

# Cyberbullying: Bullying in the Virtual World

## What Is Cyberbullying?<sup>1,2,4</sup>

Cyberbullying is deliberate and repeated acts of harm inflicted through computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices.

- Electronic devices are used to harass, threaten, humiliate, and hassle peers. This includes posting obscene, insulting, and slanderous messages or photos, as well as developing websites to promote and distribute hateful or hurtful content.
- Cyberbullying can be carried out through many different communication modalities, including:
  - Text messages, emails, video, phone calls, chatrooms, instant messages, blogs, websites, social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr), and internet gaming
- The kinds of behaviors being transmitted through these modalities include:
  - Flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing and tricking, exclusion, cyberstalking, and happy slapping<sup>4</sup>

## How Is Cyberbullying Different From Other Forms of Bullying?<sup>2</sup>

- *Anonymity*: Unlike other forms of bullying, in cyberbullying the identity of the bully is often unknown.
- *Cyberbullying actions are viral*: Students are connected (via electronic devices) 24/7. Information cannot only be circulated widely, but rapidly from one person to another. This means students are susceptible to cyberbullying victimization (or are able to perpetrate cyberbullying) around the clock, and a large number of people can be involved in a cyber-attack in one way or another.
- *Ease of cruelty over technology*: Cyberbullying can be performed from a physically distant location and the perpetrator may not see its immediate effects. It may be easier for bullies to be hurtful using typed words rather than speaking face to face.
- *Adults may be ill-prepared to respond*: Many parents feel they lack the technical know-how to monitor youth's technology use. As a result, cyberbullying acts are often unmonitored, missed, and without consequence.

## How Are Victims of Cyberbullying Affected?<sup>2,4</sup>

The effects of cyberbullying tend to parallel those of traditional bullying. However, in some cases many of the above differences may make cyberbullying more devastating than other forms of bullying. Negative outcomes related to bullying include:

- Feelings of depression, sadness, anger, and frustration
- Family and academic problems
- School violence and delinquent behavior
- Low self-esteem and suicidal thoughts
- Many cyber bullies and victims are also bullies and victims of traditional bullying.

## What Are Some Signs that a Child May Be a Victim of Cyberbullying?<sup>2,4</sup>

A child may be a victim of cyberbullying if he or she:

- Unexpectedly stops using personal technology (e.g., cell phone, computer, games)
- Appears nervous or jumpy when (s)he receives messages via electronic devices
- Appears angry, upset, depressed, or frustrated after using the computer or his or her cell phone
- Avoids discussions about activities on the computer or cell phone
- Becomes unusually withdrawn from friends and/or family members

## What Are Some Signs that a Child May Be Cyberbullying Others?<sup>2</sup>

A child may be cyberbullying others if (s) he:

- Quickly switches screens or closes programs when someone walks by
- Becomes unusually upset when personal device uses are restricted
- Avoids discussions about activities on the computer or cell phone
- Uses multiple online accounts or an account that is not his or her own

In general, if a youth significantly changes his or her behavior when using technological devices, steps need to be taken to find out why.

## Who Is Responsible for Responding to Cyberbullying: Parents, Teachers, and/or Law Enforcement?<sup>2</sup>

“Collectively we need to create an environment where kids feel comfortable about talking with adults about this problem and feel confident that meaningful steps will be taken to resolve the situation<sup>2</sup>”

## What Are NYS Laws and Policies Regarding Cyberbullying?<sup>3</sup>

NYS LAW recognizes cyberbullying through the Dignity for All Students Act (The Dignity Act):

- Cyberbullying is defined as harassment or bullying by any form of electronic communication.
- Requires school districts to create policies and guidelines that prohibit acts of bullying and include provisions for responding to those acts.
- School employees are required to promptly report incidents, investigate reports, and take action to end harassment and bullying.
- This law adds bullying to the list of incidents for which a student can be disciplined within the school setting.
- Although NYS proposed the use of criminal sanction for bullying offenses, it was not enacted.<sup>3</sup> Incidents occurring off school property that substantially disrupts the learning environment at school may be addressed by school staff.

\*Not from NYS? See [http://www.cyberbullying.us/Bullying\\_and\\_Cyberbullying\\_Laws.pdf](http://www.cyberbullying.us/Bullying_and_Cyberbullying_Laws.pdf) for information within the US.

## Resources for Educators, Parents, and Students

- The New York State Education Department (NYSED) offers guidance on bullying and cyberbullying prevention | [www.p12.nysed.gov/dignityact/documents/DignityActBrochureUpdateFinal.pdf](http://www.p12.nysed.gov/dignityact/documents/DignityActBrochureUpdateFinal.pdf)
- Books on Cyberbullying | [www.cyberbullyingbook.com](http://www.cyberbullyingbook.com), also see Reference [4] below
- Empower safe internet use | [www.missingkids.com/NetSmartz](http://www.missingkids.com/NetSmartz), [www.common sense media.org/educators/cyberbullying-toolkit](http://www.common sense media.org/educators/cyberbullying-toolkit)
- Tips for Responding to Cyberbullying
  - Educators | [http://www.cyberbullying.us/Top\\_Ten\\_Tips\\_Educators\\_Cyberbullying\\_Response.pdf](http://www.cyberbullying.us/Top_Ten_Tips_Educators_Cyberbullying_Response.pdf)
  - Parents | [http://www.cyberbullying.us/Top\\_Ten\\_Tips\\_Parents\\_Cyberbullying\\_Response.pdf](http://www.cyberbullying.us/Top_Ten_Tips_Parents_Cyberbullying_Response.pdf)
  - Students | [http://www.cyberbullying.us/Top\\_Ten\\_Tips\\_Teens\\_Response.pdf](http://www.cyberbullying.us/Top_Ten_Tips_Teens_Response.pdf)
- Tips for Preventing Cyberbullying:
  - Educators | [http://www.cyberbullying.us/Top\\_Ten\\_Tips\\_Educators\\_Cyberbullying\\_Prevention.pdf](http://www.cyberbullying.us/Top_Ten_Tips_Educators_Cyberbullying_Prevention.pdf)
  - Parents | [http://www.cyberbullying.us/Top\\_Ten\\_Tips\\_Parents\\_Cyberbullying\\_Prevention.pdf](http://www.cyberbullying.us/Top_Ten_Tips_Parents_Cyberbullying_Prevention.pdf)
  - Students | [http://www.cyberbullying.us/Top\\_Ten\\_Tips\\_Teens\\_Prevention.pdf](http://www.cyberbullying.us/Top_Ten_Tips_Teens_Prevention.pdf)

## References

[1] Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J. W. Cyberbullying Scripts: Talking to Teens about Online Harassment. [www.cyberbullying.us/cyberbullying\\_scripts.pdf](http://www.cyberbullying.us/cyberbullying_scripts.pdf)

[2] Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J. W. (2011). Cyberbullying: Identification, Prevention, and Response. [www.cyberbullying.us/Cyberbullying\\_Identification\\_Prevention\\_Response\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](http://www.cyberbullying.us/Cyberbullying_Identification_Prevention_Response_Fact_Sheet.pdf)

[3] <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/dignityact/documents/DignityActBrochureUpdateFinal.pdf>

[4] Kowalkski, R. M., Limber, S. P., & Agatston, P. W. (2008). Cyberbullying: Bullying in the digital age. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.