

Cyberbullying: A New Danger

“Cyberbullying” is a new form of electronic bullying that is terrorizing many children and teens through instant messaging, chat rooms, offensive e-mails and personal websites. Young people are very vulnerable to this, particularly girls. This behavior is seen most commonly among middle school students. Websites, and screen names give bullies a mask of anonymity which makes them difficult to trace.

The biggest mistake adults make is not taking young people’s complaints seriously – awareness and education are the keys to the prevention of cyberbullying.

Signs you child or teen may be a victim of cyberbullying:

- Long hours on the computer
- Closes windows on their computer when you enter the room
- Is secretive about Internet activities
- Behavioral changes
- Is always doing homework on the Internet, but always in chat groups and getting behind with school work
- May find unexplained long distance telephone call charges
- Won’t say who they are talking to
- Trouble sleeping
- Stomachaches and headaches
- Lack of appetite, throwing up
- Crying for no apparent reason
- Lack of interest in social events that include other students
- Frequent visits to the school nurse or office complaining of feeling sick – wants to call mom or dad to come and get them
- Lowered self-esteem
- A marked change in attitude, dress or habits

Tips for parents

Discuss cyberbullying with your children and teens:

- Keep home computers in an open area where you can see what’s going on.
- Ask for your child’s help in becoming cyber-savvy or consider enrolling in a course to bring yourself up to speed on the computer.
- Have consequences in place if your children violate family rules on Internet use, especially cyberbullying.
- Ask your child if he or she has been a victim on online teasing or harassment
- Let them know:
 - Don’t reply to messages from cyberbullies.
 - Do not keep this to yourself! You are NOT alone and you did NOT do anything to deserve this! Tell an adult you know and trust.
 - Do not erase or delete messages from cyberbullies. Report this information to authorities.
 - Never arrange to meet with someone you meet online.

- If your child or teen is being cyberbullied, do not accept the bullying behavior as a problem he or she has to live with
- Inform your Internet Service Provider (ISP) or cell phone/pager service provider. Learn what kind of parental controls are available through your Internet Service Provider. If you are not satisfied, you can switch providers or purchase software to accomplish the same thing
- Inform your local police department
- Delete your current e-mail accounts, cell phone/pager accounts and set up new ones
- If you are receiving harassing messages from cyberbullies through Instant Messaging (IM) software such as ICQ MSN Messenger, AOL Instant Messenger, etc., use the “Block”, “Ignore”, or “Ban” feature

For more information, go to the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use at <http://cyberbully.org>.

Source: Center for Responsible Internet Use
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