Cyberbullying & Gifted Children

While the online world can provide a wealth of resources and creative outlets for gifted students, it also can be ripe for a form of bullying called *cyberbullying.*

Social media and virtual communication allow students to easily take part anonymously in negative behaviors through whatever technology is at their fingertips. Cyberbullying includes the use of text messages, blogs, social media, images, or other forms of technology with the goal to intimidate another person.

A 2019 report from the Cyberbullying Research Center indicates that 24% of middle and high school students have been cyberbullied—and the negative outcomes from cyberbullying are far reaching.

Cyberbullying may be linked with low self-esteem, family problems, academic difficulties, school violence, and numerous delinquent behaviors. Targets of cyberbullying may feel depressed, sad, angry, frustrated, afraid, and embarrassed to go to school.

TYPES OF CYBERBULLYING

According to the *Educator's Guide to Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats* by Nancy E. Willard, there are eight types of cyberbullying:

Flaming. Using electronic messages to engage in online fighting. This can include insults, threats, and vulgar language.

Harassment. Continually engaging in electronic communication that is malicious, insulting, and degrading.

Denigration. Using an online platform to put down another individual or group. This can include lies, rumors, or gossip that will tarnish an individual's reputation or character.

Impersonation. Posing as someone else and posting inappropriate or hurtful messages that could cause problems for whomever he or she is impersonating.

Outing. Divulging information about someone that is secretive or not supposed to be public knowledge.

Trickery. Luring another into disclosing information that is private or disconcerting and then making it public online.

Exclusion. Intentionally and maliciously blocking an individual from being a member of a group.

Cyberstalking. Any of the above behaviors repeatedly taking place and intensifying to a point where an individual feels overtly threatened and fearful.

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TIPS FOR PARENTS

Know what technology/social media your child is using. Long gone are the days of merely using Facebook. Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Kik are popular apps. Your first step as a parent is to know what social media options your child is participating in and what kinds of material can be shared virtually with those tools. Check out parent guides to cyberbullying and social media tools at https://www.connectsafely.org/.

Talk with your child about appropriate and inappropriate uses of technology and social media. How your child portrays herself in the online world is just as important as the person she is in the real world. Be open and honest about correct and incorrect online behaviors. Model how careful everyone must be about what they post, share, and upload online. Teach them that what's posted online never truly is erased.

If you notice signs of cyberbullying—such as your child avoiding school, becoming anxious or upset when using devices, becoming withdrawn, or losing sleep—talk with your child calmly and openly.

- Listen to your child and respond carefully and rationally.
- Avoid making the situation worse by immediately reacting or calling the school.
- Get as much information as possible and from multiple perspectives.
- Make sure your child feels safe and listened to. Validate feelings and help build resilience with your children by teaching them how to deflect or ignore hurtful things posted online.
- Focus on your child's strengths and positive self-talk.
- Consider using bibliotherapy to engage your gifted child's ability to empathize with book characters who have been isolated or bullied and discuss problem-solving strategies.
- Provide support, listen to your child's concerns, and help empower your child to strengthen her resiliency.

Include your child in deciding the best way to handle the situation. Bullying often involves a sense of powerlessness. Gifted learners with perfectionism may avoid asking for help. Help your child regain dignity and control. Provide a safe environment to openly talk about what they are going through and let them know they are not alone.

TIPS FOR STUDENTS WHO FEEL CYBERBULLIED

- Understand that you are not to blame. It is not your fault.
- Do not respond to bullying behavior online. Keep a screenshot or record of the attacks and share with an adult you trust. Use humor or distract if you must respond.
- Seek help from a friend, teacher, parent, or other adult. Having someone who will listen can help you process the situation.
- Speak up for others who are being cyberbullied and, if you feel comfortable, tell them to stop it. Support the person being targeted by being a friend and listening.
- Block the person doing the cyberbullying.
- Make sure your cellphone, tablets, and computers are all password protected and never share your password, even with friends.
- Use apps like **ReThink** or **STOPit** to help stop cyberbullying.

FOR MORE INFO

Search:
National Crime Prevention Council, www.ncpc.org/resources/cyberbullying

Stop Bullying, www.stopbullying.gov

Violence Prevention Works, www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/cyber_bullying.page

Read:

MacFarlane, B., & Mina, K. (2018). Cyberbullying and the gifted: Considerations for social and emotional development. *Gifted Child Today, 41*(3), 130-135.

Moreau, E. (2019, January 9). Hottest social app trends for teens. *Lifewire.* www.lifewire.com

Patchin, J. W., & Hinduja, S. (2013). *Words wound: Delete cyberbullying and make kindness go viral.* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.

Patchin, J. W., & Hinduja, S. (2016). *Bullying today: Bullet points and best practices.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Various books on cyberbullying and cyberthreats by Nancy E. Willard

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1 Siegle, D. (2011). Facing Facebook: A guide for nonteens. *Gifted Child Today, 34*(2), 14-19.