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Impacts of cyberbullying

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Impacts of cyberbullying

Abstract

With the recent change in technology, bullying has taken on a new form called cyberbullying. Due to how new cyberbullying is, parents and educators may be unaware of what it is and how it takes place. There are many different forms of cyberbullying that can take place twenty-four hours a day, seven days week. Cyberbullying can take place at schools and at home while leaving an everlasting impact on an individual. This paper will discuss what cyberbullying is and the different forms it can take on. It will also address how students spend their time on the internet and why parents should be concerned. Finally this paper will discuss how cyberbullying is a problem and what parents and educators can do to address this problem together.

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Kelly Burns

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Abstract

With the recent change in technology, bullying has taken on a new form called

cyberbullying. Due to how new cyberbullying is, parents and educators may be unaware

of what it is and how it takes place. There are many different forms of cyberbullying that

can take place twenty-four hours a day, seven days week. Cyberbullying can take place at

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discuss what cyberbullying is and the different forms it can take on. It will also address

how students spend their time on the internet and why parents should be concerned.

Finally this paper will discuss how cyberbullying is a problem and what parents and

educators can do to address this problem together.

According to Scarpaci, "The American Medical Association claimed that half of all children in the United States are bullied at some point in their lives, and one in 10 is victimized on a regular basis" (p.171). A National Institute of Child Health and Development study stated that 13 percent of children in grades six through ten had teased, intimidated, or acted physically hostile toward classmates, while 11 percent had been the victims of such behavior. Scarpaci (2006) also noted boys were more apt to be bullies or victimized by bullies than girls, who were more likely to be the victims of vicious gossip, cyberbullying, and sexual harassment. While girls were more likely to favor indirect bullying methods, boys tend to resort to physical means (Crick & Nelson, 2002). Individuals who are submissive rather than active are likely to become victimized nearly 85 percent of the time. The remaining 15 percent are aggressive victims who are singled out because of a provoking characteristic in their personalities (Scarpaci, 2006).

Scarpaci (2006) notes basic ideas that characterize bullying. Bullying consists of the bully and the victim. Bullies are described as feeling powerful and superior to their victims. Bullies enjoy the idea of having power and control over people and use their power to hurt their victims. "Bullies tend to be drawn disproportionately from lower socioeconomic-status families with poor child-rearing techniques, tend to be impulsive, and tend to be unsuccessful in school" (Sampson, 2002, p. 9). Bullies tend to focus on individuals who respond poorly to bullying, turning them into chronic victims.

According to Cook and Yin (2006), between 15 and 25 percent of students are bullied on more than one occasion. It is uncertain to what degree physical characteristics, such as weight, height, eye glasses, clothing, play a role in bullying. The one characteristic that seems to be common among bullying incidents is the victims tend to be

smaller and weaker than their classmates (Sampson, 2002). Most students do not report

being victimized by bullies. Victims often fail to report incidents to teachers or parents.

Therefore, adults may not understand the extent of bullying. One reason students may not

report these incidents is they do not believe teachers will respond to the situation.

Sampson notes that in a survey of American middle and high school students, "66 percent

of victims of bullying believed school professionals responded poorly to the bullying

problems they observed" (Sampson, p.5). Students who do not report bullying as it occurs

give reasons such as fear of retaliation, feeling adult response will worsen the situation,

humiliation for not standing up for oneself, and so on.

In a similar context, witnesses of bullying rarely intervene or tell adults for fear

the bullies will target them next (Sampson, 2002). According to Sampson, "In a study of

bullying in junior and senior high schools in small Midwestern towns, 88 percent of

students reported having observed bullying" (2002, p.6). Studies have also found that a

small percentage of students who witness incidents of bullying provide any real

assistance when seeing another student being victimized.

While schoolyard bullying has been the more traditional form of bullying, a shift

in technology has created a new type of harassment known as cyberbullying. Stover

(2006) states bullies are using technology as a means to torture their victims. According

to Stover, "Some studies report that anywhere from 20% to 40% of middle and high

school students have been the victim of at least one instance of online bullying" (p.41).

