

## **Cyberbullying: An Emerging Threat to the “Always On” Generation**

By Bill Belsey, President and Founder of Bullying.org

April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1999 was a day that changed my life. It began like many other days, but somewhere along the way, an emotional tsunami flooded my consciousness as news emerged of a school shooting at Columbine High School in Middleton, Colorado. Eight days later, a copycat shooting took place at a high school in rural Alberta. This was clearly not a “Big-city” problem or an “American” problem; it was everyone’s problem, as a Canadian parent and educator, it was also MY problem.

It became apparent soon afterwards that the young people who committed these heinous acts were relentlessly bullied and teased throughout their young lives.

In response to these deeply disturbing tragedies, I created a Web site, [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org). I decided that the Web site would have three goals; first, to help people, especially young people, learn that they are NOT alone in dealing with bullying in their lives, to help them realize that being bullied is NOT their fault and that they CAN do something positive about it.

[www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) allows people to connect in a safe, moderated online community where they can share their stories, poetry, drawings, music, animations and videos. A team of volunteer reviewers moderates replies and the original submissions. Visitors to the Web site can also use the worlds’ largest online database of helpful resources on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) to find information about bullying.

[www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) began to quickly create quite a buzz online through “word-of-mouth” referrals, as it was successfully filling a tremendous need for information and support. Then, on May 21, 2001, I was fortunate enough to do an interview with CBC National Television News anchor Peter Mansbridge during which Mr. Mansbridge was generous enough to refer to [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) as “One of the best Web sites in the world for young people”, that night, [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) was propelled to another level.

I created the national educational organization, Bullying.org shortly thereafter to help support and expand the vision of preventing bullying through education and awareness.

[www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) has since received as many as three quarters of a million visitors and contributors from across Canada and around the world in one month and is listed as one of the top "bullying" referenced Web sites in the world by [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and many other Internet search engines. [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) has since been chosen for the ChildNet International Award which goes to projects that make the Internet a better place for youth, as well as being a finalist in the Stockholm Challenge Award which has been called the Nobel Prize of the IT (Information Technology) world.

Shortly after [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org)’s launch, I realized that something new was being experienced and reported by young people around the world. In response, I created [www.cyberbullying.ca](http://www.cyberbullying.ca), the world's first Web site specifically dedicated to the emerging issue of cyberbullying. [www.cyberbullying.ca](http://www.cyberbullying.ca) has often been cited as the first to use this word and define this emerging behaviour.

## **SO WHAT IS CYBERBULLYING?**

*"Cyberbullying involves the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group, which is intended to harm others."*

–Bill Belsey

### **What Forms Does Cyberbullying Take?**

Cyberbullying can happen through the use of almost any means that we communicate over the Internet such as: Social Media such as FaceBook and Twitter, e-mail, cell phone text (SMS) and multimedia messages (MMS), instant messaging (IM), defamatory Web logs (Blogs), personal Web sites, online personal polling sites and apps such as Snapchat, Streetchat, Ask.fm, YikYak and others, especially those that encourage anonymity.

### **How is cyberbullying different from other forms of bullying?**

Cyberbullying, like other forms of bullying, is about human relationships, power and control. Those who bully others are trying to establish power and control over others that they perceive to be “weaker” than them. Those who bully want to make victims feel that there is something wrong with them, but victims should know that there is NOTHING wrong with THEM. It is THE BULLIES who have the real problems.

Cyberbullying is different from other forms of bullying in a number of ways. While bullying is something that is often under the radar screen of adults, cyberbullying is even more so as today’s youth, a group that I have dubbed the “Always On” generation, feel it most often and most intensely. This generation is increasingly communicating in ways that are often unknown by adults and away from their supervision.

Cyberbullying is also different in that it is a particularly cowardly form of bullying. Cyberbullies can more easily hide behind the anonymity that the Internet can provide.

Cyberbullies can communicate their hurtful messages to a very wide audience with remarkable speed.

Cyberbullying does not provide any tangible feedback about the consequences of using information technologies to cyberbully others. Cyberbullies do not have to own their actions, as it is usually very difficult to identify cyberbullies, so they do not fear being punished for their actions.

Cyberbullying is often outside of the legal reach of schools and school boards as this behaviour often happens outside of school on home computers or via mobile phones.

Victims of bullying are often fearful of telling others about being bullied because they fear that the bullying may actually become worse if they tell. Victims of cyberbullying are often also afraid to report to adults about being cyberbullied, as they also fear that adults will over-react and take away their mobile phone, computer and/or Internet access. This is something that is increasingly unthinkable for the “Always On” generation as not being online means not being able to socialize or communicate with their peers, and this fear of exclusion is paramount in the lives of most adolescents and teens.

