

# Bullying in School: Warnings and Solutions

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**Abstract**—In a society where adults are openly malicious and freedom of speech has reared an ugly head; the behaviours we have displayed as adults are rubbing off on future generations through progressive forms of bullying. Bullying which is not a new term to society is often overlooked until a person has acted out and in some cases it is too late to redirect the inappropriate behavior. One aspect of creating a safe school environment is increasing student efficacy and reducing all forms of bullying. The purpose of this study is to recognize the immediate warning signs of bullying and attempt to curtail its detrimental effects.

**Keywords**— Bullying, cyber-bullying, elementary and adolescent education.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a common feature of everyday life. We see it at the workplace, at home, in the club and sports fields, but most commonly of all at school, where children learn as much about how to behave towards others as they do about their lessons in class. Unfortunately, some children learn only too well how to dominate others by foul means rather than by fair, and sadly begin to enjoy doing so, setting a pattern for how they will behave as adults.

Bullying can be defined as a repeated negative interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power and targeted at a person who is perceived to be weaker or more vulnerable, without apparent provocation (Morrison, 2009). It is a persistent unwelcome behavior, mostly using unwarranted or invalid criticism, nit-picking, fault-finding, exclusion, isolation, being singled out and treated differently, being shouted at, humiliated, excessive monitoring, having verbal and written warnings imposed, and much more.

Most adolescents and teens are very comfortable using technology, and technology has become an important part of their social lives. While using technology can be fun and essential for learning useful skills, it can also be used for cyberbullying, referring to the use of technology, like cell phones and the Internet, to bully or harass another person. Cyber bullying affects many adolescents and teens on a daily basis with over half of adolescents and teens having been victims of online bullying, and about the same number having engaged in cyber bullying. This form of bullying can be very emotionally damaging to teens, and can have legal consequences for teens and parents.

The frequency of bullying in public schools has grown over the years and has contributed to fearful school environments for school aged children. Aggression and antisocial behavior in American schools persists and represent a very visible

problem, particularly as youngsters make the transition from childhood in primary school to adolescence in secondary school (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). Much of the aggression in schools during this period involves individuals bullying their peers (Bosworth & Simon, 2000). Left unaddressed, bullying can have a life-long impact on the victim. It is noted that in many cases of school violence, the student felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the attack.

Bullying has been on the rise in recent years and apart from the schools and professional environments its effects are visible in almost every sector of life. This has triggered enormous concern from school and public authorities on the mechanism and procedures to put in place to quickly identify this devastating phenomenon and curtail its detrimental effects. Most of the legislative responses to bullying require the State's Department of Education to develop policies and procedures to prevent bullying (Fried & Fried, 2003). This has increased the attention given to the issue as state law makers and school authorities attempt to understand the forms of bullying, their progression and effects on the victims and methods to limit these effects.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bullying is a purposeful act and is often aimed at those who are weaker, friendless or who differ from the norm in some way. The bullies are usually aware of what they are doing and know that their actions will marginalize their victim. Motivation for bullying varies but the outcome is similar. In their book, Roxborough & Stephenson (2007), discuss five forms of bullying.

1. **Physical bullying:** Kicking, hitting, punching, pushing, tripping, threatening gestures, breaking belongings, cornering the victim.
2. **Emotional bullying:** Name calling, verbal abuse, stalking a person, spreading rumors, blackmail and extortion, theft of belongings, hiding belongings, exclusion.
3. **Sexual bullying:** Unwanted touching, making obscene gestures to the person, telling lewd jokes or stories about the person, circulating inappropriate photos that may have been taken without permission.
4. **Cyber bullying:** Large volumes of abusive texts or emails; hate messages on Facebook, Bebo or other similar site, Inappropriate circulation of photographs. Fig. 1 shows Cyber bullying statistics among students of grades 4-8.

5. **Racial bullying:** Exclusion because of skin color, language or appearance, mocking cultures, stereotypical classifications, discrimination because of religious differences.

