

Cyberbullying: There's No App For That

What is Cyberbullying?

- Cyberbullying is the use of technology to cause harm to other people
- Cyberbullying has the same **3 defining features** as offline bullying:
 - Power imbalance (between the person perpetrating and the individual being victimized)
 - Targeted
 - Intention to Harm
- Most students do not use the term cyberbullying, rather, they might refer to it as “drama” or “trash talk”
 - As an educator, it is therefore important to understand what cyberbullying is and use the definition of cyberbullying to unpack whether a situation that has occurred, which might be differently labelled, should be considered cyberbullying

Why Worry about Cyberbullying?

High Prevalence of Cyberbullying

- Girls are more likely to report being cyber-victimized than boys. For example, 16% of girls in grade 10 and 9% of boys in grade 10 report being cyber-victimized. With increasing grade, more boys report cyber-bullying others than girls. For example, 9% of boys and 5% of girls report cyber-bullying others in grade 10.
- What contributes to cyberbullying being so prevalent?
 - The cyberworld has **fewer social cues** (e.g., body language, facial expressions, or voice inflections) and lacks context both of which are critical in appropriately understanding a situation
 - Individuals tend to be more **rapid and disinhibited** in online responses compared to offline
 - Therefore, individuals are more likely to misinterpret situations in the cyberworld as spiteful, and respond in impulsive, disinhibited ways such as cyberbullying

Serious Negative Impact of Cyberbullying

- The negative impact of cyberbullying on students is over and above those of offline bullying
 - Students who are victims of cyberbullying are at higher risk for symptoms of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance-use, & school avoidance
 - Students who perpetrate cyberbullying are at higher risk for poor academic performance, aggression and school avoidance
- What contributes to the negative impacts being so significant?
 - The following features of the cyberworld contribute to why the negative impact of cyberbullying is so significant:
 - Permanence
 - 24/7 accessibility
 - Unlimited audience
 - Perceived anonymity



Why Do Educators Need to Think about Cyberbullying?

- Teachers are mandated to address cyberbullying
- Teachers have an incredible capacity to reduce rates of cyberbullying through:
 - **Peer support** – educators can help build the relationships in classrooms
 - **Classroom Management** – classrooms that have equity and are collaborative, are less likely to have high victimization rates
 - **School Safety and Climate** – schools where children report feeling safe and that have rules that are consistently reinforced are less likely to have high victimization rates
 - **Policies** – Schools that have policies that explicitly talk about bullying and cyberbullying as well as healthy relationships are less likely to have high rates of victimization
 - **Staff Education** – the more school staff are educated about bullying and cyberbullying, the lower the rates of victimization

What Can Educators Do About Cyberbullying

1. Create environments where students feel safe disclosing
 - Many students do not disclose cyberbullying to school staff and instead only tell their peers, but peers don't have the knowledge or skills to address cyberbullying
 - Educators can help students feel comfortable disclosing and prevent them from feeling re-traumatized by:
 - Believing the student
 - Listening to their story
 - Refraining from judging or blaming the student
 - Responding to their disclosure and intervening
 - Being transparent with how you are going to help and what the process will be
2. Help students build relationships
 - Help students develop the skills they need to establish healthy relationships including communication skills, problem solving skills, self-regulation skills, critical thinking skills
 - Facilitate relationships in the classroom through recognizing the social dynamics of the class (e.g., who is isolated) and using social architecture (e.g., assigning seating, groups, partners etc.)
3. Teach students digital literacy skills
 - Help students recognize both the benefits and risks of technology
 - Help students develop skills for navigating their cyber world
4. Recognize and identify cyberbullying
 - Know what cyberbullying is and how youth interpret it
5. Educate students about cyberbullying
 - Help students understand what cyberbullying is
 - Build empathy in students by teaching them about the negative impacts of cyberbullying
6. Intervene in cyberbullying
 - When cyberbullying occurs, make sure that you are educated about how to intervene
 - Identify what supports you have at your school to aid you in intervening (e.g., administration support) and what supports are available for the student (e.g., counselor)