

Protecting Kids from



CYBER- BULLIES

Cyber bullying allows for easy revenge with anonymity

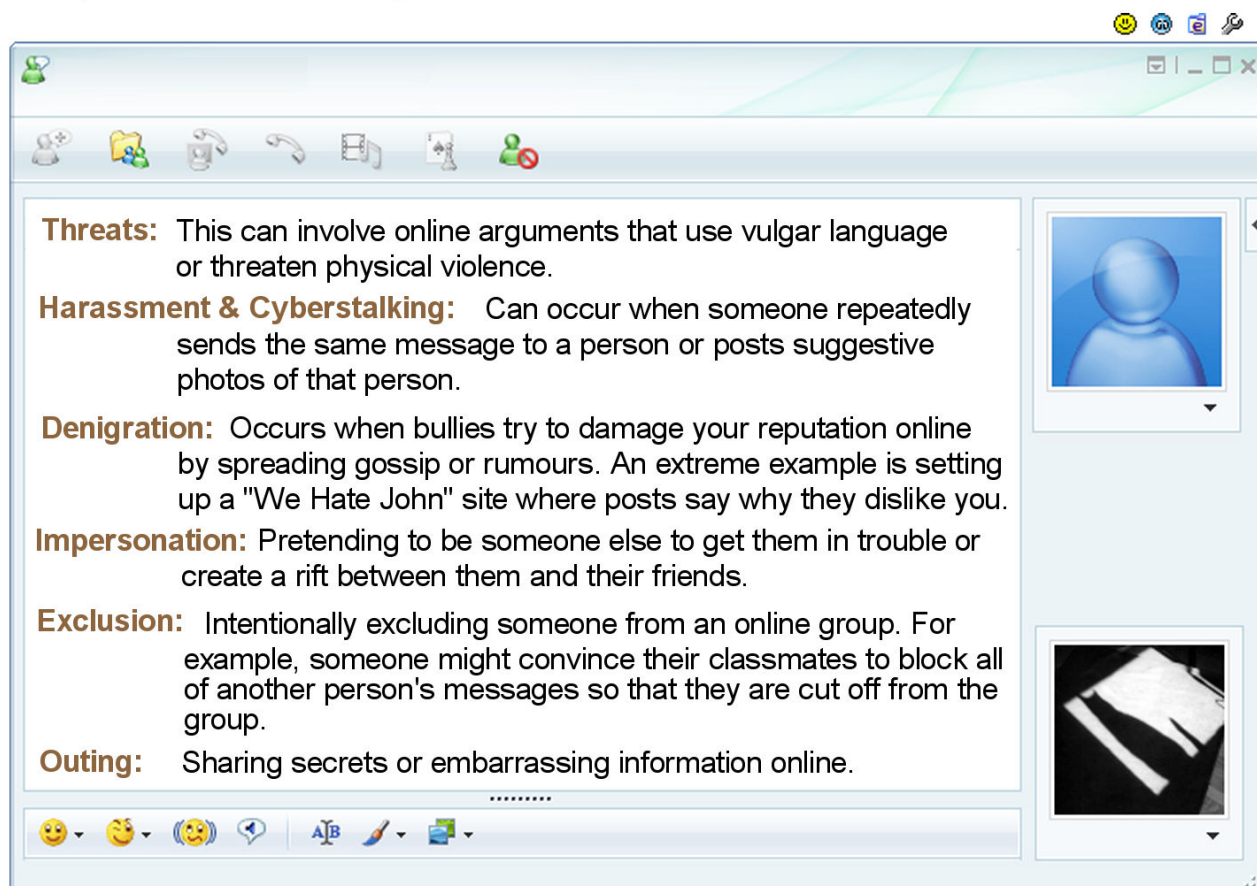
Cyber-bullying occurs when somebody sends (or posts) harmful or cruel messages or images over the internet - or over other digital communication devices. Kids might use the internet to threaten their peers, or to send information that will embarrass one of their classmates. Or perhaps they might pretend to be somebody else when visiting a chat room in order to get the other person in trouble.

A cyber-bully might make fun of a person's race, religion, height, weight, intelligence - exactly the sort of things a playground bully might decide to pick on. Cyber-bullying lacks the immediate physical threat that kids might experience on the playground, but in

some ways this online form of bullying is even worse. Lies and rumours are posted on websites around the clock - so the bullying doesn't stop when the kids come home from school.

Part of the attraction for cyber-bullies lies in the fact that they can carry the act out anonymously. There's nobody supervising them when they are online, and they might feel that cyber-bullying allows for easy revenge. They can say things online that they might not have the nerve to say face-to-face. Moreover, they don't have to engage with the other person emotionally. They don't have to deal with feelings of guilt if they can't see the other person crying.