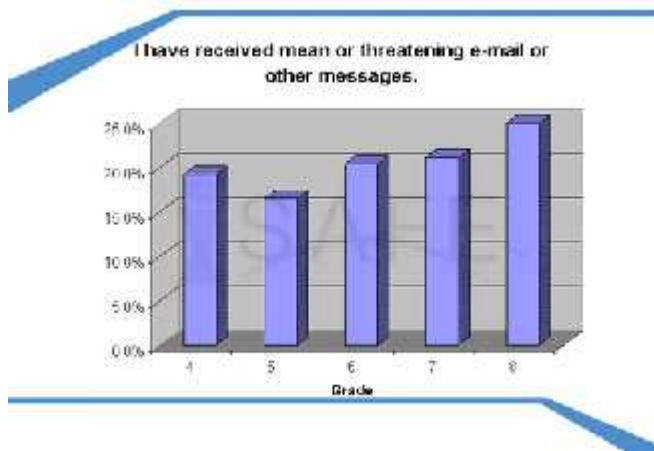


Fig. 1 Cyber bullying statistics among grades 4-8

Source (iSAFE Inc., 2009)

[http://www.isafe.org/channels/sub.php?ch=op&sub\\_id=media\\_cyber\\_bullyin\\_g](http://www.isafe.org/channels/sub.php?ch=op&sub_id=media_cyber_bullyin_g)

Most people do not realize that bullying is a progression. Recognizing the progression of bullying is important for parents, caregivers and teachers. Any warning signs should be attended to and the child given the opportunity to share in private what has been happening to him or her. There are five typical stages that bullying goes through as it develops from minor annoyances to ongoing and intense harassment among children (Roxborough & Stephenson, 2007).

**Phase 1: Bullies watch and wait**

Bullies typically choose someone who is smaller and weaker than themselves. A bully will watch a potential victim for a period of time, assessing his or her weaknesses and the possibility of resistance.

**Phase 2: Bullies test out the waters with their victims**

After observing their victim for a while, bullies may interact with them and gauge the response.

**Phase 3: The bullying steps up a notch**

By this stage the child will realize that the bullying is purposeful and upsetting. He or she may ask a teacher or parent for help but is often given glib advice about standing up for himself or herself. Bullies watch what is going on and if the way remains clear, will step up the harassment.

**Phase 4: The bullying gathers momentum**

If the victim is resigned to the bullying, the perpetrators will take advantage of this and step up the level of bullying.

**Phase 5: Bullying is fully established**

By the time bullying is fully established, the child will be living in torment. The bullies will harass their victims at school, in the classroom, in the playground and on the way home.

- The purpose of bullying is to hide inadequacy. Bullies project their inadequacy on to others:
- To avoid facing up to their inadequacy and doing something about it;
- To avoid accepting responsibility for their behavior and the effect it has on others, and
- To reduce their fear of being seen for what they are, namely a weak, inadequate and often incompetent individual.

Although general characteristics tend to be displayed by bullies, bullying is really a continuum of behaviours. In other words, no one characteristic will define bullying; rather, a combination of several traits and characteristics shape the inappropriate behaviour. Bullies often engage in a "shopping manner" to target potential victims. They look for students who can warrant self-gratification by showing distress, who relinquish tangible resources, and who are less likely to retaliate or report them. Students who bully tend to show extreme levels of insensitivity, lacking appropriate anger management skills, possess beliefs that support random and impulsive acts of violence. Some of the most prevalent signs of bullying displayed by the aggressor include, but are not limited to the following:

- Are aggressive with others (including parents and teachers)
- Frequently hit or push other children
- Are physically strong and socially dominant
- Have a positive view of aggression
- Have trouble following rules
- Show little empathy for others
- Are emotionally immature
- Are irresponsible
- Show inadequate social skills (also true for bully/victims)
- Seek attention (think fear equals respect)
- Are often contemptuous of both children and adults
- Are often academically below average
- Cannot and will not accept responsibility for their actions

Just like other forms of bullying, cyber bullying is a very serious issue and bullying statistics show that cyber bullying is a big problem among teens. Cyber bullying can be very damaging to adolescents and teens. It can lead to anxiety, depression and suicide. Also, once things are circulated on the Internet, they may never disappear, resurfacing at later times to renew the pain of cyber bullying. Cyber bullying can take many forms:

- Sending mean messages or threats to a person's email account or cell phone
- Spreading rumors online or through texts

- Posting hurtful or threatening messages on social networking sites or web pages
- Stealing a person's account information to break into their account and send damaging messages
- Pretending to be someone else online to hurt another person
- Taking unflattering pictures of a person and spreading them through cell phones or the Internet
- Sexting, or circulating sexually suggestive pictures or messages about a person

Cyber bullying can come through many types of technology:

