

Bullying and Cyberbullying

Bullying is the act of intimidating or controlling another person by using threats or physical force. Bullies usually show intolerance to other people different from themselves. Tolerance is the ability to accept people for who they are by overlooking their differences. One of the biggest problems with bullying is that it is relentless, it does not end. Most people can take one episode of teasing or name calling or being ignored at the mall. However, when bullying goes on and on, it puts a person in a constant state of fear. If you see someone being bullied, you should speak up and tell a trusted adult. It is important to be assertive but not aggressive when dealing with a bully. Do not be afraid to ask for help. The best thing to do is stay away or avoid bullies.

Cyberbullying is when one person uses technology to threaten, harass, humiliate, embarrass or otherwise target another person. Cyberbullying occurs so easily because the person doing the bullying can hide behind the technology. Because texting is not verbal and the sender's tone can be easily misunderstood, kids can send hateful and/or threatening messages to other kids without realizing how hurtful the messages can be. Sending sexually explicit photos or texts, called sexting, can be considered cyberbullying. One person's joke could be another's hurtful insult. Sometimes kids even send death threats using social media and text messages.

Examples of cyberbullying can include:

- Sending cruel or mean texts, e-mails, or instant messages.
- Posting offensive or sexually explicit pictures or messages about other people in blogs or on websites.
- Using someone else's username to spread rumors or lies about them or someone else.
- Malicious tweets, posts, or messages.

Cyberbullying can become an issue of cyber-harassment or cyber-stalking which is a major crime that could lead to jail time.

Cyberbullying and the law

The law, H.B. 2003, states that "a person commits a **third-degree felony** if the person posts one or more messages on a social networking site [or via instant messaging or text messaging by phone] with the intent to harm, defraud, intimidate, or threaten another person."

Third-Degree Felony Punishment: (a) An individual adjudged guilty of a felony of the third degree shall be punished by imprisonment in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice for any term of not more than 10 years or less than 2 years. (b) In addition to imprisonment, an individual adjudged guilty of a felony of the third degree may be punished by a fine not to exceed \$10,000.

There are steps you can take if you are being bullied with or through technology.

- Save evidence of cyberbullying to help prove your case, if needed.
- Report bullying to your service provider.
- Block the bully from sending you messages.
- Be safe online. Protect your passwords and be careful of what you share.

