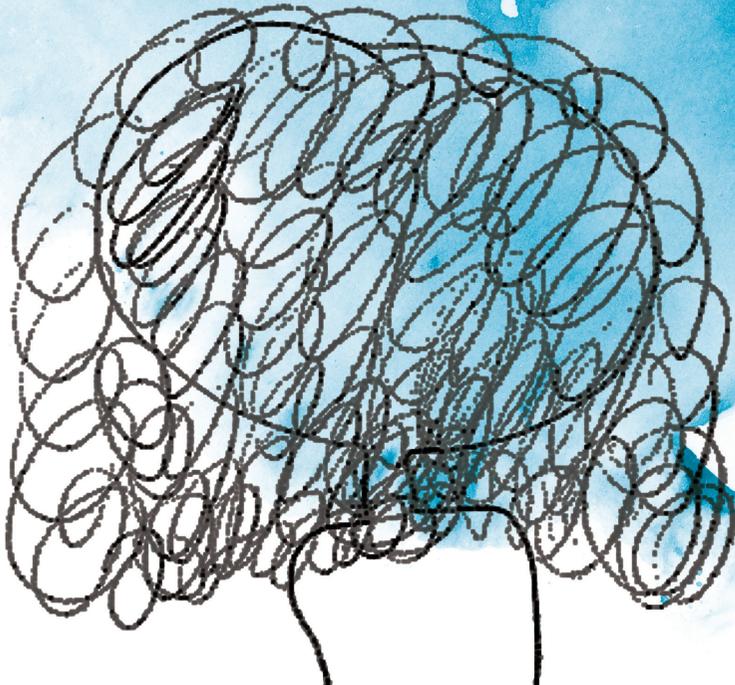
During the 2015–16 school year, approximately 16% of students in the U.S. reported being cyberbullied.[2]

Unlike bullying, cyberbullying doesn't require physical strength or a face-to-face meeting. Since many online platforms don't make an effort to verify that people are who they say they are, the cyberbully can choose an alias and remain anonymous. Anyone with an internet connection and a device can be a cyberbully — anywhere at any time.

If your children are online, there is a strong possibility they could be, or have already been, cyberbullied. An effective way to help protect your child from this growing problem is to learn about the issue to better understand what you're protecting them from.

Children who are bullied are at risk for a variety of mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, diminished self-esteem, and social withdrawal.

Forms of Cyberbullying

Harassment in the digital world extends across multiple channels, and bullies can now use the entire scope of the internet to target their victims.

Cyberbullying Channels

BLOGGING WEBSITES
Because blogging websites are both public and widely shared, cyberbullies can directly call out their victims by tagging them in blogs and in the comments sections. They can then spread the post throughout the blogging community and other connected social channels.

EMAIL
Once cyberbullies have a victim's email address, the bully can engage in email attacks on the victim. This can occur when the cyberbully sends large numbers of harassing messages from anonymous accounts. The bully can also sign the victim's email address up for explicit or offensive email lists, potentially flooding the account with inappropriate or insensitive material.

MESSAGES AND TEXT
Cyberbullies send mean, embarrassing, untrue, or hurtful messages to or about someone using cell phone text messaging. This can also include sending sexually suggestive text messages, or sexting, to someone or about someone. The messages may be sent via SMS, online messenger or texting apps, instant messenger, or a combination of these.