Cyberbullying can take place through computer, text message, cell phones, and many

other electronic forms. Where schoolyard bullying stops when the final bell rings,

cyberbullies can torment their victims 24 hours a day, from any part of the world, while

maintaining their anonymity (Stover, 2006). Cyberbullying takes on a variety of different forms, all of which can be detrimental to victims. Cyberbulling can leave lasting impacts on students, leaving them feeling miserable and discouraged. These impacts may result in lower grades and poor academic performance (Stover, 2006).

Contrasting from schoolyard bullying, cyberbullies can be physically weaker than their victims (Strom & Strom, 2005). Cyberbullies are able to mask their identity through the use of screen names, which makes it increasingly difficult to identify the individuals. According to Willard (2005), cyberbullying is particularly vicious and can lead to suicide, school violence, and declining performance in school.

Willard states it is the responsibility of school faculty to teach students by using current events, news stories, and other events. Adults need to be aware that cyberbullying is a growing problem with children and teenagers can use teachable moments to encourage awareness. If cyberbullying is not prevented, students will continue to be victims of this kind of harassment at school and at home (Willard, 2005).

Bullying has been a topic school administration and staff have dealt with over the years. There are people who feel bullying is a part of growing up; however, school staff and officials know this to be untrue. Adult should not view bullying as a part of growing up (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). In recent years, there has been a rise in technology. Bullying does not stop when the last school bell rings; technology has made it possible for bullying to occur 24 hours a day. Bullying does not need to take place at school, or even in the same city. Children can be bullied by other children from different states and different countries (Stover, 2006). This recent change is due to the easy access of technology. Children are spending more time on computer

services such as AOL Instant Messenger, FaceBook, and MySpace. While some children use this technology for school purposes and to socialize with their friends, others are using it to bully other children. According to Trolley, Hanel, and Shields (2006), forty-two percent of children have been bullied while using the internet; 1 in 4 have had it occur multiple times. Fifty-eight percent of the children who have experienced bullying have not reported these occurrences to educators or parents (Trolley, Hanel, & Shields, 2006). Cyberbullying takes place when an individual sends or posts hurtful messages online, by cell phone, or by taking part in other harmful acts (Willard, 2006).

This paper will describe bullying and how it differs from cyberbullying. It will also discuss why it is important for educators and parents to address this issue. This paper will inform readers where cyberbullying often takes place and what parents and educators can do to deescalate the problem. Lastly, this paper will look at tips for students and parents regarding online safety.

<div align="center">What is Bullying?</div>

According to Scarpaci (2006), bullying can be described as when, "a more powerful person hurts, frightens, or intimidates a weaker person on a continual and deliberate basis" (p.171). It is possibly one of the most underreported safety issues on school grounds (Sampson, 2002). Bullying can take three different forms; physical, verbal, and social. Physical bullying is described by hitting, shoving, poking, tripping, and slapping. Verbal bullying refers to name calling, insults, racist remarks, and teasing. Social bullying is when a person convinces other individuals to exclude or snub someone (Scarpaci, 2006). Bullying in a school setting refers to students who are repeatedly exposed to the above defined harmful actions by other students.

What is Cyberbullying?

While bullying tends to take place in a school setting, it has taken on a new form known as cyberbullying. Strom and Strom (2005) explain that cyber harassment "involves using an electronic medium to threaten or harm others. E-mail, chat rooms, cell phones, instant messaging, pagers, text messaging, and online voting booths are tools used to inflict humiliation, fear, and a sense of helplessness" (p.35). Cyberbullying can take place any hour of the day and can have detrimental effects on a child (Wolfsberg, 2006). Unlike the bullying that takes place in the school, cyberbullies can be physically smaller then their victims. Cyberbullies remain virtually anonymous with the use of screen names they have created. While bullies at school are easily recognized, cyberbullies are difficult to identify.

Cyberbullies tend to harm their victims through cyber threats. Cyber threats involve posting threats or harmful messages. Cyberbullies may post messages online that make the victim think he or she is in danger of being hurt. According to Willard (2006), several school shooters posted distressing information online prior to the shootings.

