

Cyberbullying: What it is and how you can stop it



What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying (also called social cruelty or electronic bullying) is defined as “being cruel to others by sending or posting harmful material using the Internet, cell phone or other digital technology.”¹

Cyberbullying can take many forms, including:

- **Flaming** – online verbal attacks or fights via electronic messages (e.g., in chat rooms) and using hostile or vulgar language
- **Harassment** – repeated messages of an offensive or derogatory nature directed to a target
- **Intimidation / Cyberstalking** – repeated messages of an intimidating character that make a person feel afraid for his or her physical safety
- **Denigration / Humiliation** – online “put-downs” or “dissing,” including sending or posting hurtful gossip or rumors to embarrass the target
- **Impersonation** – using someone’s e-mail account or other online accounts/profiles to send out messages, supposedly from the account holder, that reflect badly on that person and may cause trouble, shame, or embarrassment
- **Outing and Trickery** – disclosure of someone’s private information online, sending or posting embarrassing images, or deceptions leading another person to reveal personal details about him or herself
- **Exclusion** – deliberately keeping someone out of an online group such as a buddy list or game.²

People can cyberbully each other through:

- emails
- instant messaging (IM)
- text or digital imaging messages sent on cell phones
- web pages or blogs
- chat rooms or discussion groups
- Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and other information communication technologies.³

With cyberbullying, the imbalance of power happens because an individual is able to instantly share negative comments or photographs with a multitude of people via email, instant messaging, text messaging, and video or through website posts. The victim has no defense, and, in some cases, may not know that he or she has been targeted.⁴

¹ www.cyberbully.org, website of the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use
² Parker-Roerden, Laura and David Rudewick. *Direct from the Field: A Guide to Bullying Prevention*. (Mass. Executive Office of Health & Human Services), www.mass.gov
³ www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov, website of the U. S. Dept. of Health & Human Services | Health Resources & Services Administration
⁴ D’Antona, Ed.D., Robin. *A word about cyberbullying*.

bostonpublicschools.org/antibullying

Anti-bullying Hotline:

☎ 617-534-5050

What can I do if I am the target of cyberbullying or know someone who is being cyberbullied?

- Don’t retaliate.
- Don’t reply to offensive or threatening email, voice mail, and text messages – but DO keep a record of offensive content.
- Report the incident to a trusted adult, such as a relative, teacher, the student support team, guidance counselor, school police officer, administrator, principal, or headmaster.
- Report or flag violations to the site owners.
- Call the **City of Boston Anti-bullying Hotline**, 617-534-5050.
- Don’t be a bystander – if someone you know is being bullied, tell a trusted adult or call the Anti-bullying Hotline.

What steps can I take to protect myself from cyberbullying?

- Don’t share personal information online, such as name, address, phone number, date of birth, gender, Social Security number, photos, or passwords.
- Restrict access to your personal social media pages, since photos and information can be taken from profiles and used without permission.
- If you receive offensive text or voice mail messages, contact your mobile phone service provider and have the number blocked from your phone.

Tips to protect your privacy on Facebook:

- Facebook allows you to control who can see your profile and who can post to your Wall, who can contact you on Facebook and see your contact information and email, who can see your search results on Facebook and in search engines, and who can interact with you on Facebook. On your Facebook home page, click ACCOUNT in the upper right corner of the screen, then PRIVACY SETTINGS.
- **If someone is harassing you on Facebook:** Report and Block them. Use the Report/Block button (bottom of screen). To report a person for cyberbullying or abuse, you must first remove them from your Friends list. Users are not notified when they are blocked, and all reports are kept confidential.⁵
- For more information, visit <http://www.facebook.com/help/?safety>

Don’t be a cyberbully!

- Do not post derogatory things about others online. Do not post pictures of people online without their permission. Doing these things can get you into legal trouble.
- Think about what you say. If you are saying things online that can hurt other people, stop yourself. Even if you think the conversation is private, it could be copied and distributed online or by email to anyone.⁶

⁵ Englander, Elizabeth K. *Avoiding and Responding to Problems on Facebook*. www.MARCcenter.org, website of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center at Bridgewater State College
⁶ www.bpscybersafety.org, website of Boston Public Schools Cyber Safety Campaign.