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Cyberbullying among children and teens: A pervasive global issue

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Cyberbullying among children and teens: A pervasive global issue



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Disclaimer:

This report is based on four previously published blog posts on the author's blog, Languages, Literacy and Leadership (www.draraheaton.wordpress.com):

- Eaton, S. E. (2012). How to tell if your child is being cyber-bullied. Retrieved from <http://wp.me/pNAh3-1w4>
- Eaton, S. E. (2013). 5 Signs your child is a cyberbully Retrieved from <http://wp.me/pNAh3-1AM>
- Eaton, S. E. (2013). What to do if your child is a cyberbully: 10 tips for parents. Retrieved from <http://wp.me/pNAh3-1AW>
- Eaton, S. E. (2013). Profile of a cyberbully: 7 Personality traits to watch for. Retrieved from <http://wp.me/pNAh3-1AR>

This report is a collection of these blog posts with some updates since the original posts were written.

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Abstract

This report is a compilation of evidence-informed blog posts on cyberbullying among children and teens. It examines the issue of cyberbullying from the perspective of both the victim and the perpetrator. A key argument is that cyberbullying is a matter not only for the children involved, but also for their families and educators.

Keywords: cyberbullying, children, youth, family, educators

Introduction

A few years ago I wrote a series of evidence-informed blog posts about cyberbullying. They became some of the most read posts on my blog. I decided to collect these posts into a complete report that could be accessed by educators, researchers and the general public.

This report addresses the issue of cyberbullying among children and teens from two perspectives: that of the victims and the perpetrators. It is by no means exhaustive and is intended to serve as a starting point for further research and discussion. I have made some updates to the original blog post, but without deeply investigating the latest research available on the topic. Much work has been conducted on this important topic since I wrote the original blog posts. I encourage readers who are interested in the topic to dig more deeply into the current research and information available.

How to tell if your child is being cyberbullied

In 2012, in British Columbia, Canada, a 15-year old girl named Amanda Todd killed herself. The reason: cyberbullying.

The case has brought to light the devastating effects that cyberbullying can have on a person. Todd's death has affected Canadians immediately and deeply. Parents were suddenly asking themselves: Is my child being cyber-bullied? How would I know?

StopBullying.gov (a U.S. website) says warning signs that your child may be the victim of face-to-face or any type bullying include:



- Inexplicable injuries
- Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewelry.
- Frequent headaches or stomach aches, feeling sick or faking illness.
- Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating. Kids may come home from school hungry because they did not eat lunch.
- Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares.
- Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school.
- Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations.
- Feelings of helplessness or decreased self esteem.
- Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide.

The Cyberbullying Research Centre notes that 10% to 40% of youth may be the victim of cyberbullying. They add to the list of warning signs by zooming in on key indicators that make cyberbullying different from other kinds of bullying:

Signs your child is the victim of cyberbullying:

- Your child may be the victim of cyberbullying if he or she:
- unexpectedly stops using their computer or cell phone.
- appears nervous or jumpy when an instant message or email appears.

- appears uneasy about going to school or outside in general.
- appears to be angry, depressed, or frustrated after using the computer or cell phone.
- avoids discussions about what they are doing on the computer or cell phone.
- or becomes abnormally withdrawn from usual friends and family members.

While the Amanda Todd case may have opened up the conversation in Canada in 2012, cyberbullying is a real phenomenon that affects tens of thousands of children (and adults) around the world daily. There is no question that cyberbullying is a pervasive global issue for educators, families and citizens in general.

Signs your child is a cyberbully

Parents, educators and even children are aware that bullying is moving out of the playground and into virtual spaces. According to the American Humane Association, 15% to 20% of children bully others online.

Previously, this report discussed signs to help identify if your child is the victim of cyberbullying. But what if your child *is* the cyberbully?

