Cyberbullying

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I have been wanting to write a blog on Cyberbullying for a long time but didn't feel I had the expertise to write it. Luckily, I have colleague, and new friend, Darren Laur to help me out. Darren is currently a serving Staff Sergeant with the Victoria City Police Department, with over 27 years of law enforcement experience, and is an internationally recognized safety expert, award winning published author and highly sought after speaker. Darren and his wife run Personal Protection Systems*, which specializes in the area of personal safety and self protection both on-line and off-line.*

Here is an excerpt of Darren's blog, Cyberbullying and Digital Aggression*. Find Darren on Twitter* @crimefighterguy*!*

Cyberbullying is a form of on-line peer aggression that is delivered in a high tech way to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others emotionally, psychologically, and even physically.

Although traditional bullying has really only affected our youth while at, or traveling to and from school, modern technology has now enabled those who bully to extend their reach of peer aggression no matter where the intended target may be located.

Current research has found that cyberbullying/peer-aggression/harassment is most often committed by someone the intended target knows, loves, or trusts; and is the most frequent threat and challenge that youth face today, both on-line and off-line. Of concern to us as parents and caregivers; recent research has shown that **60% of those targeted do not tell an adult** because they either fear the adult will take away the source (computer or phone) or they feel the adult is not

willing to handle the situation in a rational manner.

Why has cyberbullying become more frequent?

- **The Technology:** Any time, anywhere. A message can be sent to a large number of people in a short period of time.

- **Anonymity:** Hiding behind the anonymity of a computer or cell phone reduces the chances of being caught.

- **Disinhibition:** Anonymity breeds disinhibition, which frees the peer aggressor to say whatever they want in the digital world that they would never think about saying face to face.

- **Lack of Supervision:** Chances are slim to none that anyone will see the peer aggressor sending the message, thus decreasing the chance of being identified.

- **Pop Culture:** Teens often take their cues from pop culture; just look at the shows South Park and Family Guy (popular shows with our youth) where the characters are constantly targeting those who are fat, homosexual, or disabled. Some youth will mimic these behaviors online.

Another big reason why cyberbullying has become more frequent is because the cyberbully does not immediately understand or internalize the very real consequences of their actions until it is too late. Youth live for the here and now and rarely think about the future. This is why it is so important to educate our youth about the harmful consequences of cyberbullying, and share with them the story of some of the recent suicide cases reported in the media both in Canada and the United States.

The many forms of Cyberbullying

Mediums through which cyberbullying often occur include; cellular voice mail, emails, chat rooms, voting/rating sites, blogging sites, web sites, virtual worlds, texting and on-line gaming. No matter what the medium, cyberbullying includes:

- **Direct IM text messaging of threats or harassment.** This could also include something called a "text war", where the intent is to have a group of individuals target one person with an overabundance of text messages. This can have a heavy financial burden attached to the intended victim.
- **Stealing passwords.** This can allow the cyber bully to have access to your accounts and pretend to be you while on-line. Once a person has your password, they can change your profile that could include sexual or racist remarks.

- **Inappropriate Blog or web site creations.** This can contain nothing but lies about you, or even questionable pictures, but available for all to see.
- **Photoshopped images**. Purposely sending inappropriate "morphed" (doctored) pictures to others, including friends and family.
- **Internet Polling/Voting Booths.** Most on-line polling programs are free and others can start a poll asking, "Do you think Jane Doe is easy to get into bed, yes or no?", or "who is the ugliest, fattest, or dumbest person in the school". One such site to be aware of as a parent is [Formspring](#).
- **Outing**. This is where the peer aggressor will share someone's secret or embarrassing information on-line with others.
- **Malicious emails**. Purposely sending malicious software (viruses and Trojans), porn or spam to your computer.
- **Physical Threats**. Threatening to do you or others harm.

What parents need to know

Prevention is always the best defence. Though some bullies will be persistent, here are some steps your child can take to reduce the incidence.