- Emails
- Instant messages sent over the Internet
- Chat rooms, where teens talk to each other online
- Text messages sent to a teen's cell phone
- Web sites
- Blogs, or web logs, which are public online journals
- Interactions through online games
- Social networking sites, like Facebook and MySpace, where individuals have a page about themselves where others can post messages
- Twitter, which sends short messages to a teen's online account and cell phone

Many cyber bullies do so for fun but in so doing undermine its consequences for themselves. The things teens post online now may reflect badly on them later when they apply for college or a job. Cyber bullies can lose their cell phone or online accounts for cyber bullying. Also, cyber bullies and their parents may face legal charges for cyber bullying, and if the cyber bullying was sexual in nature or involved sexting, the results can include being registered as a sex offender. Teens may think that if they use a fake name they won't get caught, but there are many ways to track someone who is cyber bullying.

Like bullying in person, cyberbullying can have negative emotional consequences for both the victim and the bully. There are some things that can make cyberbullying more serious:

- Because the bully can't see the victim, and may be hiding behind an online persona, the cyberbully may be much meaner than he or she would be in person.
- Cyberbullies may use fake names or pretend to be someone else, so the victim doesn't know who is attacking him or her, which can be more frightening.
- Cyberbullying can reach a teen through a cell phone or the computer at any time of the day or night, even at home.
- The messages or pictures that the cyberbully posts may stay around for many years, because once something is posted online it may not go away, or may resurface.
- Victims often retaliate to cyberbullies online, which can lead to a battle of hurtful or threatening messages, which is called flaming.

Cyberbullies may be bullies in the real world as well, though sometimes cyberbullies are teens who are the victims of bullying at school and want to get even with their tormentors. Girls are more likely to be cyberbullies than boys, but both can be cyberbullies or victims. About one in three teens has been the victim of cyber bullying.

In the United States, bullying tends to drastically increase over the late elementary school years, with peaks in middle school. Sex differences are also important in this discussion of aggression and antisocial behavior in adolescent bullying. Research has constantly found that boys, more than girls, are bullies at all levels of schooling (Pellegrini & Long, 2001). An analysis on sex differences in aggression has shown that males exhibit higher levels of both physical and verbal aggression from childhood through adulthood. This is credited to society being more accepting or tolerant of boys being involved in acts of bullying than their counterparts. This is not to say that bullying doesn't exist among females and their peer groups but; yet more apparent, in social and relational bullying.

Bullying is an under-reported problem, there are signs that bullying is on the rise.

In recent years, according to the National Education Association (NEA), "bullying has become more lethal and has occurred more frequently" than in the previous two decades (Cohen & Canter, 2003). The National Association of School Psychologists, NASP (1999) has called bullying "the most common form of violence in society." As researchers continuously probe into the phenomenon of bullying among school-aged children, alarming statistics are surfacing:

- According to the results of a nationwide survey funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, bullying affects nearly one out of every three U.S. children in grades 6-10 (Nansel, 2001).
- One third of high school students polled about issues related to school size said their schools had serious problems with bullying (Public Agenda, 2002).
- A review of 1999 data collected by the Federal government on school safety among 12- to 18-year-old students found that approximately 36 percent of students reported seeing hate-related graffiti at school (Addington, Ruddy, Miller, & DeVoe, 2002).
- Fifty-five percent of 8- to 11-year-olds and 68 percent of 12- to 15-year-olds say bullying is a big problem (Children Now, Kaiser Family Foundation, & Nickelodeon, 2004).
- A nationwide survey highlighted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that 6.6 percent of students in grades 9-12 had missed at least one day of school during the 30 days preceding the survey because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school (Grunbaum et al., 2002).
- A survey by the American Association of University Women found that although students today are likely to be aware of school sexual harassment policies, 8 in 10 students -- both boys and girls -- said they experienced some type of sexual harassment in school.

The results were the same among urban, suburban, or rural schools (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 2001).

- According to the National Center for Education Statistics and the U.S. Department of Education, Student bullying is one of the most frequently reported discipline problems at school: 21% of elementary schools, 43% of middle schools, and 22% of high schools reported problems with bullying in 2005-06. Fig. 2 shows the rates of Bullying compared to other School Discipline Problems.

