



PEN Notes: Fact Sheet #30

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Cyberbullying

Bullying and Cyberbullying Defined

The state of Wyoming defines harassment, intimidation or bullying as “any intentional gesture, any intentional electronic communication or any intentional written, verbal or physical act initiated” with the intent of: (A) Harming a student physically or emotionally, damaging a student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of personal harm or property damage; (B) Insulting or demeaning a student or group of students, or (C) Creating an intimidating, threatening or abusive educational environment for a student or group of students.

As technology has become more advanced, so have the ways that children and teens encounter bullying. **Cyberbullying** is a repeated attempt from a child or teen to scare, threaten, embarrass, or otherwise victimize another child or teen through technologies. Because cyberbullying often occurs “behind the scenes,” parents may not even be aware that it is happening. In fact, 58% of students report that they did not inform their parents when something mean or hurtful happened to them online. Unfortunately, this new form of bullying is becoming very prevalent. Statistics indicate that 90% of middle school students have considered themselves victims of cyberbullying at some point (*statistics from www.isafe.org*).



New Technologies

Although cyberbullying can be difficult to catch, there are things parents can do to build awareness in themselves and their children. First of all, parents need to understand the types of technologies their children might access.

- ✓ **Blogs** are like personal web pages, where users can display pictures and express ideas or opinions. A blog can be viewed by anyone on the internet unless the user opts to make it “private,” meaning that it can be viewed by invitation only.
- ✓ **Social networking websites**, such as “MySpace,” “Facebook,” and “Twitter,” have become very popular avenues for children to connect with peers. Like blogs, social networking websites provide spaces for users to post pictures and ideas, but enable individual pages to be linked to the pages of other users to create large networks. Some of these websites allow the content to be viewed by anyone, while others require that viewers obtain the permission of the author in order to view his or her “page.”
 - ✓ **Instant messaging**, or “IM,” enables users to see when their friends are online and allows them to send typed messages back and forth to one another instantaneously.
 - ✓ **Text messages** allow users to send typed messages to a person or groups of people using cell phones. Cell phones can also send photos, videos, and voice messages to large audiences. In addition, many cell phones can now access the internet, enabling their users to do all of the above activities virtually anywhere.



Types of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can be categorized into two different types: **direct attacks** and **cyberbullying by proxy**. **Direct attacks** occur when the bully sends harmful messages directly to or about his or her target. Examples of direct attacks might include posting insulting messages on blogs or sending embarrassing or damaging photos by email or cell phone. **Bullying by proxy** occurs when the bully involves a third party, with or without their knowledge. For example, the bully can report to their internet service provider that the target is sending him or her inappropriate IM messages. The target may have done nothing wrong; however, if the target becomes upset by the false allegations and sends the bully a mean or hateful message in response, the response may be seen by the IM service provider and may cause the victim to lose his or her account. Cyberbullies may also involve the target's parents. If the bully can make it seem as though the target has done something wrong, the target may suffer negative consequences at home and/or at school.

Protecting Your Child from Cyberbullying

- ✓ **Discuss cyberbullying with your child.** Some children may be afraid to discuss instances of cyberbullying with their parents because they are afraid that they will lose access to their cell phones and/or internet. Parents can assure their children through calm discussion that they want their child to be able to maintain their freedom with these technologies but in a safe way.
- ✓ **Set cyber safety rules.** Just as you teach your children safe ways to navigate the physical world, it is important to teach them safe ways to navigate the cyber world. Some points to emphasize with your child might include:
 - Because you cannot see or hear them, you can never really be sure who is on the other end of cyber communication—it could be a predator or a bully.
 - Never give out personal information on the internet, including phone numbers, addresses, passwords, photos, or physical descriptions of yourself.
 - Be cautious when sharing personal details on the internet. These could be used by bullies to embarrass or ridicule you.
 - Never share your IM (instant messaging) or email account with anyone, including close friends. If other people have access to your password, then private messages may become public. Additionally, with your password, others can pretend to be you and cause damage to your reputation.
 - Keep your cool. Responding to cyber bullies with angry messages may only get you in trouble.
- ✓ **Use safety measures.** If your child maintains a blog, encourage them to make it “private” so it can be viewed only by people they invite. Invite them to use social networking websites that require viewers to obtain the author's approval before viewing their page. Help them to choose passwords that are difficult to “crack” and have them change their passwords regularly.
- ✓ **Block out bullies.** If someone is bullying your child, block their email address, screen name, or phone number.
- ✓ **Know what your child is doing online.** While privacy is important, safety is more important. Parents should keep the computer somewhere in view, such as the family room or kitchen. If your child participates in blogs or social networking sites, find out how to access them so that you can monitor his or her communications.
- ✓ **Document and report.** Document any evidence of cyberbullying by printing inappropriate emails or web posts and contact your child's school or the police. State law requires districts to have anonymous reporting procedures in place and prohibits retaliation against any person who reports incidents of bullying, harassment, or intimidation. Schools are required to investigate once a complaint is received and to take appropriate disciplinary action.



Some information from www.pacer.org and www.stopcyberbullying.org

“PEN Notes” are publications of the Parent Education Network, a project of Parents Helping Parents of WY Inc., funded by a grant from the U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, Parent Options and Information. Views expressed in “PEN Notes” are not necessarily those of the Dept. of Education.