

CYBERBULLYING: HELP AND SUPPORT



DR JEAN B. HEALEY

CYBERBULLYING: HELP AND SUPPORT

DR JEAN B. HEALEY

© 2011 – DR.JEAN B. HEALEY. © Dr. Jean Healey, All rights reserved worldwide.

No portion of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical – including fax, photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system – without the written permission of the author, except as granted under the following conditions:

- (i) A reviewer may quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in a magazine or newspaper, with written approval from the author prior to publishing.
- (ii) Opinions and statements contained in this book are the original copyright of the author, unless referenced to another.

First edition published 2011

BULLYWATCH PUBLICATIONS AND CONSULTANCY

BN21603364 ABN 39083172965

ISBN: 978-0-9808458-6-0

DISCLAIMER

This book is not intended to provide psychological or educational advice or to take the place of such advice and intervention from other professionals. Readers are advised to consult their own doctors or other qualified professionals regarding intervention for psychological or social issues related to bullying. The author shall not be held liable or responsible for any misunderstanding or misuse of the information contained in this book or for any loss, damage, or injury caused or alleged to be caused directly or indirectly by any treatment, action, or application of any information contained in this book. This information is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any actions related to bullying.

National Library of Australia Cataloguing in Publication data:

Author: Dr. Jean Healey

Title: Cyberbullying e book

Edition: 1st Edition

ISBN: 978-0-9808458-6-0

Publisher: BULLYWATCH Publications and Consultancy

Notes: includes Bibliographic references

Subjects; Bullying; Bullying- prevention; School Violence –prevention; Children –Life skills guide

Teenagers –Life skills guide

Dewey number: 302.3

This ebook is offered as a complimentary resource for visitors to the bullywatch website. It is free to download to a personal computer or other device.

Dr. Jean Healey has extensively researched many aspects of bullying. Her new book 'Childhood Bullying A Deadly Serious Matter' is available through Amazon or the bullywatch website

Register at the website for resources and information to assist in managing a range of bullying behaviours and for family support.

To request permission for reproduction or inquire about private consulting or speaking engagements please contact:

Dr. Jean B. Healey

B.Ed., B. Spec. Ed., M. Ed. Studies., Doctor of Education

Educational Consultancy and Training

Director, Bullywatch Publications and Consultancy

(www.bullywatch.com.au)

Photographs by J.W. Toplis

Model: Ms Isabella Harvey

CYBERBULLYING:

HELP AND SUPPORT

DR JEAN B. HEALEY

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of technology as the major communication tool for young people in society and education today has introduced a further dimension for abuse. There is no limit to the access and opportunity provided by web-based social networks, chat rooms, email and personal profiles for abusive peers and predatory individuals to engage in bullying. Research and initiatives by communication and media authorities as well as education and other government organisations provide a sound platform for the management of bullying on the internet. However, responsibility for exposure, the sharing of private information and pictures rests with the user of the internet and a major focus of intervention in this arena needs to be on the education of young people in safe and responsible usage. Sharing private pictures and information with others whose access to the internet enables them to share even more broadly given particular circumstances, means that young people can be exposed by their 'friends' without further reference. Young people are fully competent in the use of cyber-networking, but may not be 'cyber-smart' unless they have the advantage of education to protect them online.

Young people have adopted social networking by 'proxy' as a replacement or supplement to social networking in person. To adults, teachers, parents and the community this is something of a concern. It was recently suggested that soon we will no longer need the local 'park' for young people to hang out together-they can now do it without leaving their home or bedroom and the company of their computer. Alarm bells must be sounded if this is the extent of social interaction for a young person, but as a means of meeting and communicating with others of similar age and interests, it may complement the real world of relationships. Some researchers express concern for the social development of young people engaged in isolating internet usage, and suggest the activity may exacerbate anti-social behaviours.

