

Teens and Cyberbullying

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF A REPORT ON RESEARCH

Conducted for

NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL (NCPC)

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By the National Crime Prevention Council

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Executive Summary

The National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) commissioned this study by Harris Interactive, Inc., to explore the issue of cyberbullying among middle school and high school-aged students in the United States. The survey had these four objectives:

- Explore teens' experiences with cyberbullying
- Understand teens' emotional and behavioral reactions to cyberbullying
- Probe what teens think would be the most effective ways to prevent or put a stop to cyberbullying
- Determine how teens define cyberbullying and what other terms they use to describe it

This executive summary highlights the key findings of the survey. It is accompanied by a set of action items and recommendations by the National Crime Prevention Council. The detailed survey report is available at <http://www.ncpc.org/media>.

Teens ages 13 to 17 are an online population. They use the Internet, cell phones, instant messaging, and text messaging to talk to friends, gather information for reports, check out sports scores, and practice their social skills on a larger population. Their access to these electronic communications tools is found in many different places—at home, at school, at friends' houses, and even at public libraries and WiFi sites. Seventy-eight percent (78 percent) of teens report that they have been using the Internet for three years or more; more than half say that have been on the Internet for five or more years. Eight out of ten teens (80 percent) say they used the Internet “yesterday” and 27 percent used the Internet for more than an hour “yesterday.”

Though parents are generally quite vigilant about protecting their younger children from the content of specific types of sites and put clear limits on the amount of time spent online and the reasons for it, teens report that they are largely unsupervised by their parents while online. Nine out of ten (90 percent) of 10- to 12-year-olds say their parents know where they are going online, compared with four out of ten (41 percent) of 13- to 15-year-olds. Only seven percent of 10- to 12-year-olds say their parents think they know their children's online destinations but really don't. But 27 percent of 13- to 15-year-olds report that their parents think they know online destinations but don't. Interestingly, as teens get older, they believe that their parents should be more concerned with what the teens see and hear on line.

Cell phones are an important means of communication for this age group. About 59 percent of 13-through 15-year-olds and 74 percent of 16- and 17-year-olds report that they have cell phones. Of teens who have cell phones, about 60 percent use text messaging. As many as 25 percent of teens send text messages while in school.

Cyberbullying is not an uncommon occurrence among teens in this age group. Slightly more than four in ten teens (43 percent) report that they have experienced some form of cyberbullying in the last year. The incidence of cyberbullying is higher among females than males, and is most prevalent among 15- and 16-year-olds, particularly among girls. More than half of this total age group reported at least one cyberbullying incident in the past year.

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Teen cyberbullying victims report that immediately following an incident, they are likely to consider one or more actions, such as asking the person to stop, using electronic means to block the person from communicating with them, or talking with a friend. Teens are twice as likely to talk to a friend about the incident as to talk with their parents or another adult.

Teens report a wide range of emotions as a result of experiencing cyberbullying, from anger to embarrassment to indifference. Over half of cyberbullying victims report feeling angry (56 percent); one-third report feeling hurt (33 percent); one-third report being embarrassed (32 percent), and one in eight said they feel scared (13 percent). Females are more likely than males to report all of these emotions, especially girls ages 13 to 15. Many teens, however, claim that the cyberbullying incident didn't bother them.

Though teens may not know immediately, about three out of four report that they eventually figure out who cyberbullied them. Often, this is a friend, someone they know from school, or someone else they know. Fewer than one in four teen victims (23 percent) were bullied by someone he or she didn't know. This "unknown" cyberbully was generally in a chat room saying mean or vicious things or someone sending cruel or threatening emails, instant messages, or text messages.

Most teens believe that people cyberbully for one (or more) of these reasons: "they think it's funny" (81 percent); "they simply don't like the person" (64 percent); or "they view the victim as a loser" (45 percent). Nearly six in ten teens (58 percent) said the cyberbully "probably didn't see the action as a big deal."

Nearly half of teens said that cyberbullying happens because the cyberbully doesn't perceive any tangible consequences (47 percent) or feels he or she would not get caught (45 percent).

Teens believe that cyberbullying prevention needs to occur at three different levels— individual actions, online institutions, and parental education—but most notably at the individual actions level.