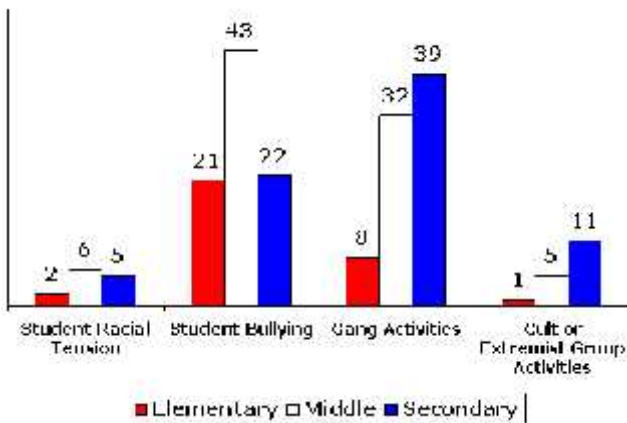


Fig. 2 Rates of Bullying and other School Discipline Problems

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education (<http://nces.ed.gov/>)  
<http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu/violence-in-schools/national-statistics.html>

Despite the potential damage of cyber bullying, it is alarmingly common among adolescents and teens. According to Cyber bullying statistics from the i-SAFE foundation:

- Over half of the adolescents and teens have been bullied online, and about the same number have engaged in cyber bullying.
- More than 1 in 3 young people have experienced cyber threat online.
- Over 25 percent of adolescents and teens have been bullied repeatedly through their cell phones or the Internet.
- Well over half of young people do not tell their parents when cyber bullying occurs. Fig. 3 shows the frequency of teenagers experiencing cyber bullying.

The Harford County Examiner reported similarly concerning cyber bullying statistics:

- Around half of teens have been the victims of cyber bullying
- Only 1 in 10 teens tells a parent if they have been a cyber bully victim
- Fewer than 1 in 5 cyber bullying incidents are reported to law enforcement

- 1 in 10 adolescents or teens have had embarrassing or damaging pictures taken of themselves without their permission, often using cell phone cameras
- About 1 in 5 teens have posted or sent sexually suggestive or nude pictures of themselves to others
- Girls are somewhat more likely than boys to be involved in cyber bullying. Fig. 4 shows the rate of cyber bullying by gender.

Frequency of teenagers witnessing online cruelty and meanness on social media websites in 2011\*

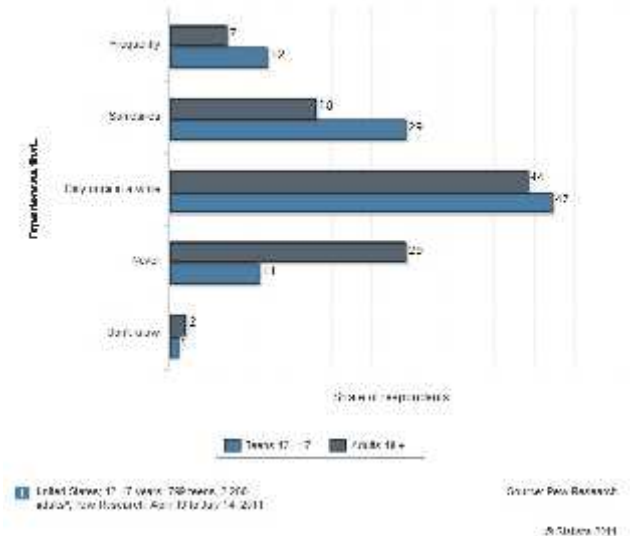


Figure 3. Frequency of Cyber Bullying among Teenagers

Source: <http://www.growmap.com/cyber-bullying/>

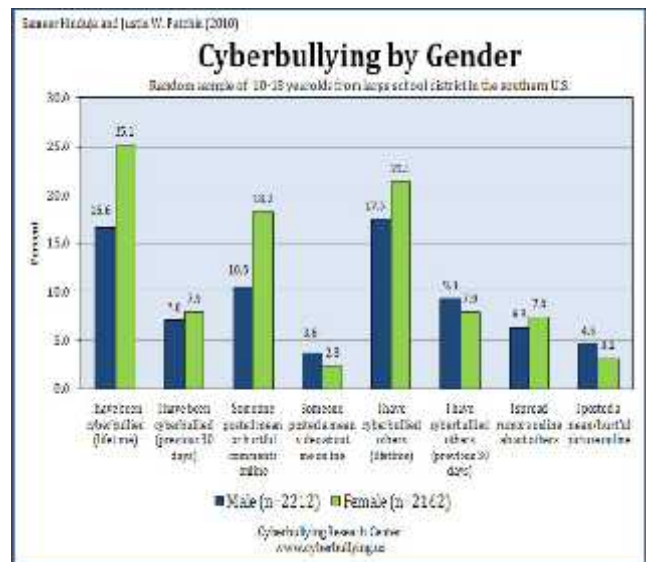


Figure 4. Cyber Bullying by Gender

Source: [www.cyberbullying.us](http://www.cyberbullying.us)