- Know what cyberbullying/violence can be and tell an adult you trust that you are being targeted.

- Ignore all cyberbullying attempts. If you bite, it will only get worse.

- Restrict those who can communicate with you via e-mail, IM, and SMS text.

- Restrict others from being able to add you to their buddy list which can usually be done in your privacy setting.

What to do if your child is a target

It is so important that when your child does disclose to you that they are a target of cyberbullying, you do not overreact as the parent by immediately banning your child from access to the Internet via computer or cell phone. Although this may seem to be the easiest thing to do to deal with the issue, it does not ultimately deal with underlying issue that your child has been targeted. If your child believes that you will not react calmly in a rational manner to resolve the situation, disclosure will not take place and disclosure is the first step in the recovery process. Like it or not, Internet access is an indispensible component to 21stcentury adolescence, and if your child believes that the banning of access will be the primary step you will take to deal with the issue, they will not disclose.

Diagnose the issue

- Remain calm and use choice speech such as, " I know that it must have been hard for you to come and tell me what is going on, but I am very glad you did, so let's talk about how we are going to deal with this challenging issue"
- Ensure that your child is safe and that you will do everything in your power to keep them safe.
- Figure out how far the bullying has gone.
- Collect all evidence to support the fact that your child is being cyberbullied. (SMS texts, IM texts, voice mails, emails). This can be as simple as teaching your child to screen capture and print (usually ctrl + print screen button) and then paste into a word document.

Take steps to reduce further bullying

- Is the targeted bullying something that can be handled by your child changing their behavior, such as not communicating with the bully or blocking the bully.
- If the bullying took place on a website, report the abuse to that site. Remind your child how to block the person from contacting them on-line.
- If they have had their email or Social Network hacked, have your child change their passwords.

Report it up the chain, depending on severity

- Contact the parents of the cyberbully. I would recommend that this be done in person, and ensure that you bring copies of the evidence to support your allegations. Remember that the other parent will likely be defensive, so ensure that you stay calm and professional and explain that you want to work with them to identify a reasonable resolution to the situation. Dr Englander, an expert in aggression reduction, recommends the following "script" to help reduce the inevitable defensiveness of the bully's parent, **" I need to show you what your son/daughter typed to my son/daughter online. He/S may have meant it as a joke, but my son/daughter was really devastated by the messaging. A lot of kids type things online that they would never dream of saying in person, and it can all be easily misinterpreted."**
- Contact your child's school and speak with the principal and let them know what is going on, what actions you have taken to deal with this issue, and the expectations you have of the school should the cyberbullying carry on during school hours.
- Contact the Internet Service Provider or cell phone carrier of the cyberbully, and let them know that your child has been targeted using their service. Again be prepared to provide copies of the evidence to support your allegations, which they may ask for.
- If the content of the cyberbullying involves threats, criminal harassment or hate crimes then contact the police immediately. Again be prepared to provide copies of the evidence to support your allegations.
- Seek a Civil legal remedy if appropriate and reasonable to do so.

The signs of Cyberbullying

Although it is not uncommon for targets of cyberbullying not to tell others that they are being victimized, there are several behavioral signs that parents, teachers, and guardians should be aware of, to help identify a person who may need help:

- A marked change in the youth's computer or cell phone habits.
- Appears angry, depressed, or frustrated after using the computer or cell phone
- Won't say who they are talking/texting to.
- Physical issues: Trouble sleeping, stomach and headaches, crying for no apparent reason.
- Fear of leaving the house.
- Frequent visits to school nurse, wants to call mom/dad to come and get them.
- Lowered self esteem.
- A marked change in attitude, dress, or habits.
- Unexplained broken personal possessions, loss of money, loss of personal items.
- Stories that don't make sense.
- Missing or incomplete school work, decreased success in class.

For more information about Bullying and Cyberbullying, check out the [RCMP's page](http://www.binarytattoo.com)**.**