MIAMI UNIVERSITY
CENTER FOR SCHOOL–BASED MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS

School Mental Health Community of Practice
School Counselors

Cyberbullying: Supporting K-12 Students who are Bullied Online

What is cyberbullying and why should we care?

- Cyberbullying ("online bullying") has the following components:
    - Electronic forms of contact
    - Intentional and (typically) repeated aggressive acts
    - Intended to cause harm to the student(s) being cyberbullied
- Cyberbullying can occur through personal websites, blogs, e-mails, texts, social networking sites, chat rooms, message boards, instant messaging, photographs, and/or video games
- Cyberbullying is different from 'in-person' bullying in the following ways:
    - Cyberbullying can happen anonymously and the student(s) being cyberbullied may not know who is cyberbullying them or why they are being targeted
    - Cyberbullying can have a very large audience (e.g., cyberbullying can go 'viral')
    - It is easier to be cruel using technology because the people who are cyberbullying do not see the immediate response of the student(s) being targeted and might not recognize the serious harm of their actions
    - It can be harder for parents and other adults to manage cyberbullying
- Rates of being cyberbullied range from 10% to 40% (depending on the age group being studied and the definition of cyberbullying)
- The percentage of those who experience cyberbullying at some point in their lifetimes has nearly doubled (18% to 34%) from 2007-2016
- Boys are more likely to engage in cyberbullying
- Girls are more likely to be cyberbullied
- Cyberbullying can result in serious emotional problems for those being cyberbullied (e.g., anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, stress, and suicide ideation)
- Those who cyberbully others are more likely to have anxiety, depression, less life satisfaction, less self-esteem, and abuse drugs/alcohol
- Both those who cyberbully others and those who are cyberbullied report less school satisfaction and lower levels of academic achievement
- Because cyberbullying can occur anonymously, those who cyberbully can act more aggressively as they feel there will be no consequences
- Only 33% of student(s) who were cyberbullied tell their parents because they are worried they will lose electronic privileges or face punishment

Citations: Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J. W. (2019). Cyberbullying Identification, Prevention, and Response. Cyberbullying Research Center (cyberbullying.org).
PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center. (2019). Cyberbullying. Retrieved from: https://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/cyberbullying/

<u>School counselors can teach other school personnel how to recognize the signs that students are involved in cyberbullying</u>.

The following are warning signs that students are being cyberbullied:

- unexpectedly stop using their devices
- appear nervous or jumpy when using their devices
- appear uneasy about being at school or outside
- appear to be angry, depressed, or frustrated after texting, chatting, using social media, or gaming
- become abnormally withdrawn
- avoid discussions about their activities online

The following are warning signs that students may be cyberbullying others:

- quickly switch screens or hide their devices
- use their devices at all hours of the night
- get unusually upset if they cannot use devices
- avoid discussions about what they are doing online
- seem to be using multiple online accounts, or an account that is not their own

In general, if students act in ways that are inconsistent with their usual behavior when using their electronic devices, find out why.

<u>School counselors can teach other school personnel how to use specific strategies to prevent and/or reduce cyberbullying behavior</u>.

The following action steps will help prevent/reduce cyberbullying behavior among students:

- ➢ Educate students about responsible use of their electronic devices at all times, ideally through a concerted focus on digital citizenship responsibilities
    - o Discuss issues related to appropriate online communication and online behavior in various areas of the general curriculum
    - o Reinforce these positive digital citizenship messages in classes that regularly utilize technology
    - o Post signage in the building(s) to remind students of the rules of acceptable electronic device usage
- ➢ Ensure that students know that all forms of bullying (including cyberbullying) are wrong and that those who engage in harassing or threatening behaviors will be disciplined
    - o Review your harassment and bullying policies to ensure that they allow for the discipline of students who engage in cyberbullying on campus or off campus
    - o Cyberbullying incidents that occur at school or that originate off campus but ultimately result in a substantial disruption of the learning environment are within a school's legal authority to intervene