Victims of online bullying may display feelings of depression or sadness. Children may report to parents or educators that nothing is causing them to be upset. Victims may display these feelings after online use (Trolley, Hanel, & Shields, 2006). Victims may also withdraw from friends, family, and activities which the victim may usually enjoy. Lastly, victims may make comments that reflect their online harassment experiences.

Forms of Cyberbullying

According to Willard (2005), there are many different forms of internet bullying. One form is referred to as flaming. Flaming can be described as online fights using electronic messages with angry and vicious language. An example of flaming is a student who insults another student and warns him to watch his back at school the next day.

Harassment is a second form of online bullying, which can be characterized as continually sending another person insulting messages (Willard, 2005). A victim of harassment may come home from school to see she has 30 vicious messages in her email inbox. As well, she may experience this for many following days.

Students who use the form of denigration are known for sending or posting rumors or fallacies about another individual to tarnish his or her reputation or relationships (Willard, 2005). An example of denigration would be if a student created a website for students to visit and post rumors and gossip about another individual.

The next form of cyberbullying is impersonation. Impersonation is pretending to be someone else and sending or posting information to get them in trouble or ruin that person's relationships with other individuals (Willard, 2005). An example of impersonation is when a student uses another person's password to log into his or her account and sends messages to other students as that individual.

Another form of cyberbullying is described as outing. Outing is the act of sharing someone's secrets, embarrassing situations, or images online (Willard, 2005). An example of outing would be if a self-conscious female was changing in the locker room and another student took her picture with a cell phone camera and posted the pictures online.

Trickery is another form of cyberbullying, which can be deceiving someone into sharing his or her secrets and then sharing that information online where others can view it (Willard, 2005). One example of trickery is when a student pretends to be another student's friend. He asks him numerous personal questions and uses this information to post messages about him online.

Another form of cyberbullying is exclusion. Exclusion is defined as deliberately and maliciously leaving someone out from an online group (Willard, 2006). An example of exclusion is when a student is blocked from accessing a friendship link that all of her friends are able to access and use.

The final form of cyberbullying is cyberstalking. Cyberstalking is described as continual, forceful harassment and denigration that contains threats or generates considerable fear (Willard, 2005). An example of cyberstalking would be if a girl broke up with a boy and he sent her angry, menacing messages. He could also spread vicious rumors and post sexual pictures of her over the internet and sent them to other students and teachers at school.

Recognizing the Bully

Regardless of the form, bullying requires at least two people- the bully and victim. By bullying other individuals, bullies feel strong and superior to their victims. They enjoy having power over others and using that power to hurt their victims (Scarpaci, 2006). Often times, bullies are stereotyped as having low self-esteem. However, they tend to be self-confident, popular, and social (Scarpaci, 2006). Many bullies come from families who have harassed them. Many bullies do not perform well academically.

Identifying the Victim

Identifying the victim tends to be easier than recognizing the bully. Educators should be attentive to individuals who have inadequate social skills and few social outlets. They should also keep an eye on students who are physically smaller than other students. One indication that a student may be experiencing bullying is a drop in academic performance (Scarpaci, 2006). Students who typically perform well academically and experience a drop in grades may be indicating characteristics of being bullied. Another indicator that a child may be the victim of bullying is a child who is frequently ill and not attending school. Victims are often too afraid to come to school and often fake an illness that will keep him or her home. Children who state they lost money or other belongings without a plausible explanation may also be the victim of bullying. Lastly, children who are being bullied may have bruises or other markings that cannot be explained (Scarpaci, 2006).

Impacts

Victims who experience online bullying are unable to escape the experience. Cyberbullying can take place 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Information found online can be seen throughout the world (Willard, 2005). Individuals who experience online bullying may be left feeling miserable and distressed. This may affect their academic performance resulting in lower grades and participation (Stover, 2006). Victims often view school as an unsafe and miserable place.

