

BULLYCIDE:

THE DARK SIDE OF CYBERBULLYING



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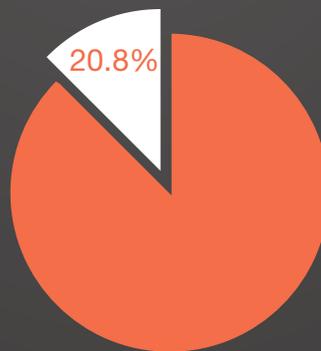
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AN INTRODUCTION TO

BULLYCIDE



20.8% of kids age 8-10 have been cyberbullied at least once in their life.

Fifty years ago, bullying was considered just a normal part of childhood. But with the advent of the Internet, bullies now have the ability to invade virtually every area of a victim's life, making it nearly impossible to ignore the bully or get an escape. And with that change has come a steady uptick in "bullycide" -- suicides related to bullying.

It is important to note that some people argue that it is hard to draw the direct correlation from bullying to suicide. But to a parent affected by a situation like this, it doesn't matter that bullying that results in suicide is statistically uncommon or not proven – what matters is that a loved one is gone, seemingly at the hands of anonymous tormentors. As Cyberbullying Research Center's Justin Patchin said, "I think it is just as important to remember that, as inappropriate as it is to assert that 'bullying causes suicide,' it is perhaps equally incorrect to say that 'bullying does not cause suicide.'"

Hannah Smith, for example, was a normal British teenage girl with two devoted parents and a bright future. Her parents were shocked to walk into her room and find her hanging, lifeless body. But when they went through her computer and phone, things made more sense. Hannah had joined Ask.fm, an anonymous website where users can post and answer questions, and her account revealed a trail of merciless bullying. This sparked an international outcry, and there are now several petitions asking to remove Ask.fm's anonymity or prohibit users under 13 from using the site. So far, though, there have been no changes to the site, and reports of bullying continue.

Sadly, Hannah isn't the only child who has been pushed to the brink by bullying. 12-year-old Rebecca Ann Sedwick leapt to her death in September of 2013 after being bullied online by at least a dozen female classmates. Her social media footprint revealed a long history of other children telling her to kill herself. The list of bullying victims goes on and on, with a few dozen children killing themselves this year alone due to Internet-based bullying. BuzzFeed reports that at least nine of those suicides were allegedly a result of one website – Ask.fm.

While suicide might seem like something reserved for severely depressed or emotionally disturbed children, it's more common than anyone would like to believe. According to the World Health Organization, a million people die every year from suicide worldwide. That equates to one death every 40 seconds. And in the United States, it's the second-leading cause of death among people between the ages of 10 and 24, also according to the WHO. Even more frightening, these numbers don't account for attempted suicides, which the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates is about 20 times more common than completed suicides.

In a time where everyone knows the dangers of bullying, suicide rates are sadly increasing rather than decreasing. In generations past, suicide rates were highest among older men, but now young people represent the largest portion of suicides. A Yale University study found that bullying victims

“160,000 children skip school every day because they fear going to school because of bullying.”

are between 200 and 900 percent more likely to commit suicide than children who have not been bullied. A British study found that bullying played a role in at least 50 percent of recent teen suicides, and 10 to 14-year-old girls may be at the highest risk of bullying-related suicide.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that 160,000 children skip school everyday because they fear going to school because of bullying, and about 30 percent of students report being either victims or bullies. These are scary numbers for any parent to consider, but suicide is a preventable tragedy, and parental involvement can greatly decrease your child's risk of suicide. Of course, you don't just need to worry about your child being a victim; given the large number of bullies, your child could also be a perpetrator, which comes with its own risks – legal trouble, chronic guilt, and serious psychological problems.

This book provides an overview of how to protect your child by monitoring her Internet use and practicing commonsense parenting. There's nothing more valuable than your child's life, so don't be afraid to intervene when you think she's in trouble. If you wait until it's too late, the costs could be much too high for anyone to have to bear.