In teens' views, the most effective way to prevent cyberbullying is to be able to block people who cyberbully from communicating with the victims (71 percent). The next most effective methods, according to teens, include simply refusing to pass along cyberbullying messages (62 percent), and telling their friends to stop cyberbullying (56 percent). Slightly more than five in ten teens (56 percent) believe that online groups and Internet service providers (ISPs) should have moderators who can block cyberbullies' messages. Forty-five percent of teens say that parents should tell their kids that cyberbullying is wrong; 43 percent say that cyberbullying should be reported to an adult. Unlike face-to-face bullying, teens do not view cyberbullying as an issue that should be addressed by the school; in fact, they feel that much of customary school intervention (large assemblies, etc.) would be largely ineffective.

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NCPC Resources To Prevent Cyberbullying

- **Public service ads** directed to the key age group (11- to 13-year-olds) and being released nationwide on March 6, 2007. These hard-hitting ads feature the refrain, “If you know you wouldn’t say it in person, don’t say it online” and the tag line “Delete Cyberbullying. Don’t Write It. Don’t Forward It,” which is based on the cyberbullying prevention research.
 - Viral videos for use on line and on television
 - Radio public service ads
 - Web banners
- **Informative online resources** for teens and parents on preventing cyberbullying (www.ncpc.org/cyberbullying)
- **Augmented materials on cyberbullying prevention** in the Teens, Crime, and the Community *Community Works* curriculum, which is used by schools and youth organizations across the country
- **Educational outreach to crime prevention community** through *Catalyst* newsletter and the Crime Prevention Coalition of America’s *Weekly E-Bulletin* on ways to prevent cyberbullying
- **Workshops** on bullying prevention in general and cyberbullying prevention in particular, at conferences and similar events
- **News media resources** for interviews, prevention tips, and other means of publicizing the need for action against cyberbullying
- **Web links** to related NCPC resources and other cyberbullying prevention resources
- **More action is needed at all levels.**
 - **Reporting systems** that encourage reporting of cyberbullies to local authorities
 - **Sample rules of conduct** that schools, community centers, youth clubs, and similar groups can adopt with respect to online behavior using their facilities or while on their premises
 - **Easy-to-use tips** for parents on talking with children and youth on this topic, ideas for communicating with other parents, and thoughts for generating action by such community organizations as PTA/PTSA’s and libraries
 - **Pledge cards**, featuring the “Delete Cyberbullying. Don’t Write It. Don’t Forward It” tag line to help children and teens remember not to cyberbully or encourage it
 - **Directory** that lists ways to contact appropriate online and similar authorities to get cyberbullies’ privileges suspended or revoked
 - **Training** for school counselors, teachers, other adults, and teen peer counselors in dealing appropriately with victims of cyberbullying
 - **Development of school and community-based anti-cyberbullying campaigns** that publicize policies, resources for victims, and help for youth and parents using effective communication strategies for and with teens
 - **PowerPoint™ presentations** that can be used by local law enforcement and other community groups to educate both youth and parents on the dangers posed by cyberbullying and how to prevent it

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Profile: Cyberbullying Victims and Nonvictims

	Total Sample (n=824)	Statistics on Those Who Experienced Cyberbullying (n=380)	Statistics on Those Who Never Experienced Cyberbullying (n=444)
	Percent	Percent	Percent
Gender			
Male	51	43	57
Female	49	57	43
Age			
13	21	17	23
14	19	18	20
15	19	24	16
16	22	26	18
17	19	14	22
Level in School			
Middle School	26	22	30
High School	74	78	70
Amount of Time Spent on Internet			
Light	40	33	44
Moderate	33	35	32
Heavy	27	32	24

Survey Methodology

A nationally representative sample of 824 middle and high school students aged 13 through 17 participated in an online survey. Respondents were invited to participate in the survey through password-protected emails. Respondents were either contacted directly or recruited through their parents. All respondents or their parents were members of the Harris Panel Online (HPOL). Interviews averaged ten minutes in length and were conducted between February 2 and February 15, 2006. Data were weighted to reflect a nationally representative online sample based on the following known demographic parameters: gender, age, race, parents' education, region, Internet use, and urbanicity of school. The results of this sample are subject to a sampling margin of error of +/- 3.41 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.