# Cyberbullying

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The Verdadera staff encourages you to discuss and explore the issues and stories, as the publication aims not only to offer an outlet for expression, but to improve our lives. Keep in mind that the emotions that flow through the text and the feelings behind the words could be those of your child, your classmate, or your best friend.

Things to Consider:
- What are the consequences of our actions when we put things online?
- Should teenagers have social media websites such as ask.fm?
- What should you do as a victim of cyberbullying?

## STUDENT SUBMISSIONS

"Courage is fire and bullying is smoke."
                                    – Benjamin Disraeli
With the current increase in social media sites, cyberbullying is a more prevalent issue than ever before. Ask.fm and 'anon' asks on tumblr allow people to anonymously ask rude, intrusive, personal questions, while Vine, Youtube, and Facebook publish painfully embarassing videos. I have a twitter account that I use to follow celebrities, and I have been shocked by the level of vitriol that people shamelessly spew. The real issue with cyberbullying is the level of 'protection' that the bullies feel in hiding behind their computer screens. If you can't say it to my face, don't say it at all.

"Unless and until our society recognizes cyber bullying for what it is, the suffering of thousands of silent victims will continue."
                                    – Anna Maria Chavez

I WISH I'D NEVER GOTTEN STUFF LIKE

FACEBOOK AND TUMBLR AND THE ASK.FM THING…IT JUST OPENING WINDOWS FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE TOO COWARDLY TO SAY TERRIBLE THINGS TO YOUR FACE. HONESTLY, I'VE DONE IT TOO. I'M NOT GOING TO LIE, SOMETIMES I SAY MEAN STUFF WHEN THINGS ARE ANONYMOUS. IT'S SUCH A HUGE TEMPTATION AND IT'S REALLY EASY WHEN YOU'RE HAVING A BAD DAY. I REGRETTED IT LATER, BUT THE INTERNET IS FOREVER. ONCE IT'S OUT IT'S OUT. IN MIDDLE SCHOOL THEY HAVE CYBERBULLYING ASSEMBLIES, B/C ADULTS KNOW THAT TECHNOLOGY IS SO HUGE NOWADAYS AND THAT TYPING SOMETHING ON A KEYBOARD IS EASIER TO DO THAN ANYTHING BECAUSE YOU DON'T SEE WHAT YOU'RE DOING. I FEEL BAD NOW, BUT ONLY BECAUSE I'VE SEEN IN PERSON HOW SOMEONE HAS REACTED BADLY TO WHAT I'VE SAID ON TUMBLR. BUT IF I NEVER SEE THAT PERSON, IF I DON'T REALLY KNOW THEM BUT I'M JUST HAVING A BAD DAY, THAN CYBER BULLYING IS AS EASY AS BULLYING AN OBJECT.

"The bigger the network, the harder it is to leave. Many users find it too daunting to start afresh on a new site, so they quietly consent to Facebook's privacy bullying."

– EvgenyMorozov

I was cyberbullied once in sixth grade. It was the worst experience of my life: somehow someone got my email password and then hacked my account and sent out terrible stuff to my family and everything…but that wasn't the worst part, really she started sending me nasty facebook messages. There are just way too many accounts to keep track of, and all of them make me nervous. I feel like I'm surrounded. When it's online it's all anonymous and no one knows who to blame, what's going on…it stopped after awhile when the bully lost interest but I still can't stand the fact that you can basically hold no one accountable. Well I guess you can track those sorts of things…but sometimes people use public computers. Anyway, who likes to be called stupid and ugly and all that in a ALL

CAPS EMAIL. It's worse than just saying all of that to my face because after reading stuff like that, a real textual message, it just doesn't go away.

