

## Cyberbullying And Behavior

From middle school on, students begin to accept more responsibility for their actions and gain greater autonomy from their parents, teachers and other adults. This growing independence is played out as much online as it is in the real world.

More than 90 percent of teenagers in America have daily or frequent computer access. The tools of their digital world are cell phones, computers and game consoles. They use technology to play online games, download music, e-mail and instant message. Many create personal profiles on MySpace, Facebook or other social networking sites.

Teens build a second existence online. Naturally, bullying and anti-social behavior translates from real world to the Web, invading this second existence. Where bullies take advantage of weakness to harm kids on the playground, cyberbullies take advantage of digital tools to harm them online.

**Cyberbullying, or the use of Internet-connected devices to harass others, is particularly damaging because it can occur 24 hours a day, seven days a week.**

The anonymity of the Internet allows cyberbullies to approach their victims with less fear of retaliation than traditional bullies. They burden their victims with the knowledge that everyone on the Web can view the harassment.

Cyberbullying tactics include:

- Sending abusive text messages to cell phones, computers, or Internet-connected game consoles.
- Posting abusive comments on someone's blog or social networking site (e.g., MySpace or Facebook).
- Creating a Web page that masquerades as the victim's personal site and using it to embarrass him or her.
- Making it appear that the victim is posting malicious comments about friends to isolate him or her from friends.
- Posting the victim's personally identifiable information on a site to put them at greater risk of contact by predators.
- Sending abusive comments while playing interactive games.
- Taking photos — often using a cell phone camera — and posting them online, sometimes manipulating them to embarrass the target.

Kids become cyberbullies because the power and anonymity of the Internet strips away responsibility and bolsters independence and autonomy beyond a level they can maturely handle.

When students are bullied in real life and online, involvement in school activities may diminish. Grades may slip. Before long, the student may dread going to school.

**Because cyberbullying impedes a child's ability to succeed in school, it must be addressed at home and in the classroom.**

Fortunately, school boards, parent groups and governments have begun to take action.