

21ST CENTURY BULLYING, Crueler Than Ever

Bullying is a heart-breaking problem. It is defined as aggressive behavior that is persistent, intentional, and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Bullying includes everything from being threatened or physically assaulted to being called derogatory names or being ostracized.

Children and teens who are bullied were once seen as the victims of harmless pranks. Bullying was called a “rite of passage.” Parents told victims to take the Biblical advice to “turn the other cheek” in the belief that if their child didn’t react, the perpetrator would derive no satisfaction from his teasing and go away. Studies over the last few decades, however, have documented the damage of bullying to the self-esteem of children and the other scholastic and mental health issues bullying may cause. Bullying is now seen as a serious problem by parents, educators, medical and mental health professionals, and scholars.

Now, bullying has followed teens online. Cyberbullying is a modern twist on traditional bullying. Cyberbullying is defined as use of the Internet, cell phones, or other devices to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person. Cyberbullying includes such things as sending malicious emails, spreading rumors or threats, and posting embarrassing or intimate photos of a person—sometimes altered—without their permission. Frequently, the audience is enormous. And what lives in cyberspace can never be fully erased.

One 2008 study by Sameer Hinduja and Justin Patchin, *Cyberbullying: An Exploratory Analysis of Factors Related to Offending and Victimization*, shows that children need to be educated about bullying at an early age, because traditional bullying is linked to cyberbullying. The two researchers found that youth who experience a range of problems, including being bullied the traditional way, are often more likely to be cyberbullied—or to *cyberbully*—others. Specifically, they found that those “who reported recent school problems, assaultive behaviors, or substance abuse were more likely than their counterparts to experience cyberbullying, both as an *offender* and a *victim*.”

The consequences of being either a victim or perpetrator of bullying are severe. Victims have suffered life-long depression and even committed suicide. And, according to one study, 60 percent of those who were bullies had committed one criminal act by the time they were 24. Clearly, early intervention is a must for both victims and bullies.

For more information on bullying and cyberbullying go to NCPC’s websites, www.ncpc.org or www.mcgruff.org; Stop Bullying Now, www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov; www.wiredsafety.com; and www.connectsafely.org.

