

Cyberbullying

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Usually, it is repeated over time. Traditionally, bullying has involved actions such as: hitting or punching (physical bullying), teasing or name-calling (verbal bullying), or intimidation through gestures or social exclusion. In recent years, technology has given children and youth a new means of bullying each other.

Cyberbullying, which is sometimes referred to as online social cruelty or electronic bullying, can involve:

- Sending mean, vulgar, or threatening messages or images
- Posting sensitive, private information about another person
- Pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad
- Intentionally excluding someone from an online group (Willard, 2005)

Children and youth can cyberbully each other through:

- Emails
- Instant messaging
- Text or digital imaging messages sent on cell phone
- Web pages
- Blogs
- Chat rooms

Although little research has been conducted on cyberbullying, recent studies have found that:

- 18% of students in grades 6-8 said they **had been cyberbullied** at least once in the last couple of months; and 6% said it had happened to them 2 or more times (Kowalski et al., 2005).
- 11% of students in grades 6-8 said they **had cyberbullied** another person at least once in the last couple of months, and 2% said they had done it two or more times (Kowalski et al., 2005).
- 19% of regular Internet users between the ages of 10 and 17 reported being involved in online aggression; 15% had been aggressors, and 7% had been targets (3% were both aggressors and targets) (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004).

- 17% of 6-11 year-olds and 36% of 12-17-year-olds reported that someone said threatening or embarrassing things about them through email, instant messages, web sites, chat rooms, or text messages (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2006).
- Cyberbullying has increased in recent years. In nationally representative surveys of 10-17 year-olds, twice as many children and youth indicated that they had been victims and perpetrators of online harassment in 2005 compared with 1999/2000 (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006).

Who are the victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying?

In a recent study of students in grades 6-8 (Kowalski et al., 2005):

- Girls were about twice as likely as boys to be victims and perpetrators of cyber bullying.
- Of those students who had been cyberbullied relatively frequently (at least twice in the last couple of months):
 - 62% said that they had been cyberbullied by another student at school, and 46% had been cyberbullied by a friend.
 - 55% didn't know who had cyberbullied them.
 - Of those students who admitted cyberbullying others relatively frequently:
 - 60% had cyberbullied another student at school, and 56% had cyberbullied a friend.

References

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- **Wolak, J., Mitchell, K., & Finkelhor, D.** (2006). *Online victimization of youth: Five years later*. *National Center for Missing & Exploited Children*.
- **Ybarra, M. L., & Mitchell, K. J.** (2004). Youth engaging in online harassment: Associations with caregiver-child relationships, Internet use, and personal characteristics. *Journal of Adolescence*, 27, 319-336.

*Online Resource: Stop Bullying Now: <http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/kids/>