

Cyberbullying: A Digital Epidemic

Although bullying is nothing new, today's bullies have the tool of technology at their fingertips, which gives them an expanded reach and the potential to do more damage than ever before. This modern form of bullying—or cyberbullying—is, quite simply, bullying with the use of digital technologies.

According to [StopBullying.gov](https://www.stopbullying.gov), a website managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, **the most common places cyberbullying occurs** are email, social media, text messaging, instant/direct messaging, online gaming communities, online forums, chats rooms, and message boards.

What does cyberbullying look like?

So, what types of behaviors qualify as cyberbullying? Essentially, **cyberbullies exhibit a pattern of repeated behavior aimed at scaring, angering, or shaming those who are targeted**. Some examples of cyberbullying behaviors are:

- Sending offensive, hurtful, harassing messages or threats
- Publicly disclosing someone's intimate personal information
- Impersonating someone and sending damaging messages to others on their behalf
- Taking photos without someone's knowledge and posting the photos online or sending them via email or phone
- Taking photos of someone with their knowledge but posting the photos without the person's consent

Cyberbullying creates unique concerns because it can be:

- **Persistent**—digital devices offer the ability to immediately and continuously communicate 24 hours a day, making it hard for those experiencing cyberbullying to find relief
- **Permanent**—information communicated electronically can be permanent and public if not reported and removed; negative online reputation can impact multiple areas of life, including college admissions and employment
- **Hard to Notice**—cyberbullying is harder to recognize because teachers and parents may not overhear it or see it happening

But cyberbullying just applies to kids, right?

Because bullying typically has a higher occurrence in younger people, adults tend to not think about cyberbullying much, unless they have children. However, with our increased use of electronic communication like Zoom and Google video meetings, social media livestreaming, and shared cloud drive documents, even adults are at a higher risk than ever before. Additionally, there is a commonly overlooked but distinct intersection between cybersecurity and cyberbullying that is important to understand. When we closely examine hackers' tactics for obtaining money or information, the overlap with cyberbullying tactics is quite clear. Likewise, cyberbullies often take inspiration from hacker playbooks to harass their victims. Taking all of this into consideration, it's clear how a lack of proper cybersecurity implementation can put you at an increased risk of harm should a cyberbullying situation arise.

What can we do about cyberbullying?

Although October, as both Cybersecurity Awareness Month and Cyberbullying Prevention Month, is typically when cyberbullying is discussed on a national level, **cyberbullying awareness and prevention are truly a year-round effort**. In fact, the [Cybersmile Foundation](https://www.cybersmile.org)—a nonprofit committed to building a safer, more positive digital community—has established the **3rd Friday in June as Stop Cyberbullying Day**.

[Stop Cyberbullying Day](https://www.stopbullying.gov) is an international annual event that brings together internet users from around the world to commit to building a kinder, more inclusive internet. Now that's something we can get behind!

Cyberbullying Resources:

- [StopBullying.gov](https://www.stopbullying.gov)—learn how to identify cyberbullying, find resources on state laws and policies, and get tips for preventing and responding to cyberbullying
- [CyberSmile.org](https://www.cybersmile.org)—stay up to date on cyberbullying news, anti-cyberbullying efforts, and Stop Cyberbullying Day
- [Cyberbullying Research Center](https://www.cyberbullyingresearchcenter.com)—find up-to-date information on a range of topics related to cyberbullying