

# Bullies in Cyberspace



Internet and cell phone taunting is a growing problem for kids.

"I'm going to call the police on you." As Jennifer\* read the text message, she knew she needed to ask an adult for help. For weeks, the fourth grader from Atlanta had been getting threats from an **anonymous**, or unknown, bully.

This bully was different from a tough kid on the playground. This person could always find Jennifer. The bully could bother her at school, at home, or even at a friend's house.

Jennifer was being teased by a **cyberbully**. That is a person who uses the Internet or cell phones to bother another person. Cyberbullying is common among teens. Now experts say it is a problem among younger students too.

A new survey found that one in every four kids in grades 4 to 8 had been bullied online more than once. Students in fourth grade are especially likely to **taunt**, or tease, one another on the Internet.

\*Real name not used

## Web of Lies

Bullies can bother victims in person only when adults aren't watching. But cyberbullies can attack anytime, says Parry Aftab. She runs WiredSafety.org. That Web site helps victims of online bullying.

Cyberbullies may send mean text messages or e-mails. Others might use classmates' passwords to log in to their game accounts.

"[Victims] can't get away from [it]," Aftab says. "It follows them to camp. It's where they are."

Some bullies post mean messages about their victims on Facebook and other Web sites. Others send fake messages in the victims' names to get them into trouble.

In some cases, cyberbullies pretend to be someone else entirely. The bullies make friends with the victims online. Then they turn on them.

"You never know if it's your best friend or your worst enemy," says a fifth grader who did not give his name.

## Battling Bullies


Cyberbullying can have serious effects. Aftab says the teasing can hurt children's **self-esteem**. That is a belief in yourself. Some kids' grades drop. Other students lose sleep.

To protect kids, companies are making products to **monitor**, or watch, Internet use. One product takes a picture of the computer screen. Kids can use the picture as proof of bullying. Cell phone companies also let people block text messages and calls from some numbers.

Even kids and teens are taking a stand against cyberbullying. The International Youth Advisory Congress is a group of about 150 teens from around the world.

The group wants to stop online bullying.

In October, the group gave their ideas to the United Nations. One of those ideas was to give social networking sites a special "report abuse" button. That button would let victims turn in cyberbullies.

Experts say one of the best things victims can do is tell adults they trust. After Jennifer told her parents about the text messages, the bully was found. He apologized and said he didn't know he was upsetting her. His mean messages have stopped. Now Jennifer is no longer afraid of her cell phone. 

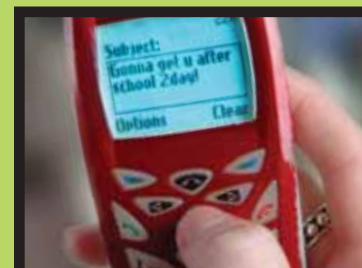
**THINK CRITICALLY:** In what ways can kids protect themselves when using computers and cell phones?

## Stay Safe in Cyberspace

Are you the target of a cyberbully? Whether you're online or on the phone, here are some tips for staying safe:



If you are threatened by a cyberbully, tell a parent or another adult you trust.



If you can help it, don't open text messages or e-mails from bullies.



Never give out your Internet or e-mail passwords to anyone.



Save bullies' messages. Your parents might need them as proof to get the bully to stop.