Lenhart (2007), states that in the USA, 73% of young people 12–17 used internet social networking sites in 2009 and this represents an increase from 58% in 2007. They also state that 82% of young people 14–17 and 55% of younger adolescents have a social networking profile page. Australia is a global leader in the use of SMS text messaging and mobile phones are the most common medium used here for cyber-bullying. (Dooley, Cross, Hearn and Treyvaud, 2009)

In recent years some government and education authority efforts have been undertaken to educate young networkers about their privacy and security online. Hinduja and Patchin (2010) discovered that *MySpace* users are increasingly likely to choose to restrict access to their profiles by making them 'private'. In 2006, 39% did so while their research showed that in 2009, 85% used this facility. However their research also discovered that a significant number of users include their full name and sometimes their home city and /or school in their profiles making them very easy to locate for predatory users. This indicates a need to consider safety online and the means by which these participants can be assisted to ensure their safety is not compromised while they communicate.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority provide guides for students on 'Socialising on the Internet' and 'Internet Safety'. These free brochures make it clear that parental responsibility is paramount and their vigilance in observing their children's internet usage is a key factor in protection from online abuse and predators. It is concerning, however that meeting new acquaintances online and then arranging real-life social meetings is not discouraged rather, it is suggested such meeting be planned and organised with a 'parent'. It would seem that such an experience would be best deferred until the young person is mature enough to make judgments about the individual requesting the meeting.

These brochures offer advice for parents of children and young people regarding their usage and include these general hints and tips:

- spend time online
- help your kids use the internet as an effective research tool
- teach your children 'netiquette'
- set rules (for usage)

They also suggest parents teach children:

- that not all internet information is reliable
- there are ways to deal with upsetting or disturbing content and
- to be aware of strangers and their real identity.

(ACMA, Cybersmart Guide)

Numerous websites are now available to offer support and guidance for parents and users in relation to safety online. The most comprehensive and valuable list of such sites is contained in the appendices of the report by Dooley et al (2009). These sites advise what protective programs are available and how to install and use them. In the end it is a shared responsibility and the avoidance of abuse relies on the resilient and proactive measures taken by users, by parents and school personnel to ensure that online experiences are valuable and productive rather than destructive.

DEFINITIONS

Cyber-bullying is defined by Hinduja and Patchin (2010) as:

'wilful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones (mobiles) and other electronic devices'

They add further that cyber-bullying refers to:

'incidents where adolescents use technology,....to harass, threaten , humiliate or otherwise hassle peers'.

(Dooley,et al) (2009) simply refer to cyber-bullying with reference to traditional definitions and add that it constitutes,

'bullying in an electronic medium or via technology'

The similarity to other forms of peer abuse is obvious, however the major defining feature is the involvement of technology to frighten and abuse others. Other key components of the accepted definitions of bullying or peer abuse, are probably also relevant to cyber-bullying. These include

intentional harm, repetition and power differences. Some analysts however, question this and omit reference to power differences in the definition:

‘the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated and hostile behaviour by an individual or group, intended to harm another’

This may indicate that the power differential is seen as negligible when the abuse is distant and impersonal. Also the social power status of the abuser may be less than that of the victim, but the anonymity and reach of the technology as a weapon for abuse invests the socially less-powerful individual with a greater degree of control and power than they usually receive.

Further the criteria for ‘repeated’ abuse changes with the internet environment. If the image or message is posted only once, but the recipients and viewers are numerous, is this the same as repeated bullying? Kowalski, Limber & Agaston (2007) note that the methodologies are varied and therefore impact may differ. Young people can use their personal profiles to vilify others, list people they don’t like and denigrate others; they can assume virtual personalities or use online game and chat rooms to spread rumours, exclude individuals and disseminate abuse and private information. To some extent the limits of the usual definitions of peer abuse become apparent with further analysis. Interestingly, however there is no mention of conflict in any definition currently offered of cyber-bullying.

