



## **Cyber Bullies- Not Your Typical Bully**

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Just as we are beginning to understand and prevent bullying on a systematic level, Along comes an entirely unique and cruel form: cyber bullying. Cyber bullying is an, entirely different animal. It happens in private while traditional bullying typically occurs in the open, where there are few adults present. The bully, the bystanders, and the victim are often in the cafeteria, hallway, school bus or playground. By contrast, victims of cyber bullying may not even be able to identify their aggressor. Like classic bullies, cyber bullies are after power and want to inflict pain on their peers. Through technology, cyber bullying spreads like wild fire in cyber space, where parents offer little protection, as we are the digital immigrants and our children are the digital natives.

Cyber bullying comes in many different forms as well. It's done through email, instant messaging, postings to online bulletin boards or social networking sites, and through cell phones. According to the article "Cyber Bullying: Intervention and Prevention Strategies" by Ted Feinberg & Nicole Robey of the National Association of School Psychologists 2009, there are several types of cyber bullying:

- Flaming – On-line fights using vulgar language
- Exclusion – Intentionally excluding someone from an online group
- Outing and trickery – Engaging someone in instant messaging or text, tricking them into revealing secret information, and then forwarding the information to others
- Harassment and stalking – Repeatedly sending cruel or threatening messages
- Denigration – Posting degrading information or gossip about someone to ruin his or her reputation or friendships
- Impersonation – Breaking into someone's email account and sending out vicious or embarrassing messages to others.

In addition to having its own unique forms of bullying, cyber bullying has its own unique type of bully. And so far, there is no evidence that kids and teens who are bullies on the playground are also cyber bullies.

We carry in our heads and hearts the portrait of the classic bully. The male bully is personified by such famous movie characters as Scut Farkas in “A Christmas Story” and Johnny Lawrence in “Karate Kid”. Both of these traditional male bullies used physical aggression to pick on kids who were smaller and weaker than them. The female bully is epitomized by Regina George, the alpha female character in the film “Mean Girls”, who, along with her posse of friends, dominate and intimidate their entire school as they strive for power and attention.

Anonymity frees the cyber bully from the constraints of the typical bully. The cyber bully doesn’t need a posse or a group of onlookers to ensure and maintain his or her position of power. He need not be imposing, and she need not be popular. With a simple click of a button the cyber bully gets immediate gratification. And often there are no consequences for their behavior.

“STOP”, a Cyber bullying program through Wired Kids, Inc. identifies four types of cyber bullies:

- “Vengeful Angels” – This is the child that sees him/herself as the great defender rather than a bully because he/she is coming to the defense of a friend who has been bullied. Because of the anonymity of cyberspace, kids who might typically hold back from defending a victim in real life, have free reign to defend a friend on-line because there is no retaliation, no fear of the bully turning against the defender
- “Power Hungry”- These may be kids who are victims of traditional bullying and want to exert their power and control over others. Some call this group “The Revenge of the Nerds”
- “Mean Girls” – as a group, use exclusion and harassing as a form of entertainment. These are the girls that enjoy breaking into someone’s email account and sending out embarrassing messages to others under their victim’s name. This category of cyber bullies is most similar to Regina George and her posse without the need for popularity or school power
- “Inadvertent bullies” – We might call these kids, “The Whoops” group as they innocently forward secret information to one friend and finds that this friend spreads the information indiscriminately to others. The inadvertent bully does not intentionally hurt the victim.

Even though cyber bullying comes with its challenges, there are some actions you can take, especially up front, to lessen the chances your child will be a victim of cyber bullying:

- Reduce your child’s overall screen time exposure. This lessens the chances for bullying to occur

- Keep your computer in the open at home where you can casually monitor your child's computer activities. Let your child know that you will be periodically checking in on their friends list, webpage history, and communications not to intrude on their privacy, but to make sure they are safe
- Discuss cyber bullying openly and review appropriate vs. inappropriate online behavior. If possible, begin this dialogue prior to opening an email or social networking account. Setting guidelines in advance will make it easier for you in the long run
- Discourage secretive behavior
- Learn your child's username and check your child's profiles, webpage's, and blogs
- Encourage your child to tell you if they or someone they know is being cyber bullied
- Discourage your child from retaliating in any way to cyber bullying. Instead, when communication is inappropriate or threatening, encourage your child to ignore or block those communications
- If your child knows who the offender is, solicit help from the cyber bully's parent when possible
- Immediately involve school personnel if the cyber bully is a classmate.

There are also many informative and useful websites out there to aid you and your child in effectively dealing with cyber bullying. Here are just a few:

[www.cyberbullyhelp.com](http://www.cyberbullyhelp.com)

[www.cyberbullying.us](http://www.cyberbullying.us)

[www.enough.org](http://www.enough.org)

[www.cyberbully.org](http://www.cyberbully.org)

[www.WiredSafety.org](http://www.WiredSafety.org)