In most cases, cyberbullies know their victims, but their victims may not know their cyberbullies, the aggressors may or may not bully their victims through physical, verbal, emotional or psychological means that are more easily identified.

With the advent of mobile, wireless Internet access, communications have become more ubiquitous. As a result, Cyberbullying can happen any time and any place and for many children, home is no longer a refuge from negative peer pressure such as bullying.

## **CYBERBULLYING AND THE LAW**

Some forms of cyberbullying are considered criminal acts. Under the Criminal Code of Canada, it is a crime to communicate repeatedly with someone if your communication causes them to fear for their own safety or the safety of others.

It is also a crime to publish a "defamatory libel", writing something that is designed to insult a person or likely to hurt a person's reputation by exposing him or her to hatred, contempt or ridicule.

A cyberbully may also be violating the Canadian Human Rights Act, if he or she spreads hate or discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or disability.

## **WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT CYBERBULLYING?**

### **Awareness and education are the keys to the prevention of cyberbullying!**

Spend some time on the [www.cyberbullying.ca](http://www.cyberbullying.ca) Web site learning what you can do about cyberbullying. It is often a very hurtful, difficult and time-consuming challenge to deal with the effects of cyberbullying after it has occurred. It can take a lot of time and effort to get Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and Mobile Telecommunications Service Providers (the phone companies who sell you your cell phone and pagers) to respond and deal with your complaints about being cyberbullied.

### **An ounce of prevention, a word of advice for "Netizens" (citizens of the Internet, advice for youth AND adults)...**

**Students should be reminded regularly to never give out or share personal information numbers (PIN), etc.** Personal information includes their names, the names of friends or family, their address, phone number, school name (or team name if students play sports). Personal info also includes pictures of themselves and their e-mail addresses. They should ask permission before sharing any information with a website, a "chat buddy" and even when registering a product purchased for their computer (like a game). Passwords are secret. They should never tell anyone their password except their teachers, or perhaps their parents or guardians.

**Don't believe everything you read** Just because someone online tells young people that they are 15 doesn't mean they are telling the truth. Even adults can't tell when a male pretends to be a female or a 50 year old pretends to be a 15 year old.

**Use Netiquette (Internet etiquette).** Students should be reminded to be polite to others online just as they would offline. If someone treats them rudely or meanly - do not respond. Online bullies are just like offline ones - they WANT others to answer (don't give them the satisfaction). DON'T WRITE ALL IN CAPITALS!!! This is considered "yelling" on the Internet and is very rude. It may encourage others to "FLAME" them. Flaming is the sending of repeated, aggressive messages to others.

**Students should never send a message to others when they are angry** Wait until you have had time to calm down and think. Do your best to make sure that your messages are calmly and factually written. You will usually regret sending a "Flame" (angry message) to someone else. Once you've sent a message, it is VERY hard to undo the damage that such "flames" can do.

**Students should never open a message from someone you don't know** If in doubt about it, they should ask their teachers, parents, guardians or another adult.

**If students encounter something online that doesn't look or "feel right", it probably isn't.** Students need to learn to trust their instincts. While surfing the Internet, if they find something that they don't like, makes them feel uncomfortable or scares them, they should turn off the computer and tell an adult. Internet filters can only go so far. After working with students, teachers and technology for many years, I truly believe that the only truly effective filter we should spend time and energy on is the one between the ears of our young people. For every filter that schools in school boards put in place, there are many ways around each and every one of them. In fact, there are many Web sites that have been created to show people (read kids) how to get around them. Also

**Young people don't have to be "Always on".** They should be encouraged to turn off, disconnect, and unplug, at least for a while. They should be encouraged to give themselves a break. Encourage young people not to stay online or connected too long. Families need to work at spending time with their family and friends offline. Why not try a little less virtual reality and a lot more actual reality!

**Sign on the dotted line.** Parents and guardians should be strongly encouraged to create an Internet Acceptable Use Agreement with their children. Bullying.org Canada has examples of such contracts for families to consider using. It should be made clear the Internet access and use is a privilege to be earned and honoured, not assumed right.

**Update your AUPs... ASAP!** Schools and school boards should update their computer and Internet Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs) to include harassment done with mobile and wireless Internet information technologies. Schools and school boards should work with their local parent councils to include the idea that members of the school community are responsible their online behaviour and actions away from the school every bit as much as they need to be responsible and accountable for their actions and behaviours There should be clear and serious consequences for anyone who doesn't follow the AUP that should be signed by both students and parents. The updated AUP should specifically prohibit the use of ICTs for cyberbullying.