There are a number of salient factors which differentiate cyber-bullying from others forms of abuse, including the fact that the abuse can be undertaken anonymously. The bully can screen their identity by using anonymous email identities, pseudonyms and other internet veils. At least when bullying occurs in a social environment, the victim and others are witness to the abuse and may well initiate intervention. In some ways the internet facilitates the abuse but also changes the dynamics. The bully cannot see the immediate response of the victim, but may hear from others how upset they are. This style of secretive, sneaky abuse, which relieves the abuser of the immediate responsibility for upsetting the victim, suits the covert bully.

It is a major focus for educators and parents to provide the information necessary for young people to be protected, to be encouraged to be vigilant and to take responsibility for their postings. However, it is true to say that many teachers and parents do not feel they are as computer – and online – savvy as the young people they are trying to protect. For this reason, general messages about self-protective behaviours need to be reinforced beyond the computer, and the acceptance of responsibility in all phases of life and behaviour needs to be encouraged. This includes developing an awareness of the types of predatory behaviour that can eventuate from casual meetings online, and of course is relevant to the discussion about bullying in cyberspace.

IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

A recent Australian review of cyber-safety research (Dooley, et al, 2009) indicates that rates of cyber-bullying are comparatively low in Australia at <10% , whereas international rates are up to 52% and that 82% of victims know the identity of the perpetrator (page 59). Hinduja and Patchin (2010) found that 20% of 11-18 year old students in their research indicated they had been a victim of cyber-bullying and about the same number admitted bullying others on the internet.

The impact of cyber-bullying compares to other forms of abuse and bullying as described further in Healey, 2006. Those individuals exposed to this form of abuse develop depression, withdrawal and suicidal ideation to the same extent as other victims whose abuse is more personal and face-to face. Low self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness and humiliation all result from the often public denigration of

the victim. Fear and distress at returning to school where their reputations and private information were, they believed widely known and scorned, leads to school refusal and social withdrawal.

Distress is compounded since the opportunity to spread the abusive message is limitless to the determined bully and the victim has no way of controlling where the abusive messages are distributed. The impact of the abuse can also be greatly boosted by the language used and the participation of many others who may contribute their opinions. Finally, because of the humiliation they feel, the victim may keep the abuse secret from their family and those who can assist and protect them. All of these elements indicate a serious and severe response is highly likely for the abused individual and there have been a number of reported deaths as a result.

In 2009 MTV conducted a 'Digital Abuse Study', and found that 10% of 14–24-year-old users had sent naked photos of themselves via the internet. Lenhart (2007) also found that 15% of 12–17-year-olds with mobile phones had sent nude or near nude photos to their friends.

This form of interaction called 'sexting' is a burgeoning issue for those who are charged with protecting young people from themselves and others who would harm them.

Unfortunately the photos often become public when friendships sour and the individual concerned cannot retrieve the images. Prosecutions and severe outcomes such as the suicide of Jesse Logan shown here, are the punitive and tragic outcome of this new method for abusing others. Educating young people to protect themselves from such embarrassment is a critical measure in protecting them from cyber-bullying.

See the impact of cyberbullying at this site

BEBO BULLY VICTIM IN SUICIDE BID : Monday, 18 February 2008, 17:06 GMT

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/sussex/7251384.stm



INTERVENTIONS

MySpace has introduced protective measures such as promoting safe social networking on their sites since 2006. They have employed trained specialist personnel to deal with inappropriate content and have closed down 29000 profiles set up by registered offenders (*Patchin and Hinduja, 2010*). They restrict access to sites set up by young people under age 15 and do not permit children under 13 to register. These measures provide some protection from predatory users, and may be a useful barrier to peer abuse.