Why this is a Problem

According to Strom and Strom (2005), cyberbullying is such a new problem that understanding it is very limited. One reason cyberbullying has become such a problem is

that teens are making poor decisions when it comes to online use." Willard states, "Teens are in process of developing frontal lobes that allow for reasoned and ethical decision-making. Learning to make reasoned and ethical decision requires attention to the connection between actions and consequences. According to Strom and Strom, use of technologies can interfere with the recognition of the connection between an action and a harmful consequence (2005).

Children

Teens work online under the impression that they cannot be seen. This anonymity provides them with a feeling of security that can eliminate fears of being caught. Teens also operate under the idea they cannot see their victim. With this thought in mind, they are unable to see the impact their words or threats have on their victims. This allows them to be free of remorse or guilt (Willard, 2005). Teenagers often times feel they have a free speech right and can say whatever they choose. It does not matter what kind of impact it has on the victim (Willard, 2007). Many children believe that online bullying is a part of growing up and people should just accept it.

Children are also aware their parents may have concerns about their online use if they know what their children are doing online. Therefore teens are discreet about disclosing any information to their parents. Teens feel if their parents know about their online activity the parents will restrict their access to the internet. This is a very severe form of punishment to teenagers. Victims of cyberbullying often do not tell their parents for fear they will only add to the problem. They believe the retaliation they will face will be much worse (Willard, 2005).

Parents

Many parents are unaware of the dangers children can experience online, and parents prefer to believe their children are using their time to learn. Many parents do not pay enough attention to their children's use of the internet. Parents may also not have the understanding their children do regarding technology; therefore, their skills are at a disadvantage in efforts to keep their children safe online (Willard, 2006). Another reason parents may not be cognizant of what their children are doing online is because they may be too busy to supervise them while they are spending time on the computer. For parents who are technology savvy, they may rely on parental controls and filtering devices to keep their children out of danger. However, these filtering devices provide parents with artificial safety. Students are still able to obtain forbidden material. Filtering software does not prevent cyberbullying (Willard, 2005). Not only are students able to access this material from their computers at home, they can also bypass the filtering software at school and harass others online during school hours.

Parents may also believe they should not invade their child's privacy and do not realize there are places online where their child may be at risk to engage in poor decision-making. On the other end of the spectrum, parents may simply be unaware of the online hazards and think that because their child is using a computer at home, he or she is safe and making appropriate decisions (Willard, 2005).

Responsibility

School Responsibility

One way to help deter inappropriate internet use is for teachers and administrations to provide regular supervision and safeguarding. Students should be

made aware that they have limited privacy in regards to their online activity.
Investigations may occur if a faculty member suspects a student is behaving
inappropriately online (Willard, 2004).

Faculty members may also look into updating the current policy regarding
bullying to include cyberbullying and harassment taking place through the use of
technology. This policy should be clearly stated and provide specific consequences for
those breaking this policy (Blumenfeld, 2007). If an individual is suspected of violating
the policy, an investigation into the matter will proceed and the consequence will be
implemented.

A problem is faced by faculty is when an incident of cyberbullying has taken
place off school grounds. Schools typically redirect the problem back to the parents
stating they do not have the authority. This is a misconception. Schools do have the right
to intervene as long as certain steps are taken to address the situation (Trolley, Hanel, &
Shields, 2006). Assuming there is already a policy regarding bullying which includes
cyberbullying, the school should also add cyberbullying to their guidelines regarding
computer use on school property. Lastly, it is important to note that although
cyberbullying may take place off school grounds, it could be school related (Trolley,
Hanel, & Shields, 2006). New schools are encouraged to educate students about the
impacts of cyberbullying. Teachers can incorporate information about cyberbullying into
the curriculum.

Another way schools can take action is by discussing this ongoing problem with
other schools in the district. Administration and faculty members from each school may
consider implementing a school-wide bullying prevention program that will coincide with

other schools in the area (Blumenfeld, 2007). Having a program set up district-wide will provide a sense of stability for students, and will keep all faculty on the same page.

Not only is it important for faculty members to discuss this problem with other schools, but it is imperative the faculty is updated about new information regarding cyberbullying. Schools may provide in-services or informational meetings regarding the topic (Blumenfeld, 2007). The faculty can use this information to educate parents and guardians about cyberbullying strategies to help deter online harassment. The information can be shared by meetings or handouts and can also be shared with students to notify them of the dangers of risky online behavior.