**Become Further Informed.** Schools and school boards should contact Bullying.org and have us present information sessions for students, staff and parents about cyberbullying. Parents, teachers and students should be encouraged to read the information on the [www.cyberbullying.ca](http://www.cyberbullying.ca) Web site, so they will be informed about cyberbullying and related online behaviour issues.

### **IF YOU ARE A VICTIM OF A CYBERBULLY, WHAT CAN YOU AND YOUR PARENTS DO?**

Do not keep this to yourself! You are NOT alone! Tell an adult you know and trust! It is very hard to solve such problems on your own.

#### **Inform your Internet, Instant Messaging or mobile phone service provider**

Such as MSN for instant messaging:

<http://ca.support.sympatico.msn.com/contactus.aspx?productkey=messenger>

#### **Inform your local police**

**Do not reply to messages from cyberbullies!** Even though you may really want to, this is exactly what cyberbullies want. They want to know that they've got you worried and upset. They are trying to mess with your mind and control you, to put fear into you. Don't give them that pleasure.

**Do not erase or delete messages from cyberbullies** You don't have to read it, but keep it, it is your evidence. Unfortunately you may get similar messages again, perhaps from other accounts. The police and your ISP, and/or your telephone company can use these messages to help you. You might notice certain words or phrases that are also used by people you know. These messages may reveal certain clues as to who is doing this to you, but don't try and solve this on your own. Tell an adult you know and trust. GET HELP!

### **WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION SHOULD BE SAVED?**

To report cyberbullying, it's really important to save as much info as you can. The more you have saved, the easier it will be to track down the people bothering you.

Save the following from E-mail:

- E-mail address
- Date and time received
- Copies of any relevant e-mails with full e-mail headers

Save the following from Groups or communities:

- URL of offending MSN Group site
- Nickname of offending person
- E-mail address of offending person
- Date you saw it happen

Save the following from Profiles you see on the web:

- URL of Profile
- Nickname of offending person
- E-mail address of offending person
- Date you viewed this Profile

Save the following from Chatrooms:

- Date and time of chat
- Name and URL of chat room you were in
- Nickname of offending person
- E-mail address of offending person
- Screenshot of chatroom

### **REPORT CYBERBULLYING E-MAIL**

If you receive e-mail from cyberbullies, you can report it to your ISP with the full headers displayed. The full header shows every stage of an e-mail's journey. Forwarding e-mail with the full header displayed will let the support team track down where it came from.

### **WHAT TO DO IF SOMEBODY HAS STOLEN YOUR ACCOUNT**

If somebody has stolen or "hacked" your account and changed all the login details, you will need to get in touch with a support team to get it back.

### **HOW DO I REPORT CHATROOM CYBERBULLYING?**

You don't have to put up with abuse in chat, and the companies that run chatrooms don't want abusive people using their service.

- Highlight the chatter's name
- Use the ignore button to stop all conversation with that person
- Take a screenshot of the abuse
- Note the time, date and chatroom name
- Report to the chatroom moderator and service operator
- Speak to a parent or a teacher

Students should know that it isn't their fault that there are some very strange people in the world. Students should not be ashamed to tell somebody about any disturbing, threatening, weird or frightening behaviour you encounter in chat.

People aren't anonymous online, and with the right info saved, they can be traced by the Police and dealt with.

## **PROTECT YOURSELF**

Never arrange to meet with someone you have met online unless your parents go with you. If you are meeting them make sure it is in a public place.

Young people may need to delete your current e-mail accounts, cell phone/pager accounts and set up new ones. If they have persistent cyberbullying problems, it is recommend that they do this as soon as possible, unless they are working with the police and their Telecommunications Provider to keep the account (s) active to try and catch the cyberbully. Bullying.org Canada is currently in discussions with various Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and Mobile Service Providers (MSPs) to address these issues.

## **CYBERBULLYING SOLUTIONS:**

### **Youth Solutions**

1. Do not respond/engage to the abuse.
2. Tale to someone about it. Ignoring bullying often leads to it becoming worse.
3. Keep records/print off messages if possible, to help identify bully.
4. If necessary get a new number, account, give it out one person at a time and keep a diary to record any abuse. Your tormenter may be closer than you think.
5. Take a break--Unplug.