SOCIAL MEDIA
Cyberbullies attack their victims on social media by publicly posting or privately sending harassing messages. They may also create a fake account in the victim's name (impersonation), or use a fake account of a made-up persona to tease the victim (catfishing). With so many channels to do damage, cyberbullies have many ways to harass their victims.
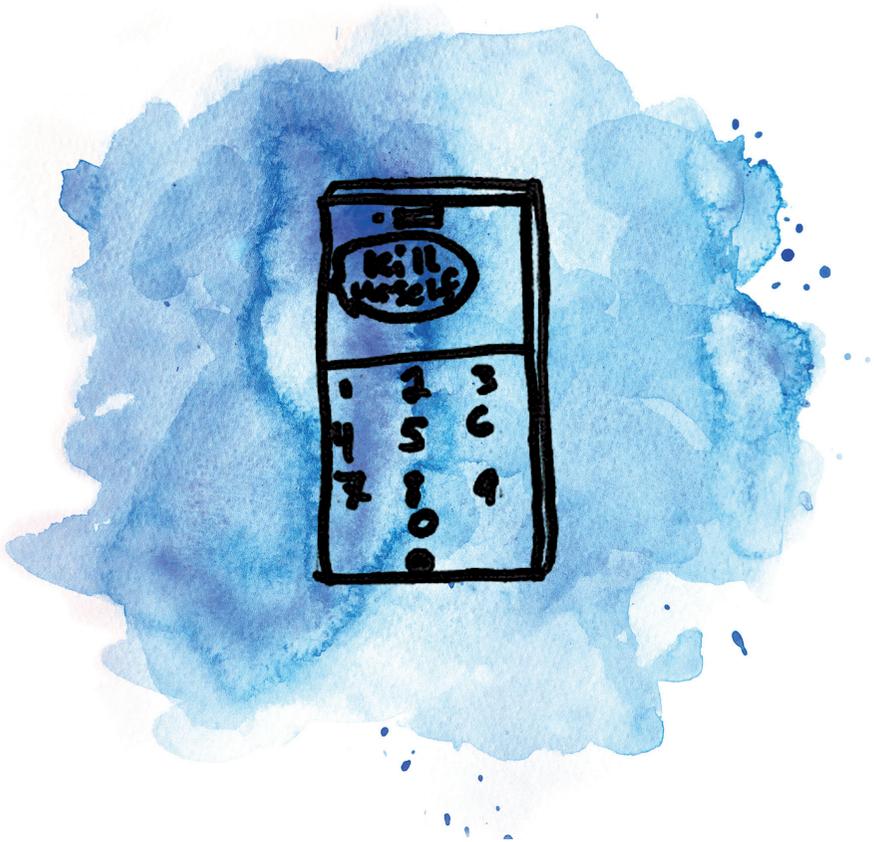
Cyberbullying Methods

CATFISHING

When people pretend to be someone else online to trick people into a relationship, it's called catfishing — and it's a form of cyberbullying. The person getting catfished often discloses personal information to the new "friend," who exploits their feelings and causes emotional harm.

DISSING

Cyberbullies can pretend to be friends with the victim, and then share or post cruel information online to ruin their reputation or friendships with others. This includes posting personal photos, videos, and screenshots.

FRAPING

Fraping is a serious offense where a person accesses the victim's social media account and impersonates them in an attempt to be funny or to ruin their reputation. Fraping can have serious consequences, especially because once something is out there, it is very hard to delete it and mend the victim's digital reputation.

OUTING

Outing is a deliberate act to embarrass or publicly humiliate an individual by posting their private, sensitive, or embarrassing information online. The information revealed can be insignificant or serious, but can have a severe impact on the victim.

TROLLING

Trolling is a form of cyberbullying done by insulting an individual online to provoke them enough to get a response. Usually these attacks are personal and instigate anger in the victim, making them lash out and behave badly.

TRICKERY

Trickery is the act of gaining a victim's trust so that they reveal their secrets or embarrassing information, which the cyberbully posts on the internet for everyone to see. The person pretends to be a close friend and confidant, and gives the child a false sense of security before breaking his or her trust.

Recognizing the Warning Signs of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying doesn't stop when a child goes home from school. If you think your child is being cyberbullied, there are many resources available to you to learn more.[3]

You can also look for some of these subtle signs yourself. If you notice any, it may be time to have a conversation about cyberbullying.

- They appear nervous when they receive a text, online message, or email.

- Their device habits change. They may stop using their devices or begin using them excessively.

- They make excuses to avoid going to school.

- They become defensive or secretive about online activity.

- They withdraw from friends and family.

- They have physical symptoms, such as trouble sleeping, stomach aches, headaches, or weight loss or gain.

- They begin falling behind in school or acting out.

- Their grades start declining.

- They appear especially angry, frustrated, or sad, particularly after going online or checking their devices.

- They delete social media or email accounts.

Staying Silent Is Not the Answer

Even if you don't see these signs, it's still a good idea to start having important conversations with your child about cyberbullying. Initiating talks with your child will help you to establish both trust and comfort. Doing so can open the door for your child to feel safe enough to come to you with problems in the future.

