

# Parent Educators Wear Another New Hat: Bully Police

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*Parents managing their children's online educations are finding they have an additional obligation: Monitoring learning sessions in the age of cyberbullying.*

LOS ANGELES, CA, USA, April 22, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As families shelter in place, parents working to manage their children's online educations are finding they have an additional obligation: Monitoring learning sessions in the age of cyberbullying.

As students are increasingly educated via computers and smartphones, the potential for cyberbullying grows.

For cyberbullies, it's easier to abuse others in the relative anonymity of the online world than on school campuses, where there are witnesses and adult supervision.

Students who may not terrorize classmates in person have no one to police them online. Fellow students with low self-esteem and little support, who are also more vulnerable to adult online predators, are likely targets.

Students from low-income households, who may already have difficulty accessing computers or WIFI, could expose their personal lives to classmates during video interactions. Screen backgrounds reveal disparities between the haves and have-nots, making lower-income children objects of insensitive and disparaging comments.

"Victims can be targeted anywhere, 24/7, and cannot escape the bullying by going home," says Adele Kimmel, a senior attorney at Public Justice in Washington, D.C. "To make matters worse, the speed and ease with which rumors, taunts, and other abuse can be disseminated and go viral allow a large number of people to participate in the target's victimization or learn about it.

"And those who engage in cyberbullying can remain anonymous, which often increases the bullying's frequency and intensity."

Under California Education Code section 48900, schools have a legal duty to protect students from online bullying. Schools can expel or suspend a student who engages in a "severe or pervasive physical or

verbal act or conduct," which includes written or electronic communications that cause another student to experience "a substantially detrimental effect" on physical or mental health or "substantial interference" with academic performance.

Because cyberbullying can be hard to track, educators might not respond to it quickly or effectively.

Teachers should monitor student chat rooms and supervise or limit online interactions among their classes. Many chatrooms can be controlled or disabled. Parents should also ask their children about their online experiences.

Parents who become aware of communications that seem problematic should promptly notify the teacher and school.

Schools and educators providing an essential service during the pandemic have the same obligation to investigate and take action against online bullying as when students are on campus. Parents have the same rights to file complaints and seek redress as when their child is subjected to bullying in the classroom.

The six-month statute of limitations for filing complaints against schools is extended while courts are closed. Still, parents need to act promptly to preserve their rights.

Victims' rights attorneys have been especially busy in recent weeks handling these types of cases and are available to answer questions and provide guidance for parents.

"It is crucial to present specific evidence of how off-campus, online bullying has caused — or could foreseeably cause — significant interference with the targeted student's education," said Kimmel.

A school's decision to ignore evidence that bullying was harming a student's emotional well-being and education could be grounds for a claim of willful and wanton misconduct and failure to supervise. It could also be the basis of a claim for negligent or intentional infliction of emotional distress.

The trauma inflicted by cyberbullying can be worse and longer-lasting than injuries suffered during a physical altercation. For this reason, it is especially important that parents stay on top of their children's online schooling and be alert to possible incidents of bullying.

The potential harm could be life-altering, even life-threatening. Kimmel said that "remedies available for these claims may include compensatory damages for physical injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder, other emotional distress, pain and suffering, and wrongful death, as well as punitive damages."

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