### **Parent Solutions**

1. Make a more "talkable" subject.
2. Place and keep the computer in an open, common area.
3. Inform Internet Service Provider (ISP) or cell phone service provider of abuse.
4. Do not erase messages; keep for evidence.
5. Software help--McAfee Parental Controls filter both IM and Chat Rooms. Tracker programs.

### **School Solutions**

1. Amend anti-bullying policies to include text messaging, cell phone use and online bullying.
2. Make a commitment to educate teachers, students and parents about cyberbullying.
3. Make sure parents know whom to contact at the school if there is a problem.
4. Never allow a known incident of bullying to pass unchallenged and not deal with it.
5. We need to "Walk the Walk" of positive, respectful online communication and behaviour in our schools and not simply "Talk the talk". We need to strongly encourage teachers and students to become engaged in collaborative, international projects where there is a well-established, mutually respectful online community with a solid track record in education. One outstanding example of this is iEARN, the International Education and Resource Network, [www.iearn.org](http://www.iearn.org). iEARN has over one

million k-12 student and teacher members in over 110 countries around the world, all of whom share iEARN's vision of "Connecting youth and making a difference!" Schools participate in students and teacher-created projects that not only relate to curriculum, they also serve iEARN's vision of helping to make our world a better place in which to live. Schools can visit [www.iearn.org](http://www.iearn.org) for more information.

## **USEFUL TIPS**

### **How do I take a screenshot of offensive content?**

A screenshot is like a photograph of your screen. It captures everything that you can see on your screen at the press of a key and is useful for recording details you might want to report.

- Have the information you wish to record open on your screen and press the PrintScn / SysRq key on your keyboard. The image is now saved in a temporary memory.
- Open a new Word document, right click your mouse and select Paste to insert the screenshot.\*
- Make a note of the date, location, e-mail address, name (nickname or real name) and any other information that you think might be useful and then Save the file. \* The screenshot can be inserted into any program that accepts images.

### **How do I save an address in Groups?**

If someone or something makes you feel uncomfortable it is important to tell someone you trust who can help you to report your experience to the right people. If you encounter potentially illegal or offensive content in MSN Groups or have seen a Group that you believe should be placed behind an adult advisory notice, save the URL and contact the service provider immediately.

### **How do I report cyberbullying from a Hotmail account?**

You can report cyberbullying messages direct from your e-mail inbox and every report you make will actually improve the intelligent filters that protect your account.

- Sign in to Hotmail and click on the Mail tab to open the inbox.
- Select an e-mail you suspect to be an abusive message. **Tip** - a question mark is placed on all e-mail from unknown senders.
- Click the Junk option and select from either Report or Report and Block sender, and then simply follow the directions given.

## How do I report Hotmail with full headers included?

If you need to report an e-mail to an authority or organization, then include the full header so that action can be taken.

- Sign in to Hotmail, click Options (next to help) and select Mail from the left-hand panel, followed by Junk E-Mail Protection.
- On the following screen select Mail Display settings.
- Under Message Headers select Full and then click OK. You will now be able to forward mail with full headers displayed.

## About Bill Belsey and Bullying.org

Bill Belsey is the creator and President of Bullying.org, an educational organization dedicated to the prevention of bullying through education and awareness. He created [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), the world's most visited and referenced Website about bullying, [www.cyberbullying.ca](http://www.cyberbullying.ca), the world's first Website about cyberbullying and [www.bullyingcourse.com](http://www.bullyingcourse.com), which offers research-based online courses and Webinars to parents and educators. He also founded Canada's annual National Bullying Awareness Week, see [www.bullyingawarenessweek.org](http://www.bullyingawarenessweek.org). He has won numerous awards for his work including the Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence, Canada's National Technology Innovations Award, Mr. Belsey was named a Fellow of the World Technology Network. He was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal which honours significant contributions and achievements by Canadians.

Mr. Belsey has been interviewed by the late Peter Gzowski on CBC Radio's national "Morningside" radio show and has also appeared numerous times on the CTV and CBC National News. He has been a consultant to "The Dr. Phil Show", ABC News 20/20 with Diane Sawyer, CNN –Anderson Cooper AC360 and was also asked to offer his input into the United National International Research Study in Bangkok on Violence and Children. His print interviews have appeared in Parenting Magazine, the Globe and Mail, and the Christian Science Monitor. In an interview with Mr. Belsey on CBC TV's "The National", Peter Mansbridge referred to [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) as "One of the best Web sites in the world for children".

Mr. Belsey has presented around the world. FMI see: <http://is.gd/J8iSSa>

For more information, or to have Bullying.org present to your school community about the issues of bullying and/or cyberbullying to your organization, please contact:

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