Cyberbullied children often feel lonely, depressed, and reluctant to share their feelings with others. There are many reasons for the silence, and one of them could be the fear of losing access to their devices and the internet. Others worry that their parents will overreact by contacting the bully's parents or the school. Some victims don't realize how common cyberbullying is, and they believe the abuse is their fault.

By establishing open communications with your children, you may increase the possibility that they will be open to talking to you about cyberbullying or other important life topics.

How to Start a Conversation About Cyberbullying

Let your child know that cyberbullying is a growing issue that can happen to anyone. Many children faced with this issue want to get help, but they might not know how to get it. Explain that being proactive and having open, honest conversations between parents and children can help to fight against cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is a sensitive subject and starting a conversation can be difficult. The following tips can help guide your dialogue and make an open discussion easier for both you and your child.

Start the Conversation Casually, but Show Concern

When talking to your children, keep in mind that asking blunt questions, such as, "Are people harassing you?" may make them panic. Instead, ask casual questions about their day-to-day lives, such as, "What did you do online today?" Also, try to reference public stories (such as ones recently in the news) when bringing up the topic, rather than specific incidents directly relating to your child or their friends.

The most important thing for your children to know is that you will be there for them if they are being cyberbullied. By stressing that you will keep all conversations private, and not intervene unless necessary, you may allay fears your child may have about talking to you.

Show Empathy During the Conversation

Throughout your conversation, reassure your child that anything said will be kept confidential, and you'll only share with others if necessary. If they mention knowing someone who is being cyberbullied, encourage them to talk to the victim about reporting the incident to the school office. Remember to emphasize that being a victim of cyberbullying is nothing to be ashamed of. Don't threaten to ban internet or device usage. If your child needs help, remind them that you, teachers, and other adults will always be there for them.

You can help them by educating yourself about the signs of cyberbullying, and by learning how to establish an open line of communication with your child.

Conversation Starter:
Is It Cyberbullying or Kids Just Being Kids?

Oftentimes, kids may not know they're cyberbullying someone. When they are the victim, the child may believe they're an individual target, not part of a larger problem. However, when the child is the bully, he or she may think they're just joking around. This section is designed to help you initiate a conversation with your child to help you better understand how your child perceives the issue.

We created questions to ask your children. Start by talking to them about their experiences with the following scenarios. If they answer yes to any of the questions you ask, you can open up the conversation even more by asking some of the "Conversation Starter" questions.

1. Do you know anyone who has pretended to be you or someone else online? Have you done something like this?

YES   NO

Conversation starter: Sometimes people do things online that they may think are funny or not a big deal. Since they are not on the receiving end of this, they may not realize exactly how harmful their words can be to another person. Are you aware that it can actually hurt someone? Have you been hurt by this?

2. Has anyone sent you harmful or mean comments on a social network app or via texting? Do you know someone that has done this to another person?

YES   NO

Conversation starter: Sometimes people can say things online that they normally wouldn't say to someone's face. They may not realize exactly how harmful their words can be to another person. How does that make you feel?

3. Do you know anyone who has posted a photo of you or someone else that's embarrassing without his or her permission?

YES   NO

Conversation starter: We all do embarrassing things at some time in our lives. Sometimes it's funny for others to see that. Do you think it's OK for others to see those funny things about us without our permission? Would you like it if someone did that to you? Would you do that to others?

4. Have you or any of your friends intentionally rejected someone from a group, an online group, or a game?

YES   NO

Conversation starter: Are all your friends in your online group? Did you miss anyone? Was that person excluded on purpose or was it a mistake? Have you ever had a friend who acts differently so someone in the group suggests that particular friend should be excluded? Would you like it if your group did that to you?

5. Has anyone ever subscribed you or someone you know to receive spam emails that contain inappropriate or adult content?

YES   NO

Conversation starter: Sometimes when people are in groups they think it's funny to jokingly sign up friends to offensive or age-inappropriate websites just to get them in trouble with parents or teachers. Has that ever happened to anyone you know? Do you think that joke was funnier than the harm it caused that kid?

6. Have you or any of your friends ever forwarded someone else's private IM conversation or text without their permission?

YES   NO

Conversation starter: Do you know that it's not OK to send a private message to someone else without asking for permission first? Do you think it makes sense? Private conversations are called private for a reason. Some people do it without realizing that this is wrong.

