

# Cyber bullying

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Bullying refers to any kind of aggressive behavior, which is normally intentional and entails an imbalance of strength or power.

Cyber bullying also referred to as social online cruelty can be described as an intentional aggressive act which is carried out by an individual or group of individuals against a victim done repeatedly over a long period of time and sent through electronic contacts. Cyber bullying is usually repeated over time unless it is a death threat. The definition of cyber bullying is limited to children while in adults; it is referred to as cyber harassment or cyber stalking. In this essay, we will look at the prevalence of cyber bullying across the US, some specific instances, its psychological effects on the teenagers and steps that can be taken to prevent it. Cyber bullying is very common among teenagers, children, and preteens and occurs when one is threatened, harassed, embarrassed or humiliated with digital and interactive technologies, the internet or with mobile phones. The methods used in cyber bullying by children are only limited to one's access to technology and imagination.

Children always change roles either as the bully or as the victim. At one time, a child can be the bully and shortly after become the victim (Jacobs, 2010). Cyber bullying can take different forms, which may include one or a number of the following acts. It may involve sending threatening, vulgar and mean images or messages, posting private and sensitive information about another person and excluding someone deliberately from a social online group. Cyber bullying can as well be as simple as continuing an email sent by someone and sending it to someone else with unfriendly information

about someone else. It can also entail making fun and teasing someone and defamation.

It can as well be websites created where kids can vote against other kids. Recent studies and statistics reveal a shocking trend in the rise of cyber bullying in the recent past. The national Crime Prevention Council has given reports that cyber bullying affects more than half of the American teens. In a report by the ABC News in 2006, a survey was conducted on 1500 students in the grades between 4-8 and gave the following findings. 42% of the children had experienced some form of bullying while online. 35% of them had received threats while online.

21percentage had received threatening and mean emails or other forms of messages. 58% of the kids admitted that they had received hurtful information while online while the most shocking statistic was that 58% of these kids did not tell any adult about the form of harassment they receive while online. This clearly shows that a very large number of teenagers are being involved in cyber bullying and their parents or teachers are not even aware. Cyber bullying has become so prevalent in America for several reasons, One of the reasons is that the bully usually remains anonymous and it becomes easy to bully without the risk of being caught. The other reason is that bullies are normally instigators in nature and with the cyberspace, they are able to involve other students in bullying whom in real world, they would not involve in bullying.

Cyber bullying therefore provides a convenient way to bully others since the victim's reactions remains unseen (Shariff, 2010). Children also take up

cyber bullying for other reasons, which include jealousy, revenge, and anger, and sometimes, they take up bullying for just entertainment. Some students also take up bullying so that they can feel better about themselves and to try to prove to other students that they are more powerful. They may try to do these to students who appear to be doing better than they in class or in other areas are. They may also bully other to revenge against an event that occurred to them where they were victims and now they want to be the bullies. The first instance cyber bullying we are going to look at was the one that led to the suicide of Ryan Patrick Halligan.

Patrick was 13 years when he committed suicide, it is reported that he received instant messages while online from his schoolmates in middle school referred to him as being gay. He was constantly insulted, taunted and threatened due to his learning disorder. One of the bullies used te information about an examination Patrick had had from a hospital and started to spread a rumor about him being gay. After that, Patrick had shared some information with a girl who pretended to like but only did this to get some private information about him. This information was spread across his classmates.

At one point, Patrick told the girl that its people like him who make him want to commit suicide. These messages frustrated Patrick so much after the girl called him a loser in school and prompted him to commit suicide. After his death, the girl felt so guilty of Patrick's death that she had to seek forgiveness from his parents and sought permission to be taken to his house. The girl now moves around the country with Patrick's father talking against cyber bullying. The person who started the gay rumor also apologized

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though it still affects him (Shariff, 2008). The other incident we are going to look at relates to a student called David Knight.

A website about him had been created and was active for a long period without him being aware until a classmate informed him. When he went to check it out, he found the website with his photos and message welcoming people to make fun of him. There were hateful comments sent to him and his family members. There was an email sent to him saying he was gay, immature, and no one liked him. This website made David's life in school a living hell as he was taunted, punched and teased.

Worse still, an abusive website had been made and this made his life unbearable. This made him to eventually leave school and had to finish his final year studying at home. David's mum reports that after this incidence, he started withdrawing and isolating himself from people. This is one of the harmful effects of cyber bullying. Another instance of cyber bullying is of a schoolchild, Jodi Plump; aged 15. He was so horrified to discover that a whole website had been created for her.