CHAPTER ONE

THE DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES OF CYBERBULLYING



88% of social media using teens have seen someone be mean or cruel on a social media site.

Bullying-related suicide is a tragedy, but fortunately, the overwhelming majority of bullied children won't harm themselves. This doesn't mean, however, that you can let bullying go unchecked or that as long as your child is not suicidal, she's safe. Bullying affects victims, bullies, and bystanders, and ignoring even small instances of bullying allows the disease of bullying to grow like a cancer.

Effects on Victims

Unsurprisingly, bullying victims suffer the most from an environment of bullying. While it's probably unsurprising that bullying causes a dip in self-esteem, research increasingly shows that the effects of bullying can last a lifetime. Even as adults, victims of bullying continue to suffer. They're more likely to experience mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, and can suffer from a variety of psychosomatic ailments such as headaches and stomachaches. And while everyone loves the story of the bullying victim who grows into a popular, successful adult, this fantasy doesn't represent reality. Bullying victims often continue to struggle with social relationships well into adulthood, and they may struggle both academically and in their careers.

“A Yale University study found that bullying victims are between 200 and 900 percent more likely to commit suicide than children who have not been bullied.”

The more immediate consequences of bullying are equally frightening. Children who are regularly bullied can suffer from the following problems:

- Bad grades
- An increased risk of dangerous behavior such as drug use and promiscuous sex
- A decrease in self-esteem

- Suicidal thoughts – a significant portion of bullying victims have considered suicide at least once
- Fear of going to school
- Decreased social skills and difficulty with assertiveness
- Feelings of powerlessness and helplessness
- Becoming a bully themselves

Effects on Bullies

You might be surprised to learn that bullying victims aren't the only people who suffer when bullying occurs. Bullies themselves can experience a wide variety of problems. Part of this is due to the fact that many bullies were themselves bullied. In other cases, bullying is the result of inattentive parenting, childhood abuse, mental illness, or poor social skills. If your child is engaging in bullying, it's more than a sign he wants to fit in; it may be a red flag for serious problems. The consequences to bullies of their bullying behavior include:

- An increased risk of drug and alcohol abuse
- An increase risk of being arrested
- An increased risk of dropping out of school
- An increased risk of becoming an abusive romantic partner or parent
- Difficulty making friends and interacting with others
- Difficulty succeeding at school and in a career
- More likely to get into fights

Effects on Bystanders

Bullying is more than just a problem between two children. It represents a climate of violence and aggression that can affect everyone it touches. Children who witness bullying are not left unscathed by the experience. If your child reports that she's seen bullying, take her concerns seriously. Failing to do so can cause your child to experience a wide variety of problems, including:

- Feelings of guilt and shame
- Feeling powerless, helpless, or fearful
- Being tempted to join in on the bullying in an effort to fit in; bystanders may become bullies themselves.
- An increased risk of being bullied. When a bully tires of targeting one child, he might begin targeting a bystander – even if it's only an Internet bystander.
- More likely to skip school
- More likely to abuse drugs and alcohol

Bullying fundamentally alters your child's social environment. Studies have shown that schools with bullying problems, for example, have lower grades, more problems with truancy, experience a climate of fear and disrespect, and have students that report that adults are unhelpful or do not care about them. By intervening early to stop cyberbullying, you can stop this terrible plague from spreading to your child, her friends, her school, and your community.

CHAPTER TWO

BULLYCIDE AND THE LAW



The horror stories of children who die by their own hands after being bullied have sparked a national outcry. While bullying was once viewed as a childhood rite of passage, parents and political leaders increasingly recognize bullying as a form of violence. If your child is being bullied, you may have legal options available to stop your child from being targeted. But if your child is a bully, beware; your child could be prosecuted, and if you're found complicit in the bullying, you could even face legal charges.

