

RESEARCH PAPER 2011

- CYBERBULLYING -

- to deliberately and repeatedly torment, threaten, embarrass, humiliate, pick-on someone, to break-up friendships or spread rumours or hurt



Tools of communication that earlier generations had never heard of – IPOD, IPHONE, IPAD, LAPTOPS . Great tools if used in the way they were intended. However, modern technology can be used for good or evil because of the simplicity of communicating a message. What a convenience to have a mobile phone in your pocket to ring for help in an emergency or to convey a message that you are running late or “Happy Birthday” to family member or dear friend. Or to use your PC to send an Email rather than that time consuming phone call.

However, mobile phones and Email have a darker side. Travel on public transport and you will see teenagers galore “**texting**” friend or foe. It is so much easier to be brave or a bully when you are not face to face with your opponent. To insult, spread rumours or threaten is so easy. Just a click and a message has been sent. In fact, these messages are hard to get rid of because they are forwarded instantly around networks and seen by many, rather than just a few kids at school as in a schoolyard quarrel. In a flash a teenager can feel excluded, frightened, broken hearted and worse - particularly if messages are constantly arriving. This is what **cyberbullying** is about and, unfortunately approximately 20% of teenagers, in a recent Australian Survey, admitted to having been targeted with **cyberbullying**

Teenagers can lose interest in school, develop low self-esteem and feel lost and lonely because cyber bullying can happen anywhere – at home, at school, on public transport, anywhere internet access is available at all hours of the day or night. They may feel there is no safe place and feel ashamed. Of course the ultimate rejection they feel may result in suicide or attempted suicide.

Another difficult area is sending photos – real or fake – around a network particularly to embarrass or humiliate. Once photos are on the “net” there is no stopping where they might appear. Recent cases in the Defence Forces have shown this medium at its worst with sexual explicit photos embarrassing those involved by revealing their sexually active lifestyle.

“**Sexting**” is the sending of sexually inappropriate text messages.

Teens (or anyone) should never give out their mobile phone number or Email address to strangers. This has proven to be open to use by paedophiles and others who pretend (even using false photo images) to be someone they are not. Perhaps they send a photo of a groovy looking teenager when in fact they might be 50 years old. These perverts are known to “groom” girls or boys on the internet, arrange to meet with a view to sex or some have even enticed their victims to remote places and committed murder. Emails should not be answered if there is any doubt that the person is known. Social networking sites such as “Facebook” make contact all too easy for predators to contact the unwary. A stranger is still a stranger even after many encounters on Facebook.

BE CYBER SAVVY and always listen to a young person who feels anxious or upset. If nothing obvious seems wrong, ask about Email or texting - be informed.

Check out websites such as – [Digizen](#), [\(Cyberbullying films\)](#), [The Alannah and Madeline Foundation](#), [Raising Children Network](#).