The website was about her weight and a death date for her, she discovered about the website when she saw a girl taking a picture of her and said it was for the website. This greatly affected Jodi's studies and she was extremely upset about it. Cyber bullying has bad and serious effects on both the bully and the bullied. The first and worst consequence of cyber bullying is the fatal outcome of such instances. The failure by children to report to adults and the relevant authority figure has led to many children committing suicide due to the depression, which results from cyber bullying. Reports in the USA today,

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show that at least three children of between 12-13 years of age committed suicide because of cyber bullying (LLC, 2010).

The other consequence of cyber bullying is that the victims begin to fear associating with other people. This is usually the main intention of cyber bullying. Victims start avoiding their friends and activities as they start seeing them as enemies especially in cases where the victims do not know who the bully is; this leads to great emotional damage. A survey in high schools and middle school students revealed that students who had been involved in cyber bullying by either being victims or bullies portrayed the highest levels of depression, school absence and anxiety compared to other students who had not been involved in cyber bullying (Kowalski, Limber & Agaston, 2008). Children who had never been involved in cyber bullying had the highest grades, had fewer cases of health problems and portrayed high self-esteem. Bullying also leads to victims acquiring aggressive behaviors as they try to fight and defend themselves against the bullies.

Children delinquency has been on the increase because of cyber bullying (Limber, 2008). The bullies, on the other experience emotional disturbance in cases where their victims have gone beyond what they had expected. For instance, in the case where Patrick was pushed to commit suicide, the girl who had pretended to be a friend was so traumatized and blamed herself for the death of Patrick. Also the other boy who had initiated the gay rumor about Patrick burst into tears when he was confronted and apologized for what he had done. These examples, clearly shows that even the bullies go through some emotional distress after bullying their victims.

Cyber bullying can be stopped through different ways. Given the availability and accessibility to technology today, it may be hard to stop cyber bullying completely. Children have access to the internet, computers, mobile phones and other means of digital communications both at home and in schools. However, it would be very important to take measures to reduce it. First, the children need to be in the forefront in the fight these acts by doing the following; First, Children should talk to an adult whom they trust about the bullying.

They should persist to tell them until an action against the bully is taken. Children should not keep quiet in the face of cyber bullying, as this would affect them both psychologically and emotionally (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Secondly, children should not open messages from the bullies. In addition, they should not read them or respond to them, as this would encourage the bully to continue with his or her threats. Moreover, reading the messages may prompt the victim to counter attack the bully by sending more threatening messages than what was sent to them and this would lead to an increase in cyber bullying instead of stopping it. In addition, if the messages are from instant messages or through chat, the victim can block the bully instantly so that the messages do not go through (Breguet, 2007).

Another way of dealing with cyber bullying is by not erasing the messages and images sent to them. This is because the messages and images would be useful in giving evidence when action is being taken. In addition, these messages may be helpful in tracing and tracking down the bully. Another way of dealing with cyber bullies is by protecting oneself. Children should never agree to meet with someone they met over the internet or online.

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They should never accept a face-to-face invitation from a person they have met online as this person might be a bully physically.

Moreover, children have killed each other after being involved in cyber bullying and so protecting oneself should be a first priority to every child (Willard, 2007). The other way of dealing with cyber bullying is by telling the schoolteachers and administrators if the bully is taking place in the schools. This way, the administrators are able to investigate and take actions against the bullies. Parents, on the other hand, should accept to give teachers and school administrators the mandate to punish the cyber bullies so that the schools would be safe for all the children. Lastly, but not least, in the event that a child is threatened with death or harm, it is very important to inform the police so that action would be taken early enough before it becomes too late.

Children's security should be first priority and, therefore, death and harm threats should not be taken for granted (McQuade, Colt & Meyer, 2009). The parents should also take up the role of protecting their children from cyber bullying by taking a number of precautions; one, they need to centralize the laptops and computers and keep online accessibility where the parents have frequent access and the screen kept in a way that is viewable. Secondly, parents should establish communications with their children so that children can open up to them when faced with such bullying. Parents also need to familiarize themselves with online facilities, social networking, and chat rooms. The more knowledge a parent has about these, the higher the chances of being able to secure their children from cyber bullying. Lastly,



parents should put systems for emergency communication where kids can report any incidences of abuse.

In conclusion, cyber bullying has very damaging consequences to individuals. It disrupts school life, has great emotional damage and may have fatal consequences. Though technology has brought new opportunities for students and teenagers, it is important that everyone learn to use it responsibly. Policies should also be put in place to ensure that technology is used responsibly. School management should put in place ways of identifying, preventing and responding to cyber crimes in schools.

Parents should also take up the responsibilities of protecting their children. Teenagers, on the other hand, should take the first measures necessary to prevent cyber crimes and bullying.