



## SCOPE Tip of the Week Member Newsletter

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### Cyber-Bullying

As with many things in our technologically advanced culture, bullying behavior has also made the transition online. College students are increasingly reporting difficulty, harassment, and frustration and, in some cases, outright terror in response to cyber-bullying and cyber-attacks from other students. Cyber-attacks are insidious; it's hard to determine where they may be coming from and they can take place beyond the university computer network.

There are many different ways students experience cyber-bullying. Some of these include:

- 1) **Facebook and Social Media Sites.** Here the cyber-bully makes posts designed to create harmful debate or personal attacks. They may encourage other friends to join in the attack and post threads on a target student's wall or webpage that slander, disrespect or share embarrassing secrets with others.
- 2) **Target of a Malicious Website.** In this attack, the cyber-bully creates a stand-alone website to spread rumors or blog about their dislike for the target student. They can share embarrassing pictures, stories or start rumors with little regard for how they impact the target of their cyber-bully attack. Cyber-bullies may also post harmful information that spreads gossip, sometimes on commercial websites created for that purpose.
- 3) **Text or Picture Messaging.** A cyber-bully can send text messages or picture messages in high volumes to their target. Clever cyber-bullies can use untraceable cell phones or web services to disguise their caller-id. The target of the cyber-bully has little recourse and may end up paying for the costs of text messages. Simply blocking all text or picture messages isn't always a practical option.
- 4) **Spamming or Unwanted Sign Up.** Cyber-bullies sign the target student up for unwanted services such as magazines, pornography sites and other embarrassing services. Spamming an email address is another way a cyber-bully can attack a target's email and keep them from having access to their own account. While this can be corrected by switching emails, this is yet another example where bullies can control their target.
- 5) **Stealing of Name or Identity.** A target student may have their name stolen, causing some people to assume the target student created websites, Facebook accounts or blogs that they did not. Sometimes, clone email accounts can be used to make it seem that messages are being sent by the target, when in fact they are being sent by the cyber-bully. This harmful content can impact the target student far beyond their time at