The Cyberbullying Research Center also did a series of surveys that found these cyber bullying statistics:

- Over 80 percent of teens use a cell phone regularly, making it the most popular form of technology and a common medium for cyber bullying
- About half of young people have experienced some form of cyber bullying, and 10 to 20 percent experience it regularly
- Mean, hurtful comments and spreading rumors are the most common type of cyber bullying
- Girls are at least as likely as boys to be cyber bullies or their victims
- Boys are more likely to be threatened by cyber bullies than girls
- Cyber bullying affects all races
- Cyber bullying victims are more likely to have low self-esteem and to consider suicide

Bullying can occur directly or indirectly, aggressively or passively. As a result, two very important labels have been identified and defined as the kinds of behaviors that are exhibited by victims who are bullied. It is apparent that the role which is assumed by the victim will determine possible long term outcomes.

Passive victims feel insecure and helpless and appear cautious, sensitive and nervous on the surface. They are submissive, submitting to attacks and insults without retaliation. Passive victims represent roughly 80-85 percent of all victims (Olweus, 2003).

The provocative victim, commonly referred to as bully-victims, is defensive and exhibit irritable hyperactive behavior and a controversial quick temper which frequently gets them into trouble. They are the least liked in their peer group because they do not embrace the idea of being told what to do by a peer or peer group. Recent research has shown that these types of victims should be monitored carefully, as they frequently display not only the social-emotional problems of victims, but also the behavioral anti-social problems of bullies (Olweus, 2003).

Provocative victims also were shown to have poorly modulated behavior. Their impulsiveness, hyperactivity, and emotional instability (e.g., emotional outbursts) were very reactive, quite likely a main reason they emerge as likely targets of bullying (Schwartz, 2000). It has become increasingly evident that the effects of bullying are far reaching and can end in tragedy. Several surveys of both adults and children show effects of bullying can be quite severe. There are many implications however these are the most often repeated responses. (Blum, 2010)

1) Bullying, especially severe bullying can result in children leaving school early and also not wanting to further their education at university or college.

2) Effects of bullying can be seen in tragic emotional consequences for victims of bullies. Again, nearly 50% of those surveyed revealed they had considered or thought about committing suicide as a result of bullying. Sadly, this group converts thoughts to actions: approximately 20% of these victims actually tried to commit suicide. The effects of

bullying show that a victim of bullying also has a chance of more than 3 times the normal of suffering depression.

3) There is often no end to bullying for victims. The devastating effect of bullying is the pattern it creates in victims' minds and personalities that can last a lifetime. Nearly 40% of those people bullied at school report being bullied again later in life, be it during further education, work or even socially.

4) Bullying and the effects of bullying kills self esteem! Whatever form the bullying takes and also regardless of the content, just about every bullying victim reports that they feel worse about themselves after they have been bullied. Especially in young and developing children, self esteem is critical. Bullies sap this from their victims creating further problems for the victim. Nearly 40% of bullied victims have low self esteem compared with less than 1% for normal, everyday kids.

5) Victims of bullying have much higher absenteeism levels than that of normal children. Obviously, time spent away from classes and work not only limits victims' education and achievement but also takes them out of the social circles necessary for them to make new friends. This lack of a good network is one of the most dangerous effects of bullying.

6) Because victims have not had the chance to effectively devise coping strategies and abilities, one of the key effects of bullying is that they can often find themselves dealing with more struggles later in life. Long term relationships are harder to form and sustain and sadly, the pattern of bullying continues; however, in adult life the victim becomes the bully and is more likely to resort to aggression and violence to resolve conflict.