A major challenge to intervention is the acceptance of responsibility for protective intervention, therapy, education and suitable consequences for misuse of the internet for abusive or harmful purposes. Recent media coverage has made it clear that SNS such as *Facebook* do not accept responsibility for sites which denigrate others be they paedophiles or individuals expressing socially abhorrent opinions about recent legal matters, murders etc. With the level of exposure possible from such a site it is impossible to monitor or police all content and it would seem that only the most virulent postings, rejected by a broad range of users will be expunged. Individuals who have genuine complaints about online bullying to themselves have very little chance of having any such abusive postings removed. It is therefore imperative that young people be taught to ignore online abuse, report or forward it to those with the authority to intervene within their own environment, and basically take full responsibility for their own safety. It is clear that online abusers have far more support and freedom to abuse than other users have to a safe online environment.

The broader social networking community does not appear to feel an overall sense of responsibility for the protection of children and young people from internet abuse, denigration, cruel remarks or misinformation, or indeed for inappropriate and harmful content from a range of sources. The parallel universe that cyberspace has become works from a different social agenda where everyone, irrespective of their level of maturity or intellectual or social development, is held responsible for their own behaviour, social contacts and research outcomes. If the child can search for and find inappropriate content they will not be prevented from doing so by the system. In light of this, parents, teachers and others who have traditionally taken responsibility for children and young people need to arm themselves with information and skills to ensure that they can continue to offer protection and support even in this often alien environment. Children need protection as they explore this complex new world.

Cyber bullying involves abuse by internet, mobile phone and other electronic means. Help and support to stop cyber bullying is available here and some solutions are offered for help with this destructive and harmful behaviour. In terms of help and support for cyber bullying, it would seem that a simple solution lies in the ability of the cyber bully victim to identify the sender prior to opening the offensive material, whether email, text or SNS posting. Just as they would avoid the bully when they are seen approaching, the cyber bully victim can be trained to take responsibility for their own protection by not opening the offensive material and/or forwarding it to a third party who can provide protective intervention, such as a parent or school personnel. This is not possible, of course, when postings and texts are sent anonymously. It is clear however that the fear created through this form of bullying often deters the victim of cyber bullying from responding in a self protective manner or helpseeking. Nevertheless, the possibility of taking control of the cyber bullying by forwarding such material to a protective third party is an attractive solution for those being effected by cyber bullies.

The cyber bully uses a range of strategies which can be categorised as follows and each category provides some clues to effective help and support

1. Emails to a known address of the cyber bully victim
2. Mobile phone text messages to bully the victim
3. Social networking sites messages abusing or denigrating the victim
4. Information technologies accessible by the cyber bully including video message boards. If we examine the logistics and practicalities of cyber bullying via these media, solutions can be presented which should enable the victim to ignore, redirect, delete or track the bully and their abusive messages.

1. Emails: the relevant factors here include:

- a) The cyber bully must be aware of the email address of the recipient in order to send intimidating or abusive messages.
- b) The messages remain private as the victim is fearful of the abuser

Solutions:

- change the email address of the victim and do not distribute unless to known and trusted individuals;
- redirect the abusive cyber bullying material to a protective source such as a parent or school liaison for further intervention;
- allow students an individual email address since generic addresses such as 'student name /number@name of school or institution' provide a template for abuse.
- train the victim to ignore, redirect or delete all emails from the abusive source so as to avoid exposure to the abuse.

2. Mobile Phone Text messages: the relevant factors here include:

- a) The cyber bully must be aware of the phone number of the recipient in order to send intimidating or abusive messages
- b) The messages remain private as the victim is fearful of the abuser

Solutions:

- change the phone number and distribute only to trusted friends and family
- Forward the abusive message, without opening, to a protective source
- train the victim to ignore, redirect or delete all emails from the abusive source so as to avoid exposure to the abuse.

However, this is generally not what happens and the consistent access of the cyber bully to their victim via these electronic means can prove to be highly destructive. Supportive strategies within the home and school such as limiting access to mobile phones and supervised computer time, can offer some

protection. Allowing unlimited access to mobile phones and computers without monitoring the content is the equivalent of locking a child in their room with their abuser and this is an inadequate response. Parents may want to consider overnight restrictions on mobile and internet usage to limit access if the child is being bullied by these means. These solutions may seem obvious but the complicating factor always is the distressed mental state of the victims of cyber bullying and their reluctance to expose themselves to further and possibly physical abuse should they use these responses.