Legal Consequences for Bullies

In 2008, 13-year-old Megan Meier committed suicide after being mercilessly bullied online. Her case gave rise to the first cyberbullying prosecution in history. Lori Drew, in conjunction with her daughter Sarah, created a fake MySpace profile for a boy named Josh, then baited Meier to fall in love with Josh. Drew subsequently engaged in online bullying of Meier, pushing Meier deeper and deeper into depression. Drew was charged under federal anti-hacking laws for violating MySpace's terms of service.

At the time, there weren't many anti-bullying laws on the book, so federal prosecutors had to make do with what they had, and Drew was ultimately acquitted. Forty-eight of 50 states currently have anti-bullying laws, and nearly as many states have law designed to prevent cyberbullying. Bullying victims can sue for damages, and in some cases can seek to have bullies prosecuted for cyberstalking or cyber-harassment.

If you're the parent of a bully, you're not safe. Cyberbullying laws have been used to prosecute parents who acted as bystanders when their children engaged in bullying. In September 2013, for example, a Mississippi girl was arrested on cyberbullying charges. Her mother was

“ BuzzFeed reports that at least nine of those suicides were allegedly a result of one website – Ask.fm. ”

charged with a misdemeanor on the grounds that she knew about the bullying but did nothing to stop it.

Even if your state doesn't prosecute parents for failing to intervene when their children are bullies, you're not home-free. You could be sued for any damages that arise from your child's bullying, and the victim can seek a restraining order against you and your child.

Using the Law to Stop Bullying

What about if your child is the bullying victim and you've run out of options? It's taking the law a while to catch up to new social norms, but parents of bullying victims are increasingly finding solace in state laws. You have several options:

RESTRAINING ORDERS

A restraining order prohibits one party from contacting another, and is relatively easy to get. You'll have to show that there's been a history of bullying and that your child either fears for her safety or that the bullying has had some other effect. The bully will be prohibited from contacting your child, and if the bully persists in making contact, he could be put in jail or held in contempt of court. A restraining order also creates a formal record of the bullying that can help you if you eventually sue or seek criminal charges.

SCHOOL-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Most states now require that schools establish specific policies designed to prevent bullying. If the bully attends school with your child, you can ask the school to intervene. A school social worker might provide mediation for the two children if the bullying is minor. But if the bullying is more severe, the aggressor could be suspended or otherwise disciplined, and might be ordered to undergo a mental health evaluation to uncover the reason she's engaging in bullying.

LAWSUITS

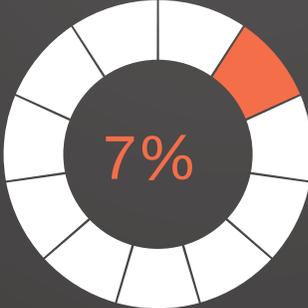
Tort law is the set of civil laws that enable people to sue when another person willfully inflicts some kind of pain or suffering. In many states, bullying is a civilly actionable offense, and you can sue the perpetrator. Even if your state doesn't specifically define bullying as a civil offense, though, you may still be able to sue if you can prove some sort of damage – such as therapist's bills or having to pay for a private school to get your child away from the bully.

A lawsuit has another hidden benefit. Sometimes cyberbullying victims don't know who the bully is because bullying takes place under an anonymous screen name. But with a lawsuit, you're able to subpoena witnesses and ask for evidence that may help you uncover the source of the bullying.

CRIMINAL CHARGES

Criminal charges are typically reserved for the most serious bullying cases that involve death threats, hacking, or months of harassment. If you haven't been able to get relief using other methods, call the police the next time your child is bullied. You can't bring criminal charges on your own, but you may be able to convince your county prosecutor to bring them. Moreover, the mere threat of criminal charges may be enough to get some bullies to stop.

STOPPING BULLYING BEFORE IT STARTS



only 7% of US parents are worried about cyberbullying, even though 33% of teenagers have been victims of cyberbullying.