The potential for online cruelty is almost unlimited. Some of the worst incidents include:



One example of cyber-bullying might occur when a person sends what they think is a private message to a friend - only to have that message forwarded to other people. For example, imagine the following scenario. A girl in junior high school e-mails a friend to tell her that she thinks a boy in her class is cute. The "friend" then forwards this e-mail to everyone in their class. This results in an incredible sense of embarrassment for the girl who sent the message. If she had admitted she liked the boy in a private conversation, she could always deny it later. But where e-mails are concerned, there is often no such thing as "private." Everyone in her class knows what she had to say in her e-mail at 4:17 p.m. on May 3rd.

When they are sitting at their computers, in the comfort of their own homes, kids may feel very informal and start to let their defences down. But it's important to realize that the internet is very public. Information can be forwarded to virtually anybody instantly, so you need to be careful what you write. Kids also need to be careful about any pictures they transmit. A good question for kids to ask themselves before sending messages or photos over the internet might be *'is this something I want my parents, teachers or friends to see?'*

Solutions to Cyber-Bullying

BLOCKING



When they are in the playground, and other children start calling them names, kids can't throw a force field around themselves to block the abuse. But when they are online, kids can block e-mails and messages from bullies they don't want to be in contact with.

IGNORING



Bullies are usually looking for a response. If they know the other person is angry, embarrassed or depressed as a result of the bullying, they might feel as if they've **won**. Sometimes simply ignoring them is the best option.

REPORTING



When they are bullied online, kids can print out a copy of the message and show it to parents, teachers or other adults that they trust. Having written proof lends more credence to claims of cyber-bullying. They can contact the Kids Help Phone for advice. The counsellors there deal with issues like this every day, and they can give a lot of helpful advice. If the threats are serious enough, kids and their parents might even contact the bully's internet service provider.

INTERVENE

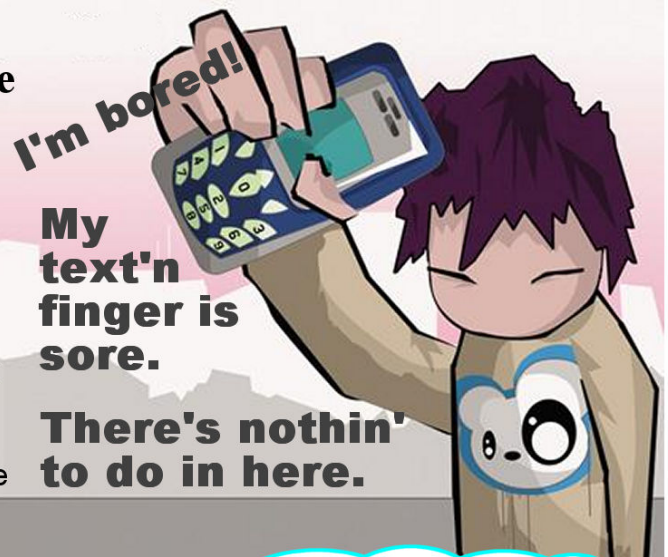
London, STOP teasing Chris about his size.



Why don't more kids intervene when someone is being bullied online? Perhaps it is because they get a kick out of seeing the other person being teased. More likely, they are afraid that if they intervene they will become the bully's next victim! But kids who want to help can join forces and stick together or report the bullying to their parents, group leaders or teachers.

Appropriate Outlets & Offline Time

A lot of cyber-bullying occurs when one kid is responding to a real or imagined insult from somebody else. He or she may decide to respond in kind, and pretty soon the situation spirals out of control. Some kids go through a "Dr. Jekyll / Mr. Hyde" phase where the kind of person they are online is completely different from the person they are in real life. They might think their actions online are all pretend or make believe, but that's not how other people interpret it.



Rather than "venting" in an online site that all their friends are familiar with, perhaps kids can visit the Kids Help Phone website and write their feelings down on a message board. They don't have to use their own e-mail addresses, or leave any information that can identify the person they are writing about. But they are still able to vent and get things out of their system without causing anybody any problems.



The last bit of advice for dealing with cyber-bullies is for kids to cut back on the amount of time they are spending online. It's pretty easy to get upset with what another person says about them online when they spend four or five hours a day at the same sites, and constantly see the rumours and innuendo being rehashed. But if they spend more time out in the sunshine, that might help to put things in perspective somewhat and let them realize it's not that big an issue after all.