

You, Your Child and Cyberbullying – Part One

Most children's social experiences are rooted in their phones.

LOS ANGELES, CA, UNITED STATES, December 1, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Bullying used to be a simple matter: children used physical intimidation (and maybe a few primitive psychological intimidation techniques), either to force other children do things for them, or to cause them unhappiness or embarrassment . There was getting your lunch money stolen, there was getting thrown into the trash can, there was getting beaten up, and there was being made a laughing stock in front of the whole school. While these old-fashioned kinds of bullying still exist (and probably always will), kids today are confronted by a new kind of bullying for the 21st century: cyberbullying.



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What is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is the use of communications technology to threaten, target or embarrass another person. Mobile phones, tablets, computers – all the devices on which children are so dependent – can

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be used as weapons, often to devastating effect. Social media give the bully an enormous audience: an embarrassing video that succeeds in going viral can have an audience of millions. The bullies of previous generations could, at their worst, humiliate another child in front of an entire school, but rarely much further. It is no exaggeration that, today, a bully can subject his or her quarry to worldwide humiliation at the click of a mouse.

What makes this even more insidious is that the cyberbully can be anonymous. Whereas it used to be possible to

confront a bully and punch him in the nose, what can a child do when the abuser is online, unreachable, and possibly not even who he or she says he is?

Children can be exposed to cyberbullying twenty-four hours a day. Attached as they are to their technological devices and online interaction, there no longer are any bully-free zones. A child used to be able to feel safe at home. Now, thanks to the Internet and devices you can turn on anywhere and anytime, the bully's reach now extends into the child's own home, and, even, into his or her own room.

How Does Cyberbullying Happen?

Children today cannot be separated from their technological devices. Many parents wish they could, but, without a highly concerted effort on their part, kids today remain focused on their phones and computers – to the extent that they seemingly prefer to interact with their friends by electronic means rather than by meeting them in the real world. Moreover, social media have created social circles for children that reach far beyond their hometowns, and put them into regular contact with people on the other side of the country, and, often enough, on the other side of the world. Parents may disapprove (and probably should disapprove), but many children's social experiences are rooted in their phones. Their social lives are playing themselves out electronically.

This dependence on electronic interaction has given birth to the cyberbully.

Sites like [Instagram and Facebook](#) have made cyberbullying all too easy. Personal information is freely posted, images can be transmitted in split seconds, and an audience is constantly at the ready. One picture can humiliate a child or teenager on a scale almost incomprehensibly beyond underpants sent up the flagpole of even the largest high school. Chatrooms are tailor-made for anonymous verbal abuse, and, even something as innocuous as online gaming can be used for intimidation or humiliation.

Mobile phones arm children today with, not only still, but also video cameras. They use these to record seemingly everything, and so much the better it is embarrassing to someone. Embarrassing videos have become an unofficial sport, and, while people derive amusement from seeing other people in humiliating situations, such public exposure can be devastating for the subject of one of these videos. An embarrassing clip can be uploaded to a site like YouTube in less than a minute and seen by millions of people within the hour.

The scale of humiliation to which a child or a teenager can be subjected is only possible thanks to the Internet and a world of equipped with Internet-connected devices wherever they go.

Signs that a Child is being Cyberbullied

Children who are the objects of bullying generally feel shame and embarrassment. That's what a psychological bully wants. As a result, bullied children may not tell their parents that they are being abused online. They may have come to feel that they somehow deserve to be bullied, or they may even have started to believe that the bully's noxious taunts are the truth.

Parents therefore have to be able to [recognize the signs](#) that their child may be the target of an online bully.

Warning signs may include displays of secretiveness or anxiety when receiving texts, or appearing troubled or upset after using the computer. An increase or decrease in a child's online activity can also indicate that the child is being bullied. A bullied child may appear withdrawn, with noticeable changes in appetite and sleeping patterns. Similarly, the child may exhibit anxiety and try to avoid going to school or attending social functions. Any shift in behavior may be a warning sign. However: some bullied children act out by displaying anger or disobedience.

The problem with many of these signs is that they can also indicate other problems that crop up in childhood or adolescence. You may even attribute your teenager's acting out more to the simple fact that he or she is a teenager. You need to be vigilant, understanding, and even something of a [detective](#) at times. You may even have to turn to your child's friends to learn the causes of your kid's altered behavior. As only one in ten of all bullied children turn to their parents for help, simply asking

your child whether he or she is being bullied just isn't enough.

What can a parent do? I consider some answers to that question in part 2 of this article.

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