

## **Cyber Bullying**

### **Introduction**

Cyber bullying, known by a variety of names such as hating, drama, gossip, trolling, or doxing is a form of bullying that employs digital devices such as cell phones, tablets, computers, or gaming consoles. Common ways in which cyberbullying takes place includes

- Sending mean or threatening messages by email, text or through comments on a social networking page.
- Spreading embarrassing rumors, secrets or gossip about another person through social networking sites, email, or texts.
- Taking an embarrassing picture or video of someone with a digital camera and sending it to others or posting it online without their knowledge or permission.
- Posting online stories, pictures, jokes, or cartoons that are intended to embarrass or humiliate.
- Hacking someone's email account and sending hurtful content to others while pretending to be them.
- Using someone else's password to get into their social networking account and post material as them that would be embarrassing or offensive.
- Tricking someone to into sharing personal information and then sharing that information widely with others.
- Creating online polls and rating people in negative, mean ways.

- In online gaming, repeatedly harming a player's character, ganging up on a player, or using personal information to make direct threats. <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/ntnl-scr/cbr-scr/cbrbllng/prnts/cbrbllng-en.aspx>

Cyber bullying can occur in any context in which people share content in cyber space. Anyone with access to the internet can engage in cyber bullying should they be so motivated; though cyber bullying is particularly prevalent among children and young adults, it also occurs amongst older adults. An especial problem that distinguishes cyber bullying from traditional forms of bullying is that once embarrassing or humiliating material is posted on social media it is always available. Further, in contrast to traditional face-to-face bullying, cyberbullying can be relentless, reaching its victims anywhere at any time. The effects of cyber bullying can be severe and long lasting, in some cases causing victims to commit suicide, as in the cases of Canadian teens Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons.

### **Cyber Bullying and Moral Disengagement**

There is reason to believe that the Internet encourages the phenomenon of moral disengagement, namely the belief that bullying someone online is less morally wrong than bullying someone face to face. (Menesini, E., Nocentini, A., & Camodeca, M. (2013). Morality, values, traditional bullying, and cyberbullying in adolescence. *The British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 31(1), 1–14.) Whereas in offline situations, say schools, businesses or other public venues, there exist central authorities and well established codes of conduct, this is not the case for the Internet, where there is a perceived absence of clear rules and recognized authority. This, combined with how easy it is to safeguard anonymity on the

Internet generates an increased sense of freedom from consequences that makes cyber bullying more likely to occur. The lack of accountability that is a consequence of anonymity allows the indulgence of bad behavior without having to fear repercussions.

Another aspect of the Internet that contributes especially to moral disengagement is that the effects of particular online acts on victims are not in general immediately and directly seen by their perpetrators. This makes it much harder to feel empathy and much easier to avoid feeling guilt. There is also the problem that the Internet makes it possible to transmit information virtually instantaneously. The ability to act effortlessly and immediately on impulse makes it more difficult to make good moral decisions when interacting with others in cyber space.

### **Children, Parents, and Cyber Bullying**

Cyber bullying is especially prevalent among children and teenagers. It starts as early as age eight, though most cyber bullying takes place in the teenage years before age seventeen. Most teens are involved in cyber bullying in one way or another, either being a target, a bully, a silent observer, or someone who become part of the problem by participating on the sidelines. <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/ntnl-scrt/cbr-scrt/cbrbllng/prnts/cbrbllng-en.aspx> That most cyber bullying takes place amongst children and young teens is a great concern inasmuch as they are not as likely as adults to have the experience and life skills needed to surmount such bullying. There is a duty on the part of parents and those who are older to be aware of what is taking place in the lives of young people with whom they have contact.

Youth who face cyber bullying are usually confused about how to deal with the problem. Typically, they may think that their parents may not understand what they are facing, or, when

the bullying has resulted from the sharing of explicit pictures or content, be liable to punish them. Signs of cyber bullying include changes in moods, behavior, sleep or appetite, withdrawal from family members, friends, and usual activities. Further signs include emotional distress during or after use of the internet, avoiding discussion about social media, and not wanting to use computers or cell phones.

Most cyber bullying occurs in the context of private and unsupervised use of the Internet. It is important, therefore, that parents have clear, well enforced, rules around their children's use of digital technology. If children are using the Internet unsupervised then parents should be prepared to purchase filtering software and child monitoring apps and software.

There are many different reasons why children and teens cyberbully others. These include:

- cyber bullying to relieve boredom. Cyber bullying becomes a form of entertainment.
- cyber bullying to obtain status and a sense of power. Having an audience, especially those who laugh at the bullying, gives cyber bullies a feeling of control and importance.
- cyber bullying in response to peer pressure. Cyber bullies may want to fit in or not be viewed as the odd one out or uncool. Groups spur each other on.
- cyber bullying done in ignorance of doing anything 'really' wrong. Some cyber bullies see their behaviour as just a harmless joke, especially when they have the sense that everyone does it.
- cyber bullying done with the belief that the victim deserves it. Cyber bullies might see the victim as someone who thinks too much of themselves, or someone who 'stole' a boyfriend or girlfriend

- cyber bullying as a response to have been cyber bullied. If a child or teen has been a victim of cyberbullying, he or she may begin bullying to act out his or her sense of helplessness and to get back at others.
- cyber bullying as a result of a sense of invincibility. Cyber bullies believe they won't get caught and many use anonymous identities to avoid detection. It's one of the reasons why cyberbullying can continue so long and be so relentless.