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- Develop and promote a safe and respectful school climate/culture in which cyberbullying is not permitted
  - Display anti-cyberbullying posters throughout the building(s)
  - Share public service announcement (PSA) videos that convey anti-cyberbullying messages (or have students create their own PSAs)
  - Have students develop and present pro-kindness messages to each other
- Ensure that students who are cyberbullied feel safe and know that you will intervene on their behalf
- Involve the students' parents to discuss known instances of cyberbullying
- Involve law enforcement personnel if physical threats or criminal activity (e.g., extortion, stalking, blackmail, sexual exploitation of a minor) has occurred
  - Utilize school resource officers or other members of law enforcement to thoroughly investigate incidents, as needed, for severe behaviors
  - Detention, suspension, change of placement, or expulsion may be warranted in severe cases of cyberbullying
- Ensure that students know the action steps that they can take to stop cyberbullying
  - Students should identify trusted adults who they can go to if they need to tell someone about instances of cyberbullying
  - Students should be encouraged to adjust their privacy settings within each of their devices and apps to control who can contact them and interact with them
  - Students should be encouraged to keep all records of cyberbullying that they experience and show those records to trusted adults
  - Students should be encouraged to go online with their parents to show them the websites and apps they use
  - Students should be encouraged to stop and think about the appropriateness of a post before they post it online
  - If they witness cyberbullying, students should be encouraged to defend the student(s) being cyberbullied, provide encouragement, help to block and report the harassment, save any digital evidence, and reach out to trusted adults
- Ensure that parents and guardians know the action steps that they can take to support their children
  - Provide support to their children and make sure they feel safe
  - Educate their children about appropriate online behavior
  - Ensure that their children understand technology use is a privilege (not a right)
  - Openly discuss online behavior with their children (and monitor online activities or develop a *Technology Use Contract*, if needed)
  - Reinforce the value of treating others with respect and dignity
  - Help children build their ability to deflect, disrupt, dispute, shrug off, or otherwise ignore hurtful things that others say or post
  - Meet with school officials to create an action plan to mitigate cyberbullying
  - Work with law enforcement personnel if physical threats or a crime has occurred

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Anti-Cyberbullying Resources

The following resources can provide you with helpful anti-cyberbullying information:

- Ohio's **Center for P-20 Safety and Security** is a collaborative effort between the Ohio Department of Higher Education and the Ohio Department of Education to create safe and supportive learning environments and respond to violence and its causes in educational settings throughout Ohio. Center personnel focus on school climate, safety, security and emergency management concerns in the K-12 and higher education environments, providing guidance and direction to promote physically safe and emotionally secure environments for students, educators, and staff.
    - https://saferschools.ohio.gov/
- The **Cyberbullying Research Center** provides research findings, stories, cases, fact sheets, tips and strategies, current headlines, quizzes, a frequently updated blog, and a number of other helpful resources. It also has downloadable materials for educators, counselors, parents, law enforcement officers, and other youth-serving professionals to use and distribute as needed.
    - https://cyberbullying.org/
- **Ohio Department of Education's Anti-Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying Resources** webpage provides information and guidance to schools to assist them in developing and implementing policies and procedures related to harassment, intimidation, and bullying.
    - https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Student-Supports/Anti-Harassment-Intimidation-and-Bullying-Resource
- **PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center** actively leads social change so that bullying is no longer considered an accepted childhood rite of passage. **PACER** provides innovative resources for students, parents, educators, and others, and recognizes bullying as a serious community issue that impacts education, physical and emotional health, and the safety and well-being of students. **PACER** has a section dedicated to cyberbullying.
    - https://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/cyberbullying/
- **STOMP Out Bullying** is a national anti-bullying and cyberbullying organization for kids and teens in the U.S. Its mission is to put an end to this crisis, to keep children of all ages safe, and to create bullying prevention education in schools and online. It works to reduce and prevent bullying, cyberbullying, and other digital abuse, educates against homophobia, LGBTQ discrimination, racism and hatred, and deters violence in schools, online, and in communities across the country.
    - http://stompoutbullying.org/
- **StopBullying.Gov**'s website has a section dedicated to cyberbullying. This section include information about what cyberbullying is and the tactics individuals use to cyberbully others, ways to prevent cyberbullying, information about social media and gaming, digital awareness for parents, how to establish rules against cyberbullying, tips for teachers, how to report cyberbullying, and how to deal with 'haters'.
    - https://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/what-is-it/index.html

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