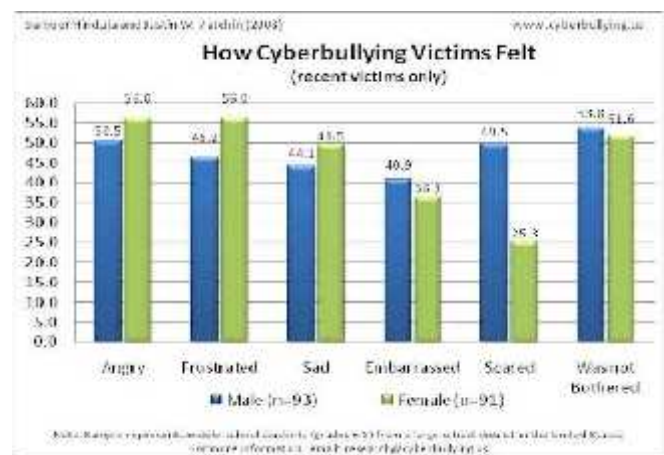


Figure 5. Reactions from victims of Cyber Bullying

Source: www.cyberbullying.us

Research has demonstrated a number of serious consequences of cyber bullying victimization (Patchin&Hinduja, 2006). For example, victims have lower self-esteem, increased suicidal thoughts, and a variety of emotional responses like retaliating, being scared, frustrated, angry, and depressed. One of the most damaging effects is that

a victim begins to avoid friends and activities, often the very intention of the cyber-bully .Cyberbullying campaigns are sometimes so damaging that victims have committed suicide. There are at least four examples in the United States where cyber-bullying has been linked to the suicide of a teenager . The reluctance youth have in telling an authority about instances of cyberbullying has led to fatal outcomes. At least three children between the ages of 12 and 13 have committed suicide due to depression brought on by cyberbullying, according to reports by USA Today and the Baltimore Examiner (Hinduja&Patchin, 2009). Figure 5 shows the reactions of cyberbullying victims and Figure 6 shows their depression levels.

routes to bus or school, avoid places where bullies hang out, sit near the bus driver or walk with friends (Barreto, 2011). Kids should also be encouraged not to give up and to join clubs and other social groups to widen their safe social circle.

Parents can work with teachers and schools by asking for a school conference to address the problem. Parents should keep a detailed record of harassment and the ways in which the school is handling the situation.

Parents should ask if their school already has a bullying prevention committee and if the answer is no, they can work to establish a bullying prevention committee in their school. The most effective of these committees are those with representatives from administration, faculty, school mental health teams and parents. These committees develop programs that look at the total school environment and work to educate everyone to create a network of adult support for children. Such a network is particularly needed in the middle-school years, when children are learning to negotiate a social environment that is no longer primarily overseen by one teacher.

There are many useful public education resources available free of cost on-line (e.g. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services HRSA www. Stopbullyingnow.org). In the neighborhood, parents can team up to make their children's routes to school safer and to be on the lookout for harassment.

Teachers can be encouraged to involve students in creating classroom rules against bullying. Teachers should have a serious talk with the bully, explaining such behavior is not acceptable and explaining the negative consequences. Involving the bully's parents in these discussions can be very helpful. Of course, teachers also should listen to the victim's concerns and document episodes of bullying. There are many creative classroom solutions that will ease children's fear of retaliation, including anonymous drop boxes and surveys of bullying and harassment among the student population.

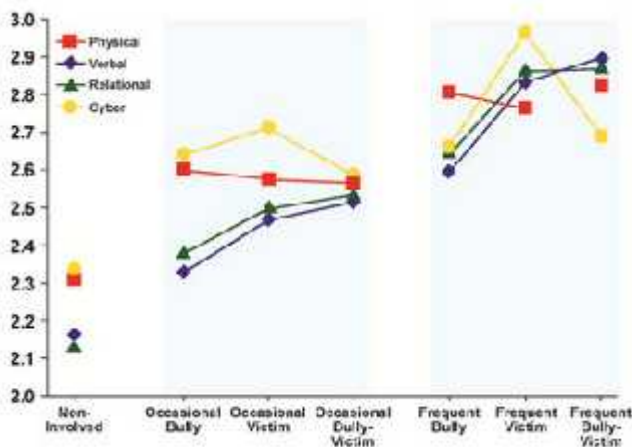


Figure 6. Depression scores for victims of cyber bullying

Source: <http://www.nih.gov/news/health/sep2010/nichd-21.htm>

### III. BULLYING SOLUTIONS

Bullying can be stopped and bullies can be held accountable but it normally takes adult intervention. Parents (guardians) should be made aware of these behaviors and intervention efforts in other to curtailing school bullying.

