

Dangers of ICTs

The powerful possibilities of ICTs need to be approached with caution as well. There are many predators out there who target vulnerable youngsters. Your job as a teacher is to inform your learners about the dangers and know what to do if inappropriate behaviour occurs.

Cyber bullying

The internet is an exciting space, in which adults and young people can interact, learn and create. Online communities can be as dynamic and challenging as 'real world' ones. However, just like the physical world, online interaction does carry with it certain risks. There are things that we need to know to keep ourselves and the young people we work with safe online. It is important to understand the main risks associated with internet usage for children and young people, in order to create safe communities in which young people can learn.

Many online young people, particular teenagers, are being cyberbullied. Girls are more likely to be targeted.

What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying can be defined as **'an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using mobile phones or the internet, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself'** (Smith et al., 2008, p.376). Cyber aggression involves the intention to *cause harm*, using technological tools like smartphones or the internet. This can include threats, teasing that is intended to hurt, exposing private information and pictures, and malicious gossiping or rumour spreading. Aggression becomes **bullying** when it is repeated over time.

Some types of Cyber bullying:

<i>Action</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
<i>Flaming or trolling:</i>	Sending or posting aggressive messages in order to "inflame" or upset others.
<i>Identity theft:</i>	Stealing someone's password, taking over their online accounts and posting incriminating or embarrassing information or images.
<i>Photoshopping:</i>	Falsifying pictures so that the person is humiliated or ridiculed.
<i>Physical abuse or 'happy-slapping':</i>	Recording someone being harassed, or physically or sexually abused and then posting the video on the Internet for everyone to see.
<i>Spreading rumours:</i>	Telling lies about someone online.
<i>Threats:</i>	Threatening people physically or psychologically.

Cyberbullying is hard to escape from: Cyberbullying extends the reach that bullies have. Bullying is no longer confined to school, or to other social spaces where young people get together. It now follows them home. The pervasiveness of internet technology means that young people can experience bullying anywhere, at any time.

Cyberbullying goes on... and on.....: Cyberbullying leaves a more lingering mark in young people's lives. Bullying in the physical world is more time limited. While it may go on for some time, it eventually comes to an end. You leave school. You move away. You grow up. But the nature of the internet means that cyberbullying can go on forever. Images and messages that circulate in online space have a life beyond the person who originally shared them. This is particularly the case with images. Pictures that are shared maliciously can be spread for years after the original incident, and can be seen all round the world. This is obviously very distressing for victims. But it can also have lasting consequences for aggressors too.

Bullying is usually a **power** play of some kind. It involves one person asserting their power over another. Bullying happens when the victim is less able to defend themselves than the aggressor. This might be because the bully is older, stronger, or because they have 'strength in numbers' – groups of children have ganged up to bully an isolated individual or smaller group of individuals.

Who gets involved in cyberbullying

Cyber aggression is very common. One off incidents of online aggression are experienced by about 20% of young people in a year. In contrast, repeated incidents of online aggression that could be defined as **cyberbullying** is experienced by about 5% of young people. This may not sound like a lot, but if 1 in every 20 young people are being bullied, the chances are that there are both online bullies and victims in every classroom, in every school. It is a common social problem.

Cyberbullying affects boys and girls more or less equally. While the 'mean girl' stereotype is popular, girls are only slightly more likely to engage in cyber aggression.

What are the effects of cyberbullying?

Because cyberbullying takes place in *virtual space* some adults are inclined not to take it seriously as physical bullying or offline bullying. However, research tells us that the impact of cyberbullying is at least as bad, if not worse, than more traditional forms of bullying.

Cyberbullying is associated with a number of negative outcomes that include:

Social withdrawal and social isolation

Depression

Anxiety

Aggravation of other mental health difficulties

Risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviours

Source: Gradinger, Strohmeier & Spiel. 2009; Campbell, Spears, Slee, Butler & Kift. 2012; Kowalski & Limber. 2013

Cyberbullying is a serious social problem that has far reaching social, psychological and health effects for young people.

The negative outcomes of being bullied – like becoming depressed and withdrawn – actually increase the chances of a child being bullied again (Gómez-Guadix et al., 2013), creating a vicious downward spiral for young victims.

But what about the bully?

It is important to remember too that it is not only victims who experience negative consequences. Being a bully is more common among young people who already have existing psychological issues – young people are more likely to **be bullies** if they themselves are anxious or depressed, or have other psychological challenges. This is because bullying is at least temporarily empowering for young people, it makes them feel stronger, more capable.

The impact of being a bully is severe for young people, and it is therefore important that the first line of defence against bullying in schools is not to either isolate the bully or to punish them. If that individual is involved in bullying because of difficulties in their own life, our impulse to punish them might actually make things worse rather than better.

Mediation, and social skills training, are the best responses we can offer to young people – both bullies and victims. Helping young people to find alternative problem solving strategies, and better ways of expressing anger and upset, are the best strategies for working with bullying as an issue.

Signs of bullying

There are no simple signs to look out for that tell us cyberbullying is definitely taking place. However, the following might help us to work out that something is wrong.

Changes in behaviour round technology

Stop using the internet or other online devices

Seem worried or jumpy when using devices

Don't talk about, or seem secretive about, their online activity

Turn screens off or away from you, or shutdown their laptop when you approach

Signs of distress