3. Social networking sites: the relevant factors differ here:

a) the site is often a private and exclusionary site accessible only to the cyber bully's selected friends. The victim therefore often hears by proxy about the abusive or denigrating information and cannot retaliate on the site or correct misrepresentations.

b) the cyberspace rules are very different for such sites. There is the issue of 'freedom of speech ' which has been used in some litigation to uphold the right of the cyber bully to denigrate or criticise, even slander the victim with no recourse to legal sanction. Solutions:

- the victim cannot engage with the abuser so must be advised to ignore their postings and contribute to other more productive social networks
- the victim may open an individual site to counteract the abusive or libellous allegations of the cyber bully
- the victim may seek intervention from webmasters if the language or content of the abuse is contrary to cyber communication regulations.

Cyber bullying is a destructive and harmful activity, which requires the victim to develop skills for self protection and help seeking.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/sussex/7251384.stm **BEBO BULLY VICTIM IN SUICIDE BID** : Monday, 18 February 2008, 17:06

GMT MySpace has introduced protective measures such as promoting safe social networking on their sites since 2006. They have employed trained specialist personnel to deal with inappropriate content and have closed down 29000 profiles set up by registered offenders (Patchin and Hinduja,2010). They restrict access to sites set up by young people under age 15 and do not permit children under 13 to register. These measures provide some protection from predatory users, and may be a useful barrier to peer abuse.

4. Other opportunities for abuse: An example has been cited of abusive peers entering the video announcements visual communication board at a school and on the school bus to expose an individual to public humiliation. This is known as 'hacking' and is most likely a police matter and should be reported as such by the school authorities. Cyber Bullying has entered the realm of severe abuse but help and support are available.

THE 'FREEDOM OF SPEECH' ARGUMENT

The advent of open communication via the internet has begun to raise complex legal issues, particularly for schools. A complicating factor in the issue of online abuse, denigration and harmful content against an individual is the much lauded constitutional 'right' to freedom of speech'. Unfortunately, online abusers in the USA and elsewhere seem to be of the opinion that their activities are protected by their

constitutional right to freedom of speech irrespective of the right of their victims to protect their own reputation.

The problem with such offensive behaviour is that the strength of the 'free speech' laws in the USA and other places around the world is much greater than that of school regulations about what is acceptable behaviour and language. In almost all the cases cited, Jacobs (2010) reports that the perpetrator, who was often suspended by the school for their behaviour, successfully sued the school for damages and asserted their right to 'free speech'. The infamous 'Tinker' decision in the USA is usually cited which sets the standard as being that the statement must 'materially or substantially disrupt the educational environment or invade the rights of others to be secure' (Tinker et al v Des Moines Independent Community School District, 1969). The amazing fact here is that the decision was made decades before the internet was even created, yet is consistently applied in cases involving internet abuse. The criterion of 'substantial disruption' is most often used to show that although the messages were offensive, they did not disrupt school operations. In other places the right to freedom of speech is tempered by the equally important right to defend one's reputation.



Recent judgements in the USA reinforce the notion that virtually anything goes in terms of abusive personal online messages and opinions. The right to Freedom of Speech is enshrined in the American constitution and various courts have set judgements which support students in this capacity. Obviously, today we would not try to deter any student from expressing political views such as the Tinkers held regardless of their origins, except if those views are held to incite racial abuse, terrorism or criminal activity. Nowhere are these political views sanctioned in an education or social setting. However, when students denigrate their teachers online, set up social networking sites or web pages to abuse, criticise and slander them, the courts are using the 'Freedom of Speech' card to support their activities.

