

Cyberbullying

Today, almost every aspect of our lives has “gone digital” making face-to-face communication the exception rather than the norm. This is even more of a reality in the lives of our children and teenagers whose homework assignments, report cards, and social interactions all increasingly have a digital or online component.



There are certainly benefits to this new digital age. Communication is far easier than it was a generation ago. Unfortunately there are also disadvantages. This ease of communication has also helped move [bullying](#) beyond harassment at school or on the playground and into cyberspace. This should come as no surprise since bullying tends to occur where teens congregate, and today, **two-thirds of teenagers go online daily to do school work, connect with friends and read about their favorite celebrities.** ¹

Facts about Cyberbullying:

- In a 2006 study, one in three online teens reported experiencing a range of cyberbullying activities, including “receiving threatening messages; having their private emails or text messages forwarded without consent; having an embarrassing picture posted without permission; or having rumors about them spread online.”
- In more recent research, where cyberbullying was defined broadly ², one in five students 11-18 years old said that they had been cyberbullied; but interestingly, the same percentage admitted to cyberbullying someone at least once in the past. ³
- Older children or teenagers may bully via [text messaging](#), [social networking sites](#), chat rooms, and other forms of digital or online communication.

For the most part, cyberbullying is defined [by the same characteristics](#) as other bullying. There are some significant differences, though, that deserve mention.

Characteristics of Cyberbullying:

- First, cyberbullying can be anonymous: youth who are being cyberbullied may not even know who the bully is, or specifically why they are being targeted.
- Second, the impact of cyberbullying can be wider-reaching than bullying done in person. The speed and breadth of the internet have permitted groups of youth to create websites just to make fun of other young people, to impersonate other teens on social media sites, and to circulate embarrassing photos, all within a matter of minutes.

- Finally, cyberbullies can be teens who might not otherwise have engaged in bullying behaviors. It is often easier to be cruel when the bully is sheltered from their target's responses which can over time include devastating consequences such as withdrawal from family and friends, [depression](#), diminished performance in school and in the most severe cases, self-harming behavior and even suicide.



Today's national media coverage of bullying often focuses on cases that come to an extreme and tragic end, with parents, schools and entire communities weighing in to express strong opinions about how to "deal with" the bullies, and wondering what, if anything could have been done to protect the "victim." And even more often, parents and teachers and the community express surprise at the ordinariness of the youth who engaged in bullying behavior, and how unlikely it seemed that they would be involved in something so terrible.

Helping Kids Rise above Cyberbullying

Current research ⁴ shows that approaches to help prevent bullying behavior are essentially the same as those that will help youth withstand harassment. These approaches – which are closely linked to the [Search Institute Developmental Assets](#), and include building strong and positive ties to family, peers and community, and fostering the values of empowerment and self-control, among others – seem to tell us that the needs of youth who react most dramatically to bullying, and those engaging in bullying behavior may in fact be the same.

Research shows that raising kids to be resilient can lead them to avoid more types of risky behaviors, including bullying.

Reprinted with permission from Search Institute®. **Copyright**© 2013 Search Institute, Minneapolis, MN; 800-888-7828; ...