Parents of children who have been identified as guilty of cyber bullying need to address the issue head on, not waiting for the problematic behavior to resolve itself. Sometimes with younger children parents may need to explain why certain behavior is problematic. Even in older children, those who cyber bully may not think they are guilty of bullying. The fact that cyber bullying takes place online and that bullies do not immediately witness the distress they cause makes it easier for them to dismiss the effects of their actions. In other instances, the bullying behavior may stem from problems in the child's life that need to be addressed by teachers and counsellors. For example, children with low self-esteem may bully others online because it makes them feel powerful or part of an 'in' group. School officials can often help identify situations that lead children to bully others. Most importantly, adults must model respect and kindness towards others.

### **Cyber-Revenge**

Cyber revenge is a sub-category of cyberbullying and typically involves an invasion of privacy. The anonymity provided by the Internet plays a large factor in motivating such revenge. This revenge commonly exploits one of the most private aspects of life, namely sex.

The Internet has increasingly become a venue for making sexual advances. The sending of nude or sexually explicit photos is widespread amongst teens. Twenty-two percent of teenage girls and eighteen percent of teenage boys have sent or posted nude or semi-nude photos of themselves to others. Thirty-nine percent of all teens have sent sexually suggestive messages via text email or instant messaging, and forty-eight percent report having received such messages. <https://www.guardchild.com/teenage-sexting-statistics/> The sending of explicit content is not, however, confined to teenagers. A September 30, 2019 article in the New York Post noted that fifty-two percent of Gen Z singles, fifty-one percent of Millennials, forty-two percent of Gen X and twenty percent of Boomers have received nude photos.

<https://nypost.com/2019/07/30/nearly-40-percent-of-generation-z-are-sexting-study/>

One result of this use of the Internet has been the emergence of what is known as revenge pornography. In many instances of a relationship breakup, an angry former partner uses digital technology to make public, either through photographs or texts, explicit material that will embarrass or humiliate the person with whom he or she had been intimate. Women have reported being approached by total strangers who know them from having viewed intimate photos an ex-partner posted to the Internet. (Cohen-Almagor, Raphael, "Netcitizenship: Addressing Cyberevenge and Sexbullying" *Journal of Applied Ethics and Philosophy* Vol 7, 2015, 14-23, 17)

Such posting of private material along with malicious descriptions and identifying details can have devastating effects. Victims of revenge pornography often suffer severe psychological effects, such that they cannot continue in their employment or establish new relationships. In some severe cases victims have been affected to the extent that they become suicidal.

Akin to revenge pornography is sextortion. The rise of sextortion is related to the ease of taking photos with digital devices. Photographs of a sexual nature are exploited to coerce or to extort photographed subjects. As in the case of revenge pornography, sextortion may be the result of a relationship breakup where a former partner possesses explicit intimate material. In other cases, malice and deceit is present right from the start. In a form of sextortion known as webcam blackmail, criminals persuade webcam users to undress and perform sex acts. They then blackmail the webcam user by threatening to release the material.

Adolescents are the most frequent victims of this type of criminal. Earlier, I mentioned Amanda Todd, a victim of sexual bullying and sextortion who committed suicide. At age twelve, through the Internet, she was contacted by a Dutch man, Aydin Coban. Coban, who victimized many young girls, would pose as a young girl or boy to gain his victim's trust. Once that trust was gained, he would persuade his victim to pose for intimate pictures. Once he had the pictures, he would then blackmail the victim by threatening to send the pictures to relatives or pornography sites.

Over the course of a year, Coban gained Amanda's trust, who eventually allowed him to do a screen capture of her bare breasts. He then threatened to release the material unless she agreed to perform a 'show' for him. Later, he created a Facebook profile of her which featured the topless photo and sent it to her classmates. This resulted in a great deal of bullying by her peers. Attempting to escape the bullying, she twice changed schools, with her family eventually moving to another city to try to protect her. She was unable to escape the cyber bullying that took place, however. After a failed suicide attempt in 2011, by drinking bleach, at age fifteen

she committed suicide in 2012 by hanging herself.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide\\_of\\_Amanda\\_Todd](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_of_Amanda_Todd)

In 2017, Coban was sentenced to eleven years for internet fraud and blackmailing dozens of girls from around the world to perform sex acts in front of webcams. It is expected that he will be extradited to Canada, where he faces further charges.

(<https://www.tricitynews.com/news/accused-amanda-todd-blackmailer-drops-appeal-1.23923868>)

### **Cyber Bullying Legislation in Canada**

On March 10, 2015, it became an offence under Canada's *Criminal Code* to share intimate images of a person without the consent of the person. An intimate image is defined as an image that shows a sexual organ, anal region, breast, or a person engaged in explicit sexual activity, taken at a time when the person(s) depicted had not relinquished his or her privacy. This law applies to everyone, not just people over eighteen. The legal consequences include:

- Imprisonment for up to five years.
- Confiscation of computer, cell phone or other device used to share the image.
- Reimbursement of the victim for costs incurred in removing the intimate image from the Internet or elsewhere.

Other *Criminal Code* offences which may arise from cyber bullying include:

- Criminal harassment.
- Uttering threats.
- Intimidation.



- Mischief in relation to data.
- Unauthorized use of computer.
- Identity fraud.
- Extortion.
- False messages, indecent or harassing telephone calls.
- Counselling suicide.
- Incitement of hatred.
- Defamatory libel. <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/ntnl-scr/cbr-scr/cbrblng/prnts/lgl-cnsgnecs-en.aspx>

