

## What is a Cyberbully?

A cyberbully is someone who uses technology to harass, embarrass, intimidate, or stalk someone else.

The methods used can include emails, instant messaging, text messages sent via cell phones, digital photos and all other means of electronic communications.

The cyberbully can send:

- angry and vulgar argumentative messages
- cruel, offensive, and insulting messages
- threats and false promises

The cyberbully can:

- post secrets or embarrassing information, including pictures, for everyone to see
- post gossip or rumors for the explicit purpose of damaging the person's reputation
- send out messages pretending to be the victim in an attempt to damage that person's friendships
- alienate the victim from online groups

## Who Are Cyberbullies?

Many times, a cyberbully is also a bully in face-to-face encounters. Bullying over the computer is a natural extension of their destructive behavior.

Some people who become cyberbullies are often the victims of bullying. They may take out their anger and frustration in cyberspace. They may be targeting the people who bully them or they may have picked a different target.

Still others regard cyberbullying as a game -- nothing more than a fun thing to do.

## Who Are the Victims of Cyberbullies?



Most victims of cyberbullies are children, but there are also many adults who are cyberbullying victims.

Generally, cyberbullies will know their victim, but occasionally they will pick victims they don't know. In these situations, the cyberbully is picking on someone based on a type of bias or prejudice. They may pick on people based on religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, or people who are deemed "not cool."

Other times, they will pick on someone based on a message that he/she has posted that the bully doesn't like.

## Why Can Cyberbullying be Worse Than Physical Bullying?

Many people erroneously assume that "words can never hurt." In cyberspace, however, cyberbullies can strike anytime, anywhere, thanks to modern technology. As long as the victims are online, they can be vulnerable to cyberbullying.

Many bullies pick on people for the feeling of power that it gives them. Because the Internet seems to give anonymity, cyberbullying is often seen to have fewer consequences to the bullies, which can encourage them to be more aggressive.

Another aspect of cyberspace that can lead cyberbullies to be more vicious than physical bullies is that cyberbullies aren't physically there when they are harassing their victims. This can lead to a lessened empathy. Since the bullies cannot see how much they are hurting the victims, they may think they have not actually hurt them much or at all and may, therefore, continue the harassing behavior.

Many people believe that there are no rules in cyberspace. They feel free to do whatever they wish. More than that, they believe they have the RIGHT to do whatever they want in cyberspace without suffering any consequences.

## Warning Signs that your Child may be a Victim of a Cyberbully

- displays signs of depression, sadness, anxiety or fear – particularly if these signs intensify after your child uses the cell phone or after being online
- avoiding friends, activities, or school
- experiences difficulty with school or a drop in grades for no apparent reason
- expressing subtle comments that indicate your child is disturbed or upset

## What to do if a Cyberbully Targets your Child



Retaliation may only escalate the problem. If you feel the need to respond to the cyberbully, help

your child develop an appropriate response, asking the cyberbully to stop the behavior. This may resolve some of the problems that are occurring.

By filtering email, instant messages and text messages, you can cut off many of the ways the cyberbullies contact your child. By having your child avoid the sites and groups where the attacks occur, he/she can ignore the bully.

If the harassment continues, then you can change your child's email address, Internet account, and usernames.

If a believable physical threat is made, the police should be contacted.

If none of these steps are successful, then you may need to take additional action, as follows:

- 1) Compile a copy of all harassing messages and postings. Save the addresses of web sites where other hostile information, embarrassing pictures or negative messages are posted. The more documentation you can save the better.
- 2) Contact your child's school. Even if the cyberbullying is not occurring in school, officials might be able to assist.
- 3) If possible, contact the bully's parents. In many cases, they will be unaware of their child's behavior. Send them a registered letter detailing the messages and asking them to make the bullying stop. They could be held liable for financial and emotional damages.
- 4) Finally, if the situation is not resolved, contact the police.

## Additional Sites for more Information About Cyberbullying

**MS-ISAC:**

[www.msisac.org/awareness/news/2007-01.cfm](http://www.msisac.org/awareness/news/2007-01.cfm)

**Cyberbully.org:** [www.cyberbully.org](http://www.cyberbully.org)

**McGruff.org:**

[www.mcgruff.org/advice/cyberbullies.php](http://www.mcgruff.org/advice/cyberbullies.php)

**Power in You:** [www.powerinyou.org/?id=MzI2](http://www.powerinyou.org/?id=MzI2)

**Bully Online:**

<http://www.bullyonline.org/related/cyber.htm>

**Staying Safe Online:**

[groups.msn.com/StayingSafeOnline/cyberbullies.msnw](http://groups.msn.com/StayingSafeOnline/cyberbullies.msnw)

**National Crime Prevention Council:**

[www.ncpc.org/media/cyberbullying.php](http://www.ncpc.org/media/cyberbullying.php)

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### Brought to You By The MS-ISAC:



# The Parent's Guide to Cyberbullies



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