



Prevention of Cyber/Gaming Bullying in Scouting

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intensive and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Usually it is repeated over time. Traditionally, bullying has involved actions such as hitting or punching, teasing or name calling (verbal bullying), intimidation through gestures, and social exclusion.

In recent years, technology has given rise to a new form of bullying among children and youth referred to as *cyber/gaming bullying*. Cyber/gaming bullying is also referred to as “online social cruelty,” “electronic bullying,” “trolling,” “cyberaping,” “flaming,” or “formspringers.”

Cyberbullying is just what it sounds like—using internet technology such as instant messaging (IM), texting, social network sites (such as Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Pinterest, Instagram, etc.), or gaming systems for the purpose of teasing, humiliating, harassing, threatening, or coercing another person, herein referred to as a “target.” It may mean text messages sent at all times of day or night, with degrading comments about someone or fictitious posts.

Cyberbullying can have devastating effects on the victim or target, whether a cyberbully acts alone or with others watching, monitoring, or witnessing the attack. The target may lose sleep, lose desire to participate in family and social activities, obsess over what is going to be posted next, become depressed, become angry, avoid school or social activities, and have suicidal thoughts. In extreme circumstances, there have been incidences where cyberbullying has led to teen suicide.

Common forms of cyberbullying include:

- Flaming or trolling—the sending or posting of hostile messages intended to “inflame” the emotions of others
- Happy slapping—recording someone being harassed or bullied in a way that usually involves physical abuse, then posting the video online for public viewing
- Identify theft/impersonation—stealing someone’s password and/or hijacking their online account to send or post incriminating or humiliating pictures, videos, or information
- Photoshopping—doctoring digital images so that the main subject is placed in a compromising, embarrassing position or situation
- Physical threats—sending messages that involve threats to a person’s physical safety
- Rumor-spreading or shaming—spreading gossip through email, text messaging, or social network sites
- Trash-talking—cruel, vulgar language or personal attacks

Signs your child may be a victim of cyber/gaming bullying include:

- Avoids computer, cell phone, and other technological devices or appears stressed when receiving an email, instant message, or text
- Withdraws from family and friends or acts reluctant to attend school or social events
- Avoids conversations about computer use
- Exhibits signs of low self-esteem, including depression and/or fear
- Has declining grades
- Has poor eating or sleeping habits
- Acts secretive when online

If your child or Scout is being cyber/gaming bullied:

- Strongly encourage your child not to respond to the cyber/gaming bullying.
- Do not erase the messages or pictures. Take screenshots and save them as evidence.
- Try to identify the individual doing the cyberbullying, even if the cyberbully is anonymous, i.e., using a fake name or someone else’s identity. There may be a way to track them

FACT SHEET



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through your internet service provider (ISP). If the cyber/gaming bullying is criminal, or if you suspect that it may be, contact the police and ask them to do the tracking for you. Areas that fall under law enforcement or police jurisdiction include threats of violence, extortion, obscene or harassing phone calls or text messages, harassment via stalking or hate crimes, child pornography, sexual exploitation, taking a photo image of someone in a place where he or she would expect privacy. If not sure, call the Cyber Tip Hotline: 1-800-843-5678.

As parents, you should ask your child:

- Has anyone ever been mean to you online and how did you handle it or respond?
- Have you ever been mean to anyone else on line, and why?
- Is it OK to forward a text message making fun of someone? Why?/Why not?
- Do you know your school's policy on bullying and cyberbullying?
- Which teacher or Scout leader would you talk to if you were being bullied?

What parents can do to prevent and address cyber/gaming bullying:

Adults may not always be present in the online environment of their children and youth; therefore, it is extremely important that a parent or caring adult play close attention to cyberbullying and the activities of the children and youth when using these newer technologies.

Suggestions for Scouters and parents dealing with cyberbullying:

- Review the Boy Scouts of America online safety policies and implement them.
- Make an agreement with youth to establish clear rules for internet usage.
- Talk regularly with youth about online activities that they may be involved in.
- Talk specifically about cyberbullying and encourage youth to tell immediately if they are victims of cyberbullying, cyber stalking, or any other illegal or troublesome online behavior.
- Explain that you will not take away their technology if they confide in you about the problem they are having.
- Evaluate the StopBullying.gov Webisode or NetSmartz® online safety episode for educational materials provided to use.
- Encourage your child to tell you if someone he or she is aware of – whether a friend or other family member – is being cyber/gaming bullied.
- Explain that cyberbullying is harmful and unacceptable behavior.
- Outline clearly your expectations for responsible online behavior and make it clear that there will be consequences for inappropriate behavior.
- Explain that treating others well online may also protect them from being harassed or cyberbullied.
- Although parents must respect the privacy of children and youth, concerns for a child's safety supersede these privacy concerns.
- Tell your child that as a responsible parent, you may review his or her online communications if you think there is a reason for concern.
- Consider installing parental control filtering software and/or monitoring programs, but do not rely solely upon these child safety measures.

Resources:

Hinduja, Sameer, PhD
Justin W. Patchkin, PhD - Cyberbullying Research Center
NetSmartz® Workshop, online fact sheet
StopBullying.gov fact sheets

You can find the contact information for your local council Scout executive at www.scouting.org/training/youth-protection.