Bullying is much easier to prevent than it is to stop once it has reared its ugly head. Just as your parents made sure you were home in time for curfew, it's your job to make sure your child is using the Internet in a way that endangers neither herself nor others. There's no surefire recipe that will prevent bullying, but following the strategies below will get you most of the way there.

Practice Open Communication

Open communication with your child is a critical step in preventing bullying. If your child knows that you listen to her and value her opinions, she's much more likely to come to you if she's being bullied. And if she is herself a bully, she'll be a lot more inclined to take you seriously if you have a history of substantive communication. Try the following:

- Take time to talk to your child every day, and schedule one-on-one time or a fun activity at least once a week. Going shopping, a dinner out, or even just renting a movie can increase closeness.
- Respect your child's opinions, and encourage her to tell you when she disagrees with you; mutual respect is a key to open communication.
- Share details about your life, and encourage your child to do the same. Don't judge her when you disagree with her or don't understand her.
- Set clear boundaries. Your child should know what she is and is not allowed to do online, and she should also know if and to what extent you'll be monitoring her computer activities.

Become Computer Savvy

You can't keep tabs on your child if you don't understand how the Internet works. If you're woefully technologically behind, try taking a basic computer skills class, or just spending some time on your own computer to get a feel for how things work. You need to know, at minimum, which social networks your

child uses and how frequently she uses them. Popular social networks – and common sites for bullying – include:

- Facebook, which allows users to post regular status updates, photos, videos, links, and a host of other material. Users can also comment on each other's statuses. If your child has a Facebook account, you should open one too, and require that he add you as a friend.
- “1 million people die every year from suicide worldwide, and it is the second leading cause of death between the ages of 10 and 24.”*
- Twitter, which allows users to post brief status updates and send messages to other users.
 - Instagram and other photo-sharing sites.
 - Ask.fm, which enables users to post questions and receive anonymous answers; it is far and away the most dangerous site for bullying victims.
 - Blogs and message boards, which enable users to post material anonymously. Micro-blogging site Tumblr is increasingly popular among teens and pre-teens.

Keep Tabs On Your Children

No matter how many rules you have, you can't enforce them if you don't keep up with what your children are doing online. In generations past, a child who came home with bruises was almost certainly the target of bullies. Cyberbullying, however, leaves no physical trace. uKnowKids can keep track of what your child is doing on her smartphone and social networks, and will even alert you to your child's texting habits. Setting it and forgetting it, though, is not an option.

You need to maintain an open dialogue about the Internet and set reasonable boundaries.

- Keep the family computer in a public space, such as the living room, and limit your child's private phone or computer time to an hour or less per night.
- Ask your child about how she spends her time online, and maintain the discussion by sharing observations about online behavior and trends. If you're troubled by something your child posts online, talk to her about it rather than simply demanding she take it down or keeping your knowledge a secret.
- Talk to your children about the dangers of cyberbullying, and let him know you'll always be there to help if he becomes a victim.
- Help your child feel valued. Children who commit suicide often feel worthless and unloved. Even when you're angry with your child, let him know that his life matters to you.
- Stay in touch with other parents, who can give you insight into cyber trends and what their kids are doing online.

Don't Be Afraid to Punish

Children tend to think of their electronic devices as fundamental rights. But you're the parent, and your child will not suffer any lasting damage if you take technology away for a while. If your child abuses her smartphone or computer privileges, taking the device away should be your first option. This gives you time to sort out the problem before your child has more time to get herself into trouble. Set clear rules, and let your child know that if she breaks these, her electronic devices may go the way of the dodo.

Take Bullying Seriously

All it takes is one snide comment for your child to feel like she can't rely on you. Your child needs to know that you always have time for him, and you should never dismiss his concerns about his relationships with friends. If he tells you he or another child is being bullied, don't tell him he's overly sensitive or blame him for the problem. Instead, listen attentively and ask him what would make the situation better. Then take action. You can't protect your child from everything, but if your child knows you take bullying seriously, he also knows he has a powerful person in his corner – you.

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