# Cyberbullying in Schools:
## Invisible Bullying with Visible Effects

**Social Media Hysteria**
Technology has made its mark on both children and adolescents. According to current research, 90% of youth ages 12-17 are active on computers, 50% of youth ages 12-17 have personal computer accounts, and media usage has increased by 2.25 hours for children and adolescents ages 8 through 18 since the last five years[1, 2.] Due to the rise in use of technology, cyberbullying has become an increased concern due to inappropriate messages and images capable of being sent to others within a matter of seconds.

**What is Cyberbullying?**
Cyberbullying is using electronic forms of communication by an individual or group to repeatedly send or post information about a person or group that is considered cruel, vulgar, threatening, embarrassing, harassing, frightening, or harmful[3,4,].

Cyberbullying is a specific form of bullying that is intentional, repeated, and involves a power differential [5, 6]. Additionally, cyberbullying can be direct or indirect. Direct cyberbullying are messages that are sent by the perpetrator or perpetrators to the victim. Indirect cyberbullyingis when the perpetrator persuades others to send or post messages about the victim.

**Prevalence**
Research indicates that cyberbullying has the highest rate of occurrences in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades[7]. However, the literature gives inconsistent results regarding the prevalence of cyberbullying among boys versus girls[8]. Some research indicates that boys are more likely to be both cyberbullies and victims, whereas other research indicates that girls are usually instigators and victims of cyberbullying[3].

**Types of Cyberbullying[9]**
- Flaming- Sending an angry, rude or inappropriate message privately or to an online group
- Harassment- Repeatedly sending what one would consider offensive messages
- Denigration- Sending or posting false information about someone
- Cyberstalking- Repeatedly sending intimidating messages
- Masquerading- Pretending to be someone else when sending inappropriate messages
- Trickery- Using tricks to send embarrassing information
- Exclusion- Using messages or performing actions to intentionally exclude a person (i.e., blocking)

**Where Does Cyberbullying Occur?**
Cyberbullying often occurs outside of school; in the home and community settings. Usually, the perpetrator(s) will use technological devices such as emails, cell phones, computers, and personal handheld devices to target the victim. Unfortunately, these devices are usually out of view of adults and can make it difficult to identify who started the inappropriate messages. Thus, the perpetrators believe that cyberbullying is anonymous and that they are immune to the consequences of their actions[3].

**Negative Effects**
The negative effects of cyberbullying mirror outcomes observed in traditional bullying. Victims of cyberbullying present a lower self-esteem and high levels of insecurity[10]. They may also develop eating disorders and chronic illnesses[11, 12]. In the most extreme and perpetual cases, victims of cyberbullying might resort to suicide [13,14]. Individuals that both bully and are victims of cyberbullying display more depressive symptoms and problem behaviors. Bullies are more likely to experience antisocial behaviors in adult life[15].

## Interventions

Although cyberbullying may not always occur at school, depending on state laws school administrators might have the right to extend school discipline consequences of bullying to perpetrators who exhibit cyberbullyig if the cyberbullying presents a "hostile learning environment"[16] for victims. However, additional research is needed to determine the extent to which school's have legal jurisdiction for addressing behavior conducted outside of school property.

Many organizations have created curricula that are specific to cyberbullying to be used as supplemental aids with school wide bullying programs. Such curriculum packages include:

- iSAFE Internet Safety Program[17]
- Cyber Bullying: A Prevention Curriculum[18]
- Sticks and Stones: Cyberbullying[19]
- Let's Fight It Together: What We All Can Do to Prevent Cyberbullying[20]
- National Association of School Psychology Cybersmart[21]

Additionally, the Anti-Defamation League has created workshops and online lesson plans for parents and school staff to learn more about ways to prevent cyberbullying[22].

In order to prevent and reduce cyberbullying at home, parents are encouraged to develop a Family Online Agreement that clearly identifies appropriate online behaviors. The Family Online Agreement can also identify procedures for what to do if the child is a victim of cyberbullying[23].

Parents also have the option to periodically visit major search engines (i.e., Google and Yahoo) in order to view the amount of their child's personal information on the internet. The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act give parents the right to requests that search engines delete inappropriate pictures or messages of their children[23].

Children and youth can also take proactive measures to prevent cyberbullying. They can block emails, texts, or instant messages from the perpetrator. However, if children are victimized, children and youth are encouraged to not retaliate, but instead save the data and report the abuse[23].

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