Cyber-Bullying Is Worse than Physical Bullying

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"Although [cyber-bullying] is less physical than traditional forms of bullying, it can have more devastating and longer-lasting effects."

In the following viewpoint, Scott Meech discusses the rise of cyber-bullying, schoolchildren's use of the Internet or cell phones to intimidate their peers. Meech claims that cyber-bullying is widespread in America. He also asserts that this form of harassment is worse than physical bullying because it subjects the victim to humiliation from a large audience, since embarrassing pictures or taunts are typically spread throughout a peer group. Furthermore, Meech states that victims have no safe haven from cyber-bullying because it reaches into homes and invades the technologies most children now depend upon for communication. Scott Meech is a computer and technology teacher at the Plano Middle School in Illinois.

As you read, consider the following questions:

1. According to the author, how do Paris and Robert Strom define cyber-bullying? How does Meech wish to amend their definition?
2. Why is cyber-bullying a difficult problem for authorities to handle, in Meech's view?
3. What two pieces of advice does Meech give to protect oneself from cyber-bullying?

To most teachers, the general stereotype of a bully is an over-sized male student who uses verbal and/or physical abuse to torment the smaller or weaker child. This stereotype is perpetuated throughout pop culture.

But the Internet has changed that, as it has changed so much else. Now there is "Cyber Bullying," and although it is less physical than traditional forms of bullying, it can have more devastating and longer-lasting effects. It is rapidly becoming a major problem. Now, a small physically weak child can be as much of a bully as the big brute but with more impact. Educators definitely need to understand how powerful and dangerous this new type of bullying has become as it has greatly impacted the classroom.

[Education professors] Paris and Robert Strom define cyber bullying as harassment using an electronic medium (e-mail, chat rooms, cell phones, instant messaging, and online voting booths) to threaten or harm others. This author believes that the definition should also include any form of information posted on the Internet, as in blogs, forums, etc. This latter form of cyber bullying involves gossip, humiliation, and threats.

Many Children Are Victims

The statistics are shocking. In the year 2000 a University of New Hampshire study found that one out of every 17, or 6 percent of kids in the United States, had been threatened or harassed online. But in March of 2006, statistics showed that 75 to 80 percent of 12 to 14 year olds had been cyber bullied. Furthermore, 20 percent of kids under 18 have received a sexual solicitation. So cyber bullying is clearly on the rise, and it affects both genders. An American Educational Research Association study [from 2006] shows that female bullies preferred the use of text messaging harassment versus face-to-face bullying by 2 to 1.
Cyber bullying is a very difficult form of bullying to prevent and to police. A major difference between cyber bullying and traditional bullying is the ability to bully without a face-to-face confrontation. Kids become emboldened by the false feeling of being anonymous and they say things they might not have said in person. Unfortunately, identifying a cyber bully isn't as easy as identifying the traditional big bad bully.

Authorities have greater difficulty in tracking down the bully because of problems in identification. Students are too often lax in their security with usernames and passwords so messages can be falsely written by individuals and misrepresented.

No Refuge from Harassment

The long-term impact of cyber bullying is greater than with traditional bullying. Digital images, cell phones, and other electronic means can greatly increase the speed in which the bully's messages can spread. Strom and Strom write, "Harmful messages intended to undermine the reputation of a victim can be far more damaging than face-to-face altercations. Instead of remaining a private matter or event known by only a small group, text or photographs can be communicated to a large audience in a short time."

Perhaps the greatest long-term effect is the loss of the home as a safe-zone. Traditional bullying usually ended when a person was home, safe with his or her family. Cyber bullying enters into the home and is with the students at all times. As [USA Today reporter] Greg Toppo writes, "Vulnerable children have virtually no refuge from harassment. It's a non-stop type of harassment and it creates a sense of helplessness." Bullies use this additional terror to traumatize their victims even more.

Our youth have grown up with technology; to them it is commonplace and part of their everyday life. Taking technology away from kids to protect them is not the answer, as they have integrated its use to such an extent that it would now begin to isolate them within their peer circles. Besides, the technology in itself is not bad; it is the manner in which it is used.

Educating Children About Cyber-Bullying

Students need to be educated on how to deal with cyber bullying as much as learning the traditional issues of drugs, sex, and nutrition. There are additional strategies that should be employed when dealing with cyber bullying. Never respond to a cyber bully. This just provides fodder and they now know that have actually made official contact. Protect your personal information with technology and change your online information including password and screen names on a regular basis.

Technology is changing the world in many ways. However, new negative uses of it have increased as well. Cyber bullying is on the rise and it is very serious.

Further Readings

Books


Roger Simpson Covering Violence: A Guide to Ethical Reporting About Victims & Trauma. New York:


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