

A PEATC

Do You Know....



Fact Sheet for Virginia's Parents Cyberbullying

What is Cyberbullying?

The *Cyberbullying Research Center* defines cyberbullying as: **“willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronics.”**

- The behavior must be deliberate, not accidental.
- The bullying reflects a pattern of behavior, not a single incident.
- The target of the bullying must perceive that harm was inflicted.

The *PACER National Bullying Prevention Center* defines it as: **“the use of technology to intentionally harass, hurt, embarrass, humiliate, or intimidate another person.”**

Cyberbullying can take place **anywhere that your child is on-line**, and sites keep expanding (Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter, Facebook, etc.). Cyberbullying can take place through email, text, online video games, YouTube, and virtual reality (See PEATC Handout on *15 Apps of Which Parents Should be Aware*). It is critical that as parents, you know where your children are spending their time when they are on their phone, computer, tablet, etc.

Why is Cyberbullying Harmful?

Just like traditional bullying, **youth who are cyberbullied report being sad, depressed, angry, and frustrated.** The *Cyberbullying Research Center* notes that students say that they feel sick and worthless and are often afraid and/or embarrassed to go to school. There are documented instances of cyberbullied youth taking their own lives.

Cyberbullying can be worse than traditional bullying because the victim may not know who is targeting them. The bully can often hide his/her identity and the actions can go viral, reaching countless other people who may then choose to participate without even knowing the target. The bully may share personal or private information about the target, post rumors, threaten, post a harmful picture, pretend to be someone they are not, create a hurtful webpage about their target and more.

Cyberbullying can be more menacing than traditional bullying and can be harder to stop. Once information is on the internet, it can be very difficult to remove. Studies have found that **children with disabilities such as learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, and autism spectrum disorders are more likely to be bullied than their peers without disabilities** and are often seen as an easy target.

Resources on Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying Research Center
Cyberbullying: Identification, Prevention and Response
www.cyberbullying.org

<https://cyberbullying.org/Cyberbullying-Identification-Prevention-Response-2019.pdf>

Pacer National Bullying Prevention Center

<https://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/cyberbullying/>

RethinkEd

Cyberbullying and Special Needs Children

<https://www.rethinked.com/blog/blog/2017/11/13/cyberbullying-special-needs-children/>



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What Can Parents Do?

It is impossible to “police” your child’s online activities 24/7; but it’s important to **keep open lines of communication**. You should talk to your child about cyberbullying as soon as he begins using technology. While there are **apps and programs that allow you to track online activities**, your child may consider this an invasion of privacy that impedes trust and the parent/child relationship. Although difficult, especially with teenagers, it is important to **create a safe environment** in which your child knows that he can talk with you about what is happening at any time. And, of course, you can set your own limits to their online activities.

If your child is being cyberbullied (note that girls are more likely than boys to be cyberbullied), **you may see the following signs:** depression, anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem, headaches, stomach aches, fatigue, changed eating habits, avoiding school, lower grades, poor concentration, thoughts or plans of suicide. If you find out that your child is being cyberbullied, be sure you let him/her know he/she is safe and **work together to come up with a solution** so that you don’t make the situation worse. **Keep records and copies of content such as text messages and screenshots** in case you need to provide evidence to the school or to law enforcement.

The *PACER Center* website provides the following tips for parents, among other valuable resources and advice:

- Remind children and youth that **they never really know who is on the other end of online communication** and should be cautious and not do or say anything online that they wouldn’t do or say in person or tell a stranger.
- Advise them to **never share their email or social media account passwords** with anyone, even their best friend. That friend may share it with others, or the friendship may end, and their private messages could become public.
- Help them determine **what is appropriate to share online**. This can include avoiding sharing personal photos or data (such as physical descriptions, phone numbers, or addresses).

Signs Your Child is

Cyberbullied:

- unexpectedly stops using their device(s)
- appears nervous or jumpy when using device(s)
- appears uneasy about being at school or outside
- appears to be angry, depressed, or frustrated after texting, chatting, using social media, or gaming
- becomes abnormally withdrawn
- avoids discussions about their activities online

Signs of BEING the Cyberbully

- quickly switches screens or hides their device
- uses their device(s) at all hours of the night
- gets unusually upset if they can’t use device(s)
- avoids discussions about what they are doing online
- seems to be using multiple online accounts, or an account that is not their own

In general, if a child acts in ways that are inconsistent with their usual behavior when using these devices, **find out why.**

(Cyberbullying Research Center)

PEATC’s mission focuses on building positive futures for Virginia’s children by working collaboratively with families, schools and communities to improve opportunities for excellence in education and success in school and community life.

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