"My pain may be the reason for somebody's laugh. But my laugh must never be the reason for somebody's pain. "

– Charlie Chaplin

I think the definition of cyberbullying for MV is a bit different of the stereotypical one. You would usually imagine people posting mean comments on Facebook walls, saying really awful things, but at MV, it's more geared towards Tumblr and ask.fm/formspring type websites. I think it's the anonymity. People think they're so smart for using the anonymous feature, but I wonder if they actually realize, just because it says you're anonymous, you're really not? Hello, IP addresses exist, not to mention I doubt a teen is going to be smarter than the police if it gets to the point where they're involved. So when I see those little snarky, mean comments in my Tumblr asks, I don't let it get to me. First off, you're a dumbass. Second, you're a coward. Third, I have better things to do in my life than to let myself get tied down by someone so unworthy.

"When people hurt you over and over, think of them like sandpaper. They may scratch and hurt you a bit, but in the end you end up polished and they end up useless."

– Anonymous

I moved recently to Monta Vista, and when I was asked about cyberbullying, it was a littler weird for me. Honestly, I don't think there's a lot of it that goes on. At least from what I see. Back in Pennsylvania, where I came from, even in high school, where you would think people would stop, there would be legitimate cases of people having long posts on each other's walls saying stupid things like "you're actually fat and

ugly so just shut up" or even "at least my mom doesn't look like a dog". Ridiculous, don't you think? But actually true. Anyways, I guess I don't think that there's cyberbullying at MV because I haven't seen anything so overt, but who knows? There might be more that goes on beneath the surface because you can't see it..

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse, and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.'
– Desmond Tutu

Cyberbullying, in my opinion, is an irrelevant obsolete issue in our community. People don't send hate messages or other such things over Facebook or chat forums, and is hardly an explosive topic since administrators at mv can regulate all of our chats and emails through their zero policy tolerance guidelines set. However I have heard about this over in schools in Saratoga over texting over who's a slut with audrie Potts that it's a bigger issue. They called her names through messaging, and she killed herself over other people's words because social media has that effect. It's sad, but still I don't think cyberbulling is that big of a deal.

"When people don't like themselves very much, they have to make up for it. The classic bully was actually a victim first."
– Tom Hiddleston

If cyberbullying means formspring.com or ask.fm, then I believe that you shouldn't be putting yourself out there to get bullied in the first place. I see people who make these accounts, and then get harassed by anonymous people who wonder who the cyber-bullies are. It's harmful because the actual people can be anonymous. But I'm also not trying to place blame on the victim; the bullies who do this in the first place should be held responsible. After all, how embarrassing is it to hide behind a computer and make sad, awful messages?

"Never be bullied into silence. Never allow yourself to be made a victim. Accept no one's definition of your life, but define yourself."
– Harvey S. Firestone

When i was a freshman, i decided to ask someone to homecoming through facebook.One of the worst decisions of my life. For some reason, i decided to ask her with a post, not with private chat. This one guy in my lit class who really hated me for some reason ended up seeing it, and that was when the news started to spread around. What ended up happening was that i got rejected, obviously, and then people started to joke around about it at school, and although i did feel embarrassed, i just tried to shrug it off. Well, at least i learned my lesson.

"My message to kids who bully other kids is: You know it's' wrong! What's really going on? Try not to make somebody else's life miserable because you are."
– Joe Nichols

Cyberbullying has played a big part in my friend's life, however it has rarely touched me. I remember my friend owning a tumblr, which includes an ask box, where you can send anonymous questions or comments. everyday she'd get hate on her weight and body and death threats. what's embarrassing is that it was obvious the anon went to our school, and to think someone we know was capable of doing this was scary as well. She never told anyone she was getting those questions until after 6 months,
when her parents found out. she tried to record a suicide note via video but was caught by her parents. those small notes everyday really accumulate and eat you up. now she lives a happy life but she changed schools. i guess the point of this story was to show how what you write in a moment's notice can change someones

life forever. please stop cyberbullying.

"You have your way. I have my way. As for the right way, the correct way, and the only way, it does not exist.."

– Friedrich Nietzsche

**More stories found at www.mvhsverdadera.org**

# Cyber-Bullying

## By Lindsay Smith, LCSW

### Cyber-Bullying Defined

According to the National Crime Prevention Council, cyber-bullying is "when teens use the internet, cell phones, or other devices to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person."

