What is Cyber Bullying?

Cyberbullying is when a child or teenager is harassed, humiliated, embarrassed, threatened or tormented using digital technology. This is not limited to the Internet; cyber bullying also encompasses bullying done through such things as text messages using cell phones. It is important to note that cyber bulling can only happen between minors. When an adult is harassing children or teenagers, it is known as cyber harassment or cyber stalking.

Cyber bullying is often a systemic attempt to get another child or teen to feel bad about him or her self through electronic communication. It usually happens more than once, and includes leaving demeaning messages on someone's Facebook page, uploading embarrassing photos, or spreading gossip or rumors through instant messaging and text messaging. There are a number of ways to humiliate and threaten children online. And because the damage is often psychological, and carries over into the real world, the threats posed by cyber bullying can be very real. There have been cases where cyber bullying has led to severe depression, self harm and even suicide.

Different kinds of cyber bullies

While some of the traits of cyber bullies are similar to more traditional bullies, it is important to note that there are some differences. Some cyber bullies are victims of real word bullying, and go online and bully others to feel powerful. Others are bullies offline, and want to extend their sphere of influence and power to the online world. Other cyber bullies just want to show that they can do certain things online to show off.

It is important to look for signs that your child is being bullied or is a cyber bully. In both cases, it is important to stop the problem by looking for causes of the bullying behavior. The motives for cyber bullying are rather wide ranging, so it is important to find out the reasons behind the behavior so that a solution can be found. Additionally, it may be necessary to help children and teenagers involved by getting them counseling and helping them understand how to overcome the problem.

Stop cyber bullying
It is important that parents play a role in stopping cyber bullying. Indeed, it is vital that parents pay attention and be open with their children and invite their confidences. If your child is a cyber bully, you should make clear rules about appropriate online behavior, and have consequences, such as losing accounts or computer time, if they break the rules. You can work with schools to help stop cyber bullying, and work with other parents to try and prevent it. Make sure your child knows that he or she can come to you if there is a problem online.

In some cases, it is possible to get law enforcement involved - especially if an adult becomes involved and brings the level of offence to cyber stalking or cyber harassment. It is vital that your child comes to you when cyber bullying takes place. It is usually possible to print the screen showing the offending action. Additionally, it is possible to trace the IP address of the user, and locate the computer from which the cyber bullying is taking place. This can help prevent further incidents.

Ultimately, though, it is important that your community as a whole takes a stand against cyber bullying, teaching kids to treat each other with respect, and to see that it is unacceptable when others are being hurt or harassed.

In the last few years cyber bullying has received a lot of attention from the media, as well as from concerned adults and young people. Cyber bullying involves sending hurtful, threatening, or embarrassing messages to or about another person using email, blogs, cell phones, social networking sites, and other electronic media. These technologies are an important part of many people's social and work lives, but to enjoy the positive benefits of electronic communication, it is necessary to prevent or stop cyber bullying.

Cyber bullying can be worse than other types of bullying because the bully may be anonymous or meaner than they would be in person, and the bullying can come at any time and in any place. Cyber bullying is related to short and long term problems for the victims and the bullies, such as depression, anxiety, poor

school attendance and performance, and feeling fear and mistrust toward others. It is important to stop cyber bullying and get help for the victims and the perpetrators.

Though cyber bullying has become unfortunately common, there are some ways that kids, parents, and other concerned adults can help prevent or stop cyber bullying. Parents and other adults can:

- Explain to kids what cyber bullying is, why it is wrong, and what will happen if the kids engage in cyber bullying, and enforce the consequences if the rules are broken. It can be difficult to accept if you find out your child has been a bully online, but by enforcing the rules it will help them develop better online behaviors.
- Encourage kids to come to tell an adult if they ever see cyber bullying, either as a victim or a bystander, and help stop cyber bullying by never passing it on.
- Help kids to be Internet safety savvy. They should know, especially, that they can't trust that a person online is who they seem to be so they should only share personal information in person and that they shouldn't share their passwords with anyone except their parents. They should also understand that anything they post online or send through a cell phone may resurface later, so they should not post or send pictures or messages they would not want everyone in the world to see, perhaps even years later.
- Parents should have access to all of their kids' accounts, and their kids should know that their parents may check occasionally to make sure their online activities are safe. It is also a good idea to keep computers in a busy area of the house, and out of bedrooms, and parents may also want to have a rule that cell phones must be turned off at certain times. like at night. Though kids do need some privacy, they should understand there is no guarantee of privacy online, and their parents have the responsibility to keep their kids safe.
- Let kids know that no one deserves to be bullied, and if they are ever the victim reassure them that it is not their fault that they were bullied.

Kids who are the victims of cyberbullying and their parents, may not know how to react. In some cases it depends on what has occurred, but these general suggestions may help:

- Don't punish kids for being the victim. This means parents should not take away their computer or cell phone privileges to "protect" them.
- Encourage kids not to retaliate against cyber bullies. If they have already done so, encourage them not to do it again, but don't make them feel like this caused the bullying.
- When cyber bullying occurs, it is a good idea to document it, either by saving the message, printing it, or saving a screen shot. This provides proof to help stop cyber bullying.
- When a child is the victim of cyber bullying, talk together with them about the next steps to take, and take the victim's concerns seriously if they are afraid of the bully.
- It may be possible to block messages from the cyber bully, or to get a new email address or cell phone number to stop the messages. In some cases, however, the cyber bully may find other ways to attack their victim.
- In some cases, school administrators might be able to intervene in cyber bullying, or you may be able to contact the bully's parents about the problem in writing, with a copy of the proof of the bullying and a request for it to stop. In other cases, parents may want to talk to the police or a lawyer about legal options.
- Parents can contact the bully's cell phone provider or the host of the bully's email account or web site to report the cyber bullying. Cyber bullies can often lose their accounts, and possibly their families' accounts as well, for cyber bullying. Even anonymous cyber bullies can sometimes be traced and stopped through their Internet service provider or cell phone provider.

Many forms of cyber bullying are against state and even federal bullying laws, and in these cases parents can contact the police for help. This is definitely an option to consider when the cyber bully's attacks have been:

- Threatening
- Sexual in nature, including sending suggestive pictures or pictures taken in a private place like a bathroom
- Extortion, demanding money or something else in return for the cyber bullying to stop
- Possible hate crimes attacking a person's ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexual orientation
- Stalking or harassment

Both the victims and the perpetuators of cyber bullying may need counseling and other help to overcome the negative consequences and stop cyber bullying.

Sources:

National Crime Prevention Council, "What Parents Can Do About Cyber Bullying" [online]

SafetyWeb, "Stop Cyberbullying - Guide for Parents" [online]

Stop Bullying Now! "Cyberbullying" [online]

STOP Cyberbullying web site [online]