Cyberbullying

Bullying occurs throughout the world and can happen at many stages in the life course, from childhood to adolescence and even to adulthood. While traditional schoolyard bullying still exists, in recent years, the Internet has provided a new platform for bullying.

There are many online platforms in which bullying may take place including e-mail, blogs, social networking websites (eg, Facebook and Twitter), online games, and text messaging. This phenomenon has come to be known as cyberbullying, electronic aggression, or online harassment. Several definitions of cyberbullying exist; most are variations on accepted definitions for traditional bullying. One commonly used definition of cyberbullying is "an aggressive, intentional act or behavior that is carried out by a group or an individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself." Estimates of the number of youth who experience cyberbullying vary, ranging from 10% to 40%, depending on the age group and how cyberbullying is defined.

Cyberbullying shares many similarities and a few key differences with traditional bullying:

- Victims of cyberbullying often do not know who the bully is or why they are being targeted.
- The hurtful actions of a cyberbully can reach the teen anytime he or she uses a telephone or computer.
- The bullying messages can also spread virally through the Internet to many other people at school or in the community, making this type of bullying potentially very embarrassing and lasting.

Previous studies have examined the negative effects that cyberbullying can have on both bullies and victims. Victims are more likely to report lower grades and other academic problems as a result of the experience. Both bullies and victims often report higher levels of depression and lower self-esteem. A serious consequence of bullying is suicide. A recent study in this month's *JAMA Pediatrics* found that victims were at higher risk for both suicidal ideation (eg, thinking seriously about suicide) and suicide attempts.

If you are concerned that your child has been cyberbullied, the first step is to make sure your child feels safe and secure and to give him or her your unconditional support. Parents can work with their children to agree on a plan of next steps; it is often very helpful to seek the child or teen's perspective as to what may help improve the situation. It is sometimes necessary for the parent to meet with school administrators, a trusted teacher, or a pediatrician to discuss the situation. Parents may also be able to work with the parent of the bully or contact the website or telephone provider to help remove the bullying messages. In some cases, the police must be approached if physical threats are involved or a crime is suspected.

Parents can play a role in preventing cyberbullying by educating their children about appropriate online behaviors. Parents should have discussions early and often about their child's friendships and relationships to develop and maintain open communication about these topics.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

http://cyberbullying.us/resources/parents

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