Jacobs (2010) describes a litany of cases wherein school personnel and students have been seriously denigrated, abused and offended by postings by students at the school. Such postings include questioning the sexual orientation and preferences of teachers, describing them as 'hopeless' and making lewd suggestions about their activities. One site included a photo of a teacher whose face morphed into a picture of Adolf Hitler on the site (Jacobs, 2010, page 2). He cites other cases where

teachers have been subjected to such abusive activity and have not been supported in their efforts to prevent such negative and harmful information being posted. This includes a student who initiated a website to denigrate his teacher, describing him as 'fat, middle-aged, and favouring those who kiss his ass' (Jacobs, page 42), among other insults and criticisms. After initially being suspended for this activity, the student eventually sued the school and received \$30,000 compensation for being suspended over the incident. The school was also ordered to apologise in writing to the student. No such apology was forthcoming for the teacher, whose reputation, self-confidence and professional standing had been damaged. This and other cases points to some corruption of the notion of free speech.

Freedom of speech must be aligned with the responsibility to ensure that exposure of corrupt or unprofessional activity is documented. Public denigration that is unfounded is generally viewed as slander or defamation in Australian law and can be addressed through legal action. In most countries, freedom of speech is aligned with social responsibility for ensuring all criticisms are founded in fact. However, if interpretations of free speech are to be broadened to allow any and all expressions of negative and abusive opinions based on nothing more than personal bias, the internet will indeed become a parallel universe where legal protections and social mores are able to be dismissed or ignored. This issue will continue to be the major focus of cyber-bullying research and intervention in coming years.

REFERENCES

- Dooley, J.J., Cross, D., Hearn, L., & Treyvaud, R. (2009) Review of existing Australian and international cyber-safety research. Child Health Promotion Research Centre, Edith Cowan University, Perth
- Healey, J. (2006). Peer abuse as a legislated child protection issue for schools. *Australia & New Zealand Journal of Law & Education*, 10 (1), 59-71
- Hinduja, S & Patchin, J (2010), *Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard*, Corwin Press, CA
- Jacobs, T. (2010) *Teen Cyberbullying Investigated*, Free Spirit Publishing, MN
- Kowalski, R.M., Limber, S.P., & Agaston, P.W. (2007) *Cyberbullying: Bullying in the digital age*, Malden,MA, Blakwell Publishing
- Lenhart,A (2007). *Cyberbullying and online teens*, retrieved from <http://pewinternet.org/pdfs>

Dr. Jean Healey has extensively researched many aspects of bullying. Her new book 'Childhood Bullying A Deadly Serious Matter' is available through Amazon or the bullywatch website. Find out more about Cyber Bullying at <http://bullywatch.com>. Register there for resources and information to assist in managing a range of bullying behaviours and for family support.

© Dr. Jean Healey, All rights reserved worldwide.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



DR. JEAN B. HEALEY

B.Ed., B. Spec. Ed., M. Ed. Studies., (Monash), Doctor of Education Educational Consultancy and Training Director, Bullywatch Publications and Consultancy, (www.bullywatch.com.au)

Email: support @ bullywatch.com.au

Dr. Jean Healey is a freelance author, researcher and education consultant with teaching experience across the broad spectrum of education and learning environments. This includes teaching children and young people with autism, intellectual and physical disability, behaviour and emotional disorders, as well as mainstream students. She has taught young serious offenders and their teachers in juvenile detention facilities. She has been an academic, training teachers in a number of universities over many years. Her teaching expertise is in special education, child protection and bullying intervention. Her research focus for the past 15 years has been on peer abuse and violence in schools.

She has presented her work at international conferences and seminars and been called as an expert witness in court proceedings related to severe bullying. She works with, supports and advises families on how to deal with severe bullying. She conducts training and consultancy with schools in relation to peer abuse and bullying intervention. Her work also extends to workplace bullying and the application of her interventions to these environments.

This book presents her unique perspectives on bullying and is meant to guide parents, teachers and other professionals in developing new understandings and competencies in dealing with the deadly serious matter of childhood bullying.