Cyber-bullying can have grave consequences. Cyber-bullying can cause teens to feel hurt, shameful, embarrassed, depressed, alone, misunderstood, and/or angry. And unfortunately, we have seen many examples of cyber-bullying leading to suicide when the teen feels there is no way out.

In the past, bullying was limited to the time the teen was physically with their peers, but cyber-bullying can occur twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Unfortunately, the only way to totally get away from cyber-bullying is to turn off all electronics. Turning off electronics not only isolates the teen from their peers, but is not realistic in terms of getting homework done.

### Why Teens Cyber-Bully and Why it is so Devastating to Teens

Teens feel protected behind a screen. It is much easier to say cruel and hurtful things to another person when you are not looking that person in the eye. Unfortunately, once the recipient reads these things, even if the other person wants to take it back, these comments can be really hard to forget and difficult to move past.

Teens are impulsive and will often send words or images to others without considering the consequences. A mean thought comes to mind and it is sent off into the digital world instantaneously without a thought to the potential consequences. Even if it is later regretted, the digital footprint is there to stay.

Teens can cyber-bully anonymously. The teens do not have to own their comments and end up saying things anonymously that they would never dare to say if their name was attached. They believe that the recipient will never know who they are and this makes them bolder in their statements.

Additionally, when these mean comments or questions are anonymously posted, teens often assume that everyone feels that way – that the voice of this anonymous person represents all of the recipient's peers. That is not true. The negative comment represents what the person who posted it feels at that moment (and even that person's feelings may have changed by the next day) and it is only representative of the person who posted it. But because negative comments are posted more often than positive comments, it makes it hard to keep a realistic perspective.

**Anonymous Websites and Associated Problems**


Anonymous cyber-bullying is facilitated by websites (such as ask.fm) that allow teens to post mean, hurtful, and inappropriate comments or questions anonymously.  Teens create accounts on websites where others can post things about them anonymously because they are curious about what others think about them.  Unfortunately, most of the comments and questions end up being negative, regardless of all the positive qualities of the recipient.  Although adults find it difficult to understand, many teens leave their sites up even after hurtful comments have been posted.  Some reasons that teens choose to leave their sites up include wanting attention from peers (even if it is negative), hoping things will change and the comments will become more positive, and wanting the encouragement and support that are sometimes given from friends after negative comments are posted.


To Teens:

If you are being cyber-bullied:

- It is not your fault.  You did not do anything to deserve this.
- Tell someone about it.  Do not keep it a secret.
- Seek help from a counselor at your school or in the community.  It can help to talk to someone you can trust about the feelings associated with cyber-bullying.
- Do not retaliate or reply to the message.
- Please consider:
    - Deleting the account.
    - Blocking the offending user.
    - Reporting the user to your parents, the site, and the school.

If you see others being cyber-bullied:

- Tell an adult about it.  Report the bullying.  Bullying is never okay.
- Stand up for the person being cyber-bullied and say something to the offender.  If people other than the recipient call out the offender on his/her behavior, the offender will often stop.
- Support the person being cyber-bullied so he/she does not feel so alone.
- Do not ever forward any mean or embarrassing content to others.


If you are saying harmful things to or about others through electronic means:  Stop!  Think before you press "send" or "post."

- What you write and disseminate in a moment can change someone's life forever.
- When you put something on the internet, you cannot take it back.  Once something is out – it's out!  Even if you regret it and take it down later, people may have already re-posted it or taken screen shots of it.  You cannot completely undo any type of electronic message.
- It has become much more commonplace for college admissions personnel and managers

who are hiring to do social media searches.  The things that come up associated with your name tell them a lot about who you are and will influence their decision on accepting you to their college or hiring you to work for their company.

- You may think you can write whatever you want and get away with it because it is "anonymous," but anonymous doesn't really mean anonymous.  If the police get involved, it is not hard for them to determine who "anonymous" really is and you can get in a lot of trouble.
- Even if you are not saying something mean directly to someone else and you think you are just venting, if you do this on a public website people will see it and some will likely know who you are talking about.   This can also create many problems.

