

BULLYING IN A TECHNOLOGY RICH WORLD

Technology has changed the way we communicate and share information. This is evident with more than 500 million Facebook users across the world, the real time communication enabled through Twitter and Instant Messaging, the emerging social media sites created just for children, and online video games. Youth go online using iPods, smartphones, personal laptops, community access computers, gaming consoles, school computer labs, the family television and iPads. Usage is hard to regulate as they are accessing internet on the school bus, at school, in their bedrooms and even at the dining room table

Victims of online abuse can be attacked via websites, social media sites, chat rooms, instant messages, online journals, blogs, or cell phone text messages. Cyberbullying has no boundaries or limitations. It is extremely simple and easy and does not require significant planning or thought as the target is usually always available. In fact, with a click of a button, deprecating statements, threats, and humiliating pictures or videos of individuals can be sent to hundreds of viewers within a moment's notice (Daniloff, 2009; Englander, Mills, & McCoy, 2009).

FORMS OF CYBERBULLYING

***E-mail:** 86% of students polled have e-mail accounts. E-mail can be used to send harassing or threatening messages. It is possible to trace the account but difficult to prove who actually sent the message. E-mail filters are also available to delete undesirable senders.

***Instant Messaging:** Users can create a private chat room with their select group. It has become a large part of the social lives of today's youth.

***Chat Rooms:** This is real time communication between two users via the computer.

***Bash Boards:** This is a nickname for an online bulletin board or virtual chat room. Youth can go here anonymously and write anything they want true or false.

***Small Text Messages (SMS):** SMS allows small text messages to be sent to mobile phones.

***Web Sites:** Cyberbullies create sites that mock, harass or torment others. Responsible servers will monitor and remove these abusive sites. The problem is that some servers are not responsible or are too big to monitor effectively.

Voting Booths: Some web sites are designed to allow users to set up polling stations. Bullies design mean sites asking people to vote on such things as "Ugliest" or "Stupidest" members of their communities.

Youth are not completely safe from threats even in their own homes. The most significant part of cyberbullying, which sets it apart from traditional bullying, is the fact that participants can remain anonymous and say things online that they would never say to someone in person (Keith & Martin, 2005; Sparling, 2004). Physical size and strength does not matter. While participants can remain anonymous, the impact of repeatedly harassing, bullying, or sending messages can cause physical and psychological damage to the recipient that endures long after the incidents have ceased (Willard, 2007).

An individual who is being cyberbullied may feel a wide range of emotions from hurt and confusion, to embarrassment and depression. Due to the far-reaching effects of cyberbullying, the child may feel helpless to stop or control the situation.

It is necessary for today's adults to become technologically savvy so they can help children deal with cyber bullies.

Safe Schools advocates a proactive response to this issue. We advise parents and educators to teach their children on the wise use of the technology available to them. This technology has opened up an amazing amount of positive opportunities but, like all good things, people need to be aware of the possibility of misuse and abuse and to teach their children the proper etiquette for this medium as well as how to respond or report misuse by others.

We all share a responsibility to teach our youth how to engage online in a healthy and positive manner.