Here are 5 key indicators that your child is harassing others online:

1. **Is secretive about online activities.** The cyberbully does not want to be discovered by parents, grandparents, teachers or others who may hold them accountable.
2. **Quickly switches computer screens or closes the screen when you enter the room or walk by.** This is a tactic often used by people who do not want others to discover what they have been doing online. Watch for indicators that your child works to quickly minimize an online browser, close a web page or change screens within a second or two of you approaching the computer they are using. This is a sign that your child does not want you to know what they have been doing online.
3. **Uses the computer or mobile devices late at night or when he or she is unsupervised.** Inappropriate online behavior is more likely to occur when the bully feels that no one is watching or supervising their actions. They feel less accountable for their online activity when left alone to misbehave.
4. **Gets extremely upset if computer privileges are revoked.** While almost any child in today's world may get upset if their technology privileges are taken away, the cyberbully may become particularly sulky, defensive or angry. The virtual space is where they feel all-powerful and free of consequences, so when that privilege is revoked, they may feel completely disempowered or oppressed.
5. **Uses multiple online accounts or accounts with a fake name.** The cyberbully is likely to take the time to create multiple online accounts using public e-mail systems such as Hotmail, Google or Yahoo, since they feel these are less easily traceable. The cyberbully will often lack the courage to represent themselves online in an authentic and transparent manner.

Tips for parents: What to do if your child is a cyberbully

So, let's say you have figured out that your child is harassing or bullying others on line. What can you do?

Here are 10 tips for parents to help you deal with your child or teen.

1. Address the problem directly. Cyberbullying is not an issue that will go away if you ignore it. You must talk with your child directly. Insist that your child engage with you in a dialogue about his or her behavior.
2. Explain that the behavior will not be tolerated. Hold the child accountable for his or her actions.
3. Explain that cyberbullying can be tracked and recorded and reported to school authorities or law enforcement.
4. Make it clear that safety trumps privacy. A child who has behaved inappropriately in an online environment, loses their privacy privileges.
5. Discuss the ways that your child can repair the damage he or she has caused. This may include a face-to-face apology or other ways of demonstrating responsibility for his or her actions.
6. Monitor his or her Internet activities and computer use. The child who cyberbullies is likely to want to be alone in order to engage in inappropriate online activities. Make it clear that parents, grandparents and other caregivers have the right to monitor online activities.
7. Take electronic devices out of the child's room. Allow computer use only in common areas of the house such as the kitchen table and ensure the screen is visible to everyone in the room. For example, don't allow a child to sit on the couch with a laptop so only he or she can see the screen.
8. Have children and teens surrender mobile devices to parents after a certain time at night. Parents return the mobile devices in the morning. There is no need for children to be using technology unsupervised late at night. If he or she uses their phone as an alarm clock, buy an old-fashioned alarm clock that sits on the night stand. Don't accept excuses that allow kids to have phones or other mobile devices in their room at night.
9. Parents must have passwords to all computers and mobile devices. Parents, not children, should have "administrator rights" to all computers.
10. Seek counseling or mental health care for children who persist with their bullying behavior. Talking to the child's teacher or school principal can be helpful, too.

As long as cyberbullying remains a secret activity, it is likely to continue. It is essential to bring cyberbullying behaviour out into the open and address it. If necessary, inform grandparents, babysitters and others involved in the child's life. Ensure that others are involved in helping your child behave appropriately in the online environment.

Remember, it is not uncommon for cyberbullies to suffer from depression or other forms of mental or emotional distress. Cyberbullying may be one sign of a deeper mental illness that requires treatment and ongoing attention.

Conclusions

This compilation of previously published blog posts provides the basis for deeper exploration and discussion among families and educators. Every year, more research is being conducted to uncover the causes and effects of cyberbullying, and more information is available about how to prevent it.

References & Resources

The following sources have informed and shaped the work for this project. Unlike a typical list of references, not all sources listed below are cited in the body of the work, though they have provided us with useful background knowledge that has collectively helped to shape this guide. I offer this list not only as a list of sources referenced, but also for further reading.

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About the Author

Sarah Elaine Eaton, Ph.D. is a faculty member of the Werklund School of Education. Her Open Access materials can be found on in the Education Resource Information Center (ERIC); the University of Calgary's digital repository (PRISM); the Informal Education Archives (www.infed.org); Research Gate; Academia.edu; and her blog (www.drsaraheaton.wordpress.com), among other sites.

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