Parent Responsibility

Just as it is important for educators to be involved in the fight against cyberbullying, it is just as crucial for parents and guardians to be aware of the dangers. Parents need to keep up-to-date with the rise in technology and continue to learn more about computer use. According to Strom and Strom (2005), adults should develop a way of communicating with their children about the dangers of cyberbullying. Parents need to inform their children of the dangers that go along with internet use and misuse. Parents should also make sure to monitor their children's computer use (Trolley, Hanel, & Shields, 2006). One way to do this is to keep the computer in a central area of the house and limit the amount of time children spend on it. Parents should also be involved in knowing what types of activities, websites, games, and so on their children frequently use on the computer (Wolfsberg, 2006). This monitoring should not stop at the computer; it could also be applied to cell phone use and other technological devices.

Child Responsibility

Along with parents and educators, children need to remain knowledgeable about computers and other forms of technology. Children need to learn how to properly use technology and be aware of the responsibility that is involved in using it (Trolley, Hanel, & Shields, 2006). It is also important for them to know about the dangers that may be involved with using technology devices. Children should be aware of how much information they are divulging because it may put them at risk for cyberbullying and other dangers. They should also be aware that information that is posted may be accessible to many individuals, not just peers. Students should make good decisions and also realize the material they post online can impact others negatively.

How to Respond to Cyberbullying

There are a number of ways children can respond if they are the victim of cyberbullying. One important note is to inform children not to engage the cyberbully. If a child is being bullied online, they should not respond to messages. While this may not be the normal reaction, children are encouraged not to reply. If a child decides to respond to the sender, adults should make him or her aware that responding with abusive postings will only perpetuate the cycle. At this point, the child should consult with a parent or teacher.

While victims are encouraged not to reply to messages that are posted or sent to them, they are encouraged to print and keep copies of any material that is harmful. Online communication can be easily altered, which is why it is extremely important to document this material as evidence (Wolfsberg, 2006). Victims of incessant online harassment

should keep a file or folder of messages to share with parents and teachers if cyberbullying persists.

Another way to respond to cyberbullying is to have the child change his or her screen name. If a child is being bullied online through his or her screen name, he or she should be encouraged to think about changing his or her screen name (Wolfsberg, 2006). A new screen name can be created so the child can remain in contact with his or her close friends and family.

It is also important for children not to share personal information when using chat rooms and blogs. Personal information can be considered name, address, email address, telephone number, school, and so on. Information that is posted on the internet should be considered public knowledge. If an individual does not want others to know specific information, it should not be posted on the internet. This information can help a bully identify his or her victim.

Lastly, children who are being bullied online may find it useful to try to identify the sender. It may be helpful for children to figure out where emails or instant messages are coming from. Right clicking the mouse over the bully's email address may help identify details of the sender (Wolfsberg, 2006). Victims of cyberbullying may also contact their internet service provider to help identify their bully (Willard, 2007). If a child does learn the identity of the sender, it is important for him or her to inform the parents of the incident.

<center>Limitations</center>

One limitation found during this research is a lack of information on this topic. A majority of research has been focused on schoolyard bullying. There was little

information that focused on cyberbullying. The lack of information is likely due to how new this topic is.

Conclusion

Due to how new cyberbullying is, parents, educators, and children may be unfamiliar with how often it takes place. Cyberbullying does not stop when the school bell rings; it can last 24 hours. Students use computers and other technological devices to harass other children. It allows for the bully to remain virtually anonymous. In addition he or she does not see the affect it has on his or her victims.

There are a number of ways to address this issue. Parents, educators, and children need to educate themselves on the safety issues regarding computers and other technology. Parents should keep the household computer in a community room such as a living room in order to keep an eye on what their children are accessing. Parents and educators should also talk with children about how to respond if they are the victim of cyberbullying. They should explain to their children that if they are the victim of cyberbullying, they should tell an adult. Cyberbullying should not be a topic that is taken lightly. It can leave lasting and detrimental effects on children.

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