7. Have any friends sent inappropriate or embarrassing videos of you or someone else without their knowledge?

YES   NO

Conversation starter: Do the kids in school talk about someone's embarrassing video? Does that person know about it? Do you think it's OK to share images that might embarrass someone? Would you forward such a photo or video?

8. Have you ever seen someone being bullied without saying anything about it?

YES   NO

Conversation starter: Do you know that kids who get bullied need all the help and support they can get? What would you do if you saw someone getting bullied? Would you say something? Would you call someone? Who would you call? A friend? A parent? A teacher?

Teach Online Etiquette to Your Children

Even if you talk to your child about cyberbullying and don't suspect they're being victimized, there are other steps you can take to help protect them from cyberbullies.

Setting guidelines and rules for how they use technology, also known as online etiquette, may include how much time your child spends online, which websites they use, or what language they use when chatting.

Practicing online etiquette is a critical skill for any child. And it's as simple as asking them to behave online the way they would in real life:

- Never use another person's cell phone or computer without permission.

- Don't communicate with strangers.

- Never interact with people online unless they're friends in real life.

- Always keep social profiles private.

- Don't give out personal information to anyone.

- Don't share passwords. Always use secure passwords, and don't reuse the same password on all your accounts.

- Be mindful about what you post about yourself and others online.

It's important to treat your child like an adult when explaining online etiquette. Make sure to cover the consequences (both within your household and in the world at large) of breaking the rules, and stress that these measures are for their own safety. Additionally, teach your child how to block individuals who are harassing them, so they are not tempted to break etiquette rules to confront their bully.

Cyber Slang Dictionary

Cyberbullying can have a language all its own. One of the reasons cyberbullying can go undetected for so long is that adults often don't understand this special vocabulary. Below are several terms that adolescents use when talking online. Understanding them may help you recognize cyberbullying red flags.

AIR: Adult in room

ASL: Age, sex, location

ASLP: Age, sex, location, picture

BASIC: Meaning boring, uninteresting, and "lame." Also used in "basic b****."

BOB: Back off, b****

BYE FELICIA: A dismissive term said when you want an annoying or unwanted person to go away. This is a pop culture reference from the movie *Friday*, which came out more than 20 years ago.

CD9: Code nine (parents are around)

DIAF: Die in a fire

DM: Direct message

GAL: Get a life

GNOC: Get naked on camera

HAPPY SLAPPING: Physical assaults that are recorded on mobile phones and then sent to other children via text messages, social networking sites, or blogs.

KMS: Kill myself

KPC: Keeping parents clueless

KYA: Kill yourself

LGBNAF: Let's get butt naked and f***

LMIRL: Let's meet in real life

Netflix and chill: "Netflix and chill" has nothing to do with movies or relaxing, and everything to do with hooking up.

Netiquette: Short for "network etiquette", these are the unofficial rules of accepted proper online social conduct.

PAW: Parents are watching

Pharming: Searching medicine cabinets for drugs

PIR: Parent in room

POS: Parents over shoulder

SUGARPIC: Suggestive or erotic photo of self

TAW: Teachers are watching

TDTM: Talk dirty to me

THOT: That wh*** over there

Tree: Marijuana

Turnt/Turnt up: Similar to "lit" this is in reference to a crazy party involving being drunk or high

Umfriend: "Intimate" partner

Zerg: To gang up on someone

99: Parents are gone

143: I love you

182: I hate you

53X: Sex

1174: Meeting place for a wild party

References

[1] National Center for Education Statistics, "Indicators of school crime and safety: 2017," p. 63, footnote 48.

[2] National Center for Education Statistics, "Indicators of school crime and safety: 2017," p. 98.

[3] https://www.commonsensemedia.org/cyberbullying; http://cyberbullying.org; and http://www.meganmeierfoundation.org/resourcecenter.html

Resource Links

For more information on cyberbullying and how to take action, see the following resource links:

GOVERNMENT AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

http://www.ncpc.org/topics/cyberbullying

https://www.stopbullying.gov/

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

https://www.commonsensemedia.org/cyberbullying

http://cyberbullying.org

http://www.meganmeierfoundation.org/resourcecenter.html

https://www.pta.org

https://thesmarttalk.org/