



# Cyber Bullying

## What is it, and what can you do?

### Definition of 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 (Kowalski et al. 2008). Cyber bullying, like traditional bullying, involves an imbalance of power, aggression, and a negative action that is often repeated.

### Characteristics of Cyber Bullying

- **Anonymity:** As bad as the person who is bullying face-to-face may be, he or she can be readily identified and potentially avoided. On the other hand, the person who cyber bullies is often anonymous. The target is left wondering who the cyber "bully" is, which can cause a great deal of stress.
- **Accessibility:** Most people who use traditional ways of bullying terrorize their victim at school, at work, on the school bus/ or walking to or from school, etc. Although bullying can happen elsewhere in the community, there is usually a standard period of time during which these children or adults have access to their targets. People who cyber bully can wreak havoc any time of the day or night.
- **Punitive Fears:** Targets 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. In the case of children/teens who cyber bully, adults' responses to this behavior are often to remove the technology from a target - 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. 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 people 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.

*Adapted from: Katy Pearson, content 2012*

# What You Can Do

- **Protect Yourself: Keep your personal information private.** Do not share passwords. Make your passwords easy to remember but difficult to guess (and do not use personal information, such as a phone number, in your password).
- **“Search” Yourself:** Find out what information about you is public. Do an internet search of your name in various forms.
- **Stop, block and tell :** If you are targeted by a cyberbully:
  - **STOP!**  
Don't do anything. Take 5! to calm down.
  - **Block!**  
Block the cyberbully or limit all communications to those on your buddy list.
  - **and Tell!**  
Tell a trusted adult, you don't have to face this alone.  
**Report cyberbullying to wiredafety.org**
- **Practice the Internet “Golden Rule”-**
  - Start by making sure you are sending things to the right place, that it arrives and that the right person gets it.
  - Is it worth sending? Don't waste peoples' time or bandwidth with junk, chain e-mails and false rumors
  - Proofread and spell-check your e-mails and make sure they know who you are
  - Don't attack others online, say anything that could be considered insulting or that is controversial
  - Don't forward other people's e-mails without their permission or share their personal information
  - Are you angry when you are writing this message?
  - Don't reply to spam, even to ask to be removed from their mailing list
  - How private is the message you are sending? Are you willing to have others read this message or forward it to others without your permission?
- **You are accountable for your actions** online/in the “virtual” world (just as in the “real” world). Do not allow bullying in any form, including cyber bullying.
- **Step away from the computer!** Before responding to something you encounter online, take a few minutes to calm yourself. Ask for support from a trusted adult.
- **Be a part of the solution, not the problem.** Never forward or share emails, photos, links, etc. which contain information that might cast a negative image of someone/something else. Don't continue the negative dynamics public (by continuing an argument through email or texts, or retaliating). Don't make the negative issues public (such as posting a negative message on a public website). Instead, report these negative messages to wiredafety.com **Help by using the technology instead of being controlled by it.**
- **If you witness cyber bullying,** staying silent makes the problem worse! Silence, when others are being hurt, is not acceptable. Everyone can be safer online and offline when bullying is not tolerated.

Adapted from: Wired Kids, Inc. <http://www.stopcyberbullying.org/index2.html>

## Additional Resources

Cyber Bullying in the Digital Age by Robin K. Kowalski, Susan Limber and Patricia Agatston

Cyber-Safe Kids, Cyber-Savvy Teens: Helping Young People Use the Internet Safely and Responsibly by Nancy Willard

GuardingKids.com, A Practical Guide to Keeping Kids Out of High-Tech Trouble, by Russell A. Sabella, Ph.D.

Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use (includes information about cyber bullying) <http://csriu.org>

Laws (state and federal) which address bullying, harassment, and hazing:

[http://www.olweus.org/public/bullying\\_laws.page](http://www.olweus.org/public/bullying_laws.page)

Wired Kids, Inc.: Stop Cyberbullying: <http://www.stopcyberbullying.org>

Wired Safety, Internet Safety and Help Group: <http://wiredsafety.org>

*For more information, including additional documents and strategies for children, teens, and adults facing these situations, please visit the **File Center** in the Online Learning Management system*