



CYBER BULLYING FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Bullying doesn't just take place on playgrounds or in school hallways anymore. As we have all gone online, so, too, have bullies. The Internet allows you to communicate with your friends through e-mail, Web sites, instant messaging, chat rooms, blogs and text messages. But, these great tools also give bullies new ways to intimidate and harass others. Cyber bullying is quickly becoming a big problem for kids, parents and schools. Here are some tips to help you understand it and how to deal with it ...

What is Cyber Bullying?

Cyber bullying is sending or posting harmful or mean text or images using the Internet or things like cell phones and PDA's (personal digital assistants).

Cyber bullying can include:

- Sending cruel, vicious or threatening e-mails;
- Creating Web sites that have stories, pictures and jokes ridiculing others;
- Posting pictures of other students/kids online with mean phrases or questions attached to them;
- Using someone else's e-mail to send mean e-mails to others; and
- Using instant messaging tools to harass others.

Trends show that bullying begins to peak during the high school years. Teens begin to find their niche and become involved in sports, music and other extra curricular activities. However, there still can be some cyber bullies who contact victims through personal blogs, instant messaging and even cell phone text messaging.

In one case, a student received a message on the Internet saying, "Hey

John¹, look at this website." After going to the Web site, John saw his photo with the headline "Welcome to the Web site that makes fun of John Smith," as well as pages of hateful comments directed towards him and everyone in his family. The creator of the Web site had others join in, posting lewd, sexual comments and smearing John's reputation.

This is an example of excessive cyber bullying in high school-aged individuals. While it potentially could have been meant as a joke, it took joking to another level and was looked at as a matter for the police to handle.

Be sure to protect yourself from cyber bullying by:

- Being careful about to whom you give your e-mail address and phone numbers.
- Never give your e-mail passwords to anyone, not even a close friend.
- Walk away from the computer if harassment starts, don't begin a war of words over the computer.
- Keep in mind that online conversations can be reproduced and spread very easily. Virtually nothing online is private.

Remember, high school students often feel invincible, untouchable, but that sadly isn't the case. Engaging in malice toward others over the Internet can become serious enough to have the police involved. Once you have a criminal record, it will follow you for the rest of your life — on college applications and on job applications. Think twice before setting up a Web site that pokes fun at someone or before you send that hateful text message to the kid in homeroom who "everyone" teases. That click of a mouse could change your entire future.

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¹ Name of student changed