General ideas to help prevent cyber-bullying:

- Know basic internet safety.  Be smart about what you choose to put out into the cyber-world and which websites you choose to use.
- Increase your self-esteem.  Higher self-esteem makes it less likely that you will feel the need to look to comments from anonymous users for validation.  If you are being yourself and surrounding yourself with true friends who support and encourage you, you are off to a great start. You can also increase your self-esteem by finding and participating in activities you enjoy and by standing up for your beliefs.
- Learn conflict resolution skills.  Know your values and be assertive in telling others how you feel, what you believe, and what you want in a firm, yet kind manner.  If you are having problems with a peer, talk to that person about it in person or over the phone.  While communicating by text, chats, or messages may be convenient, it also makes it really easy to misunderstand each other.

To Parents:

Be aware of what your teen is doing online.  Talk to your teen about internet safety and what is and is not appropriate to post.  Know what sites your teen has accounts on and determine if your teen is using these sites in healthy ways.  Require your teen to close accounts if the account has more negative than positive content or if the account is affecting your teen in a negative way.  *Some common websites/apps to be aware of:*  ask.fm, spring.me, tumblr, facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, You Tube, and Twitter.  There are many other similar websites; you can find a more extensive list by typing "social networking websites" into a search engine.  Many of these websites can be used in healthy ways and are great for encouraging and fostering social interactions among teens, but they can also be used in harmful ways.  Look at your teen's accounts to determine how your teen is using these sites.

Create an environment that fosters communication.  You want your teen to talk with you if he/she is being cyber-bullied or is experiencing other difficulties; so encourage open communication.  Talk to your teen on a regular basis about how things are going in general, with their friends, with peers, and with school.  Then listen!  Ask your teen if he/she has ever been bullied, witnessed someone being bullied, or bullied someone and what the experience was like

for him/her.  When your teen does talk with you, do not judge your teen.  Ask your teen if he/she wants you to help find a solution or if he/she would just like you to listen and be supportive. Keep an open mind and really try to see things from your teen's perspective.

Be a good role model for your teen.  Show respect to your teen and to others that you interact with.  Your teens will see how you interact with both friends and strangers and will learn what is and is not appropriate from you.  Encourage your teen not to send anything through text, video, or messages that could hurt or embarrasses themselves or others.  Encourage your teen to stand-up for others that are being bullied.  Lead by example.

Resources:

Hotlines for Teens: You do not need to be suicidal to call these hotlines.  They are happy to talk with you about any problem you may be having.

- Suicide and Crisis Hotline – 1-855-278-4204

- California Youth Crisis Line – 1-800-832-5200

Counseling for Teens:

- Los Gatos Teen Therapy – (408) 389-3538 or www.LosGatosTeenTherapy.com – provides individual, group, and family therapy for teens

Website Resources for Teens and Parents:

- http://www.thebullyproject.com

- http://www.stopbullying.gov

- http://www.pacerteensagainstbullying.org

- http://www.stompoutbullying.org

- http://www.stopcyberbullying.org

- http://www.ryanpatrickhalligan.org

Books About People Overcoming Bullying:

- <u>It Gets Better: Coming Out, Overcoming Bullying, and Creating a Life Worth Living</u> edited by Dan Savage and Terry Miller
- <u>Vicious: True Stories by Teens about Bullying</u> edited by Hope Vanderberg

- <u>Bullying Under Attack: True Stories Written by Teen Victims, Bullies & Bystanders</u> by Stephanie Meyer, John Meyer, Emily Sperber, and Heather Alexander

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## About the Professional

Lindsay Smith is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who specializes in working with teens and their families.  She is the Director of Los Gatos Teen Therapy, where they provide the following services to teens: individual therapy, group therapy, family therapy, and in-home behavior coaching.   If you would like additional information or would like to set up an appointment, please call (408) 389-3538 or go to[www.LosGatosTeenTherapy.com](www.LosGatosTeenTherapy.com).