

CYBERBULLYING and how to avoid it

A student guide written for the Mankato (MN) Area Public Schools, Mankato

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Illustrations by Brady Johnson

What is cyberbullying?

Many of us know the old nursery rhyme: “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” Many of us know that is not true. Words and even pictures can be as hurtful as being shoved or hit with a fist.

When we think of bullies we usually think of those mean kids on the playground, school bus or street who use their size to push smaller or weaker children around. That kind of bully is still around (too bad!) but new kinds of hurtful actions are being taken by a new kind of bully – a cyberbully.

A cyberbully is a person who uses the Internet, cell phones and other devices to harm, threaten or embarrass others. 43% of students ages 13 to 17 say they have been bullied online and 92% say they know the person doing the bullying! (National Crime Prevention Council)

Examples of cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can take many different forms. Here are just a few:

- **Flaming** – Online fights using electronic messages with angry and vulgar messages.
- **Harassment** – Repeatedly sending nasty, mean and insulting messages.
- **Denigration** – “Dissing” someone online. Sending or posting rumors to damage a person’s reputation.
- **Impersonation** – Pretending to be someone else and sending material to get that person in trouble.
- **Outing** – Sharing someone’s secrets or embarrassing information or pictures online.
- **Exclusion** – Intentionally and cruelly excluding someone from an online group.
- **Cyberstalking** – Repeated, intense harassment that includes threats and creates fear. (from Willard’s book *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats*)

Why you shouldn’t be a cyberbully

All forms of bullying are against the school rules. And the bullying policy in the Mankato Area Public Schools specifically mentions cyberbullying:

The misuse of technology including, but not limited to, teasing, intimidation, defaming, threatening, or terrorizing another student, teacher, administrator, volunteer, contractor, or other employee of the school district by sending or posting e-mail messages, instant messages, text messages, digital pictures or images, or Web site posting, including blogs, also may constitute an act of bullying regardless of whether such acts are committed on or off school district property and/or with or without the use of school district resources. Bullying Prevention Policy 542 Mankato Area Public Schools

The policy also reminds us that “bullying, like other violent or disruptive behavior, is conduct that interferes with students’ ability to learn and teachers’ ability to educate students in a safe environment. “ If kids don’t feel safe, it is hard for them to learn. You can be suspended or expelled for being a bully in our school district.

At its worst, kids who have been cyberbullied seek revenge, get upset, sick or depressed, and even commit suicide. Or begin to cyberbully others themselves.

Don’t be a Cyberbully - It’s not cool - it’s cruel.”

Are you a cyberbully? Often, people who are victims are also bullies. Before you feel too bad for yourself, take this quiz to find if you are part of the cyberbullying problem!

<http://www.stopcyberbullying.org/kids/are_you_a_cyberbully.html>

Advice for dealing with cyberbullies:

(adapted from cyberbulling.ca)

- **Do not keep this to yourself!** You are NOT alone and you did NOT do anything to deserve this! Tell an adult you know and trust!
- **Don't reply to messages from cyberbullies.** Even though you may really want to, this is exactly what cyberbullies want. They want to know that they've got you worried and upset. They are trying to mess with your mind and control you, to put fear into you. Don't give them that pleasure.
- **Block or delete the person.** You can block usernames from your buddy list in IM and addresses in your e-mail.
- **Change your information.** If you think someone has hacked one of your accounts, change your password. Consider changing your username and e-mail address.
- **Inform your Internet Service Provider (ISP) or cell phone service provider.** You may need to delete your current e-mail accounts, cell phone accounts and set up new ones.
- **Inform your local police.** Do this with a parent's help.
- **Do not erase or delete messages from cyberbullies** -You don't have to read it, but keep it, it is your evidence. These messages may reveal certain clues as to who is doing this to you. Although some cyberbullies think they are anonymous, they can usually be found. But don't try and solve this on your own, remember, tell an adult you know and trust. GET HELP!
- **Protect yourself** -Never arrange to meet with someone you met online unless your parents go with you. If you are meeting them make sure it is in a public place.

Resources about cyberbullying

- *Cyberbullying.org* <<http://www.cyberbullying.org/>>.
- Illinois Library Association. *NetSafe: Using the Internet Safely*. <<http://www.ila.org/netsafe/>>.
- Magid, Larry and Anne Collier. *MySpace Unraveled: A Parent's Guide to Teen Social Networking*, Berkeley, CA: Peachpit, 2007.
- National Crime Prevention Council. *Delete Cyberbullying* <<http://www.ncpc.org/newsroom/current-campaigns/cyberbullying>>.
- *Stopcyberbullying.org* <<http://www.stopcyberbullying.org>>.
- Willard, Nancy *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Online Social Aggression, Threats and Distress*. Champaign, IL: Research Press, 2007.
- Willard, Nancy. "Mobilizing Educators, Parents, Students, and Others to Combat Online Social Aggression." *Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use*. <<http://www.csriu.org/cyberbully/>>.

If you have any questions whether something you are doing or something being done to you is **cyberbullying**, talk to your parents, teacher, guidance counselor or library media specialist.

If you think someone you know is being cyberbullied
– let someone know



CyberbullyNOT

Cyberbullies use the Internet or cell phones to send hurtful messages or post information to damage people's reputation and friendships.

Don't Put Yourself at Risk

- Don't post or send information others could use against you.
- Watch out for how you are communicating. Be careful not to insult others.
 - Don't hang around places where people treat you badly.

If You Are Cyberbullied

- **DON'T RETALIATE!** This only gives the cyberbully a "win" and could make other people think you are part of the problem.
- Save the evidence and try to figure out who the cyberbully is.

- Decide whether you can handle the situation by yourself or should tell an adult. But if what you try does not work, be sure to get help from an adult.
- Depending on how bad the cyberbullying is, the steps you or a parent can take include (you will need your parent's help for some of these steps):
 - Calmly and strongly tell the cyberbully to stop and to remove any harmful material or you will take further action.
 - Ignore or block the communications.
 - Send the material the cyberbully has posted to his or her parents and tell them to make it stop.
 - File a complaint with the Web site, ISP, or cell phone company.
 - Get help from your school counselor, principal, or resource officer.
 - Contact an attorney.
 - Contact the police if the cyberbullying includes any threats.

Friends Don't Let Friends Get Hurt Online

If you see that someone is being cyberbullied:

- Tell the cyberbully to stop.
- Help the person being cyberbullied.
- Tell a trusted adult.

Don't Be a Cyberbully

It's not "cool"— it's cruel.