

What is Cyber Bullying?

Cyber bullying is bullying through email, instant messaging (IMing), chat room exchanges, Web site posts, or digital messages or images sent to a cellular phone or personal digital assistant (PDA) (Kowalski et al. 2008). Cyber bullying, like traditional bullying, involves an imbalance of power, aggression, and a negative action that is often repeated.

Cyber bullying has some rather unique characteristics that are different from traditional bullying:

- **Anonymity:** As bad as the "bully" on the playground may be, he or she can be readily identified and potentially avoided. On the other hand, the child who cyber bullies is often anonymous. The victim is left wondering who the cyber "bully" is, which can cause a great deal of stress.
- **Accessibility:** Most children who use traditional ways of bullying terrorize their victim at school, on the bus, or walking to or from school. Although bullying can happen elsewhere in the community, there is usually a standard period of time during which these children have access to their victims. Children who cyber bully can wreak havoc any time of the day or night.
- **Punitive Fears:** Victims of cyber bullying often do not report it because of: (1) fear of retribution from their tormentors, and (2) fear that their computer or phone privileges will be taken away. Often, adults' responses to cyber bullying are to remove the technology from a victim - which in their eyes can be seen as punishment.
- **Bystanders:** Most traditional bullying episodes occur in the presence of other people who assume the role of bystanders or witnesses. The phenomenon of being a bystander in the cyber world is different in that they may receive and forward emails, view web pages, forward images sent to cell phones, etc. The number of bystanders in the cyber world can reach into the millions.
- **Disinhibition:** The anonymity afforded by the Internet can lead children to engage in behaviors that they might not do face-to-face. Ironically, it is their very anonymity that allows some individuals to bully at all.

Common Forms of Cyber Bullying

Cyber bullying can take many forms. However, there are six forms that are the most common.*

- **Harassment:** Repeatedly sending offensive, rude, and insulting messages
- **Denigration:** Distributing information about another that is derogatory and untrue through posting it on a Web page, sending it to others through email or instant messaging, or posting or sending digitally altered photos of someone
- **Flaming:** Online "fighting" using electronic messages with angry, vulgar language
- **Impersonation:** Breaking into an email or social networking account and using that person's online identity to send or post vicious or embarrassing material to/about others.
- **Outing and Trickery:** Sharing someone's secrets or embarrassing information, or tricking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information and forwarding it to others

- **Cyber Stalking:** Repeatedly sending messages that include threats of harm or are highly intimidating, or engaging in other online activities that make a person afraid for his or her safety (depending on the content of the message, it may be illegal)

*Nancy Willard with the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use (CSRIU) has developed this useful taxonomy of the various forms of cyber bullying. [Visit CSRIU's site.](#)

What are the Warning Signs of Cyber Bullying?

The warning signs of cyber bullying are similar to those for traditional bullying in terms of emotional effects; however, there are some differences. For example, a bruise or torn clothing is not expected as a sign that a child is being cyber bullied, but it is also important to keep in mind that some children who are cyber bullied may also be experiencing traditional bullying at school.

A child may be experiencing cyber bullying if he or she:

- appears sad, moody, or anxious
- avoids school
- withdraws from or shows a lack of interest in social activities
- experiences a drop in grades or decline in academic performance
- appears upset after using the computer or being online
- appears upset after viewing a text message on a cell phone

If a child shows any of these warning signs, it is important to talk with the child and investigate his or her online presence to determine whether cyber bullying is occurring and to offer help when needed.

Source: Olweus Bullying Prevention Program - www.olweus.org