



Cyberbullying

What Schools and Parents Need to Know

Cyberbullying is when someone "repeatedly makes fun of another person online or repeatedly picks on another person through email or text message or when someone posts something online about another person that they don't like." (*Cyberbullying Research Center, 2010*). Estimates of the prevalence of cyberbullying vary greatly depending on the definition given, the time frame asked about, the age of the students surveyed, and the method of gathering information.

In a large study of third to twelfth graders 4.9% of girls and 4.3% of boys reported being bullied with mean or hurtful messages, calls or pictures, on their cell phone or over the internet 2-3 times a month or more in the past couple of months (*The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, 2011*).

The Pew Internet and American Life Project states 32% of 12-17 year olds who are online have experienced one or more of the following:

- 15% reported having private material (IM, text, email) forwarded without their permission
- 13% had a rumor spread about them online
- 13% received a threatening or aggressive message
- 6% had an embarrassing picture of themselves posted online without their permission
- 4% sent a sexually suggestive image or video of themselves to someone else, 15% received a sexually suggestive image or video of someone they know
- 26% of teens have been harassed via their cell phones either by voice or text (*Lenhart, 2010*)

What Schools Can Do

To Prevent Cyberbullying

- Educate students, staff, and parents about what cyberbullying is, its effects, and strategies for dealing with it
- Develop clear and consistent policies and rules against bullying and cyberbullying
- Encourage students to report all incidents of bullying, including cyberbullying to an adult
- Spend class time discussing cyberbullying, appropriate online behavior, and internet safety

If Cyberbullying Occurs

- Investigate reports of cyberbullying immediately
- Notify parents of involved students
- Provide information and resources to parents on steps to take to end the cyberbullying
- Monitor students to put a stop to any traditional bullying that may be occurring at school
- Provide students who receive or see hurtful and offensive messages about another student with strategies for intervening appropriately
- Listen to the student who was cyberbullied and check in with him/her regularly to make sure the behavior has stopped
- Offer support from the school based mental health professionals for students involved
- Impose appropriate consequences
- Contact authorities if the cyberbullying involves threats, intimidation, extortion, or sexual exploitation

What Parents Can Do

To Prevent Cyberbullying

- Ask questions about your child's online life; speak with them regularly about what websites they visit and their involvement in online activities such as Facebook, Formspring, Tumblr, Twitter, Instant Messaging, online gaming, etc.
- Discuss your expectations for appropriate online behavior and cell phone use
- Encourage them to come to you immediately if they are experiencing cyberbullying or are aware of it occurring with others

If Your Child Has Been Cyberbullied

- Encourage them not to respond to the cyberbullying
- Save the hurtful messages or pictures as evidence
- Try to identify the person cyberbullying
- Contact the ISP, email service, or website to have the sender blocked and the offensive material removed
- Request assistance from the school
- Contact authorities if the cyberbullying involves threats, intimidation, extortion, or sexual exploitation

If Your Child Cyberbullied Others

- Make it clear that you take cyberbullying seriously and that it is not acceptable
- Be a role model of engaging in appropriate online behavior and cell phone use
- Enforce your expectations and impose consequences for acts of cyberbullying
- Warn against taking any retaliation action towards the victim of cyberbullying
- Request assistance from the school
- Seek help from a mental health professional if needed