Students who bully generally show extreme levels of insensitivity, lacking appropriate anger management skills, possess beliefs that support random acts of violence, and are impulsive. This dominant behavior has been related to children trying to establish themselves in the social hierarchy and a lack of attachment to their primary caregiver/s. Therefore, if parents (guardians) improve in their ability to respond to their children's needs with consistency, warmth and sensitivity, their children may begin to develop more positive representations of and expectations for social interactions (Goldberg, 2000).

Bullying and harassment thrive on silence. Parents can break the silence by listening and talking with their children about strategies for dealing with bullies. Kids can be encouraged to practice looking assertive and confident, to speak firmly and to practice comeback lines that are short and funny. With their parents' help, kids can develop alternate

#### A. Bullying Prevention Guidelines

- Don't ignore the problem! Leaving kids alone to deal with bullying doesn't make them tougher-it makes them more vulnerable. If in any doubt, assume the child is being bullied and take action from there.
- Look for the signs of harassment because children may be too emotionally overwhelmed or frightened to tell you.
- Work with teachers and schools directly so that everyone can become more aware of the problem.
- Take steps to make the neighborhood safe. Talk to your children about how to protect themselves.
- Seek help from a mental health professional if necessary (Romme, 2010).

Cyberbullying often results in teens being depressed, afraid, or upset, especially when using the computer or cell phone. Teens may not want to tell parents if they are the victim of cyberbullying because their internet or cell phone access is very important to them and they don't want to lose it. Let teens know that they will not be punished for being the victim

of cyberbullying so they feel comfortable telling you what is happening.

If a teen is the victim of cyberbullying, parents don't have to take away their cell phone or computer access. Instead:

- Don't retaliate
- Keep a copy of the messages as evidence
- Teach teens to ignore cyberbullies or to respond with short, unemotional messages like "Knock it off."
- Try blocking the email address or phone number of the person sending the messages.
- Tell the parents of cyberbullies what their teens are doing. If they don't do anything, remind them that they are legally responsible for their teen's actions and you may be able to take them to court if the behavior doesn't stop.
- If the cyberbully is sending messages anonymously or with a fake name, ask your Internet Service Provider to help track the sender so you can tell the person to stop. If the messages are threatening or damaging, ask the police to help.
- Many email providers and social networking sites will shut down an account if you show them evidence that it is being used for cyberbullying. Go to the "contact us" page and send them copies of the messages.
- Teens who are being cyberbullied repeatedly may need to change their phone number and get a new email address.

Teens who have been the victims or perpetrators of cyberbullying may be at increased risk for depression or teen suicide, and may need counseling to overcome the harmful effects of cyberbullying.

*B. Some ways to discourage cyberbullying include*

- Tell kids that cyberbullying is wrong, no matter who started it, and find out if they have ever been the victim or perpetrator.
- Have a use contract for the Internet and cell phones that specifically tells kids not to cyberbully or they will lose their technology privileges.
- Teach kids to never share their passwords except with parents, and to use passwords that would be hard for another person to figure out.
- Encourage teens to never share personal information online - they don't know who they are really talking to, and the information may stay online for a long time.
- Tell teens not to open or accept messages from people they don't know.
- Parents should pay attention to what teens are doing online, which may include keeping the computer in a high-traffic area of the house, setting up your own online accounts and requiring teens to "friend" you so you can see the messages they send and receive, or installing monitoring software on the computer and telling teens that you can see what they do online (you should not secretly spy on teens).
- Encourage kids to speak up if someone they know is being a cyber bully or a victim.

There are state laws that cover bullying that occurs on school grounds and at school-sponsored activities. Unfortunately, there is no nationally mandated and uniform school crime reporting to help schools assess issues and concerns. Only a little more than a dozen states now require crime reporting in grades K-12. One of the reasons that national legislation hasn't been developed is that educators don't like to report problems and deficiencies that may exist on their campuses (School Security Report, 2003).

The National Conference of State Legislatures has compiled a list of State actions that relate to bullying, harassment, and hate crimes. States that have passed formal laws on bullying include California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Oregon, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia. Others will soon follow as bullying in schools is at an all time high.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Bullying can have long lasting effects on people. It must therefore be taken seriously and dealt with early on. This study presented a comprehensive view of bullying in schools, its consequences and some solutions to curtail these effects. Standardized methods and procedures for dealing with bullying still remain areas of work for law makers but education remains the key to every successful action and powerful movement against this increasingly devastating social problem. Communities leaders, teachers, parents, students must build a consistent, planned program to educate schools and the society in general about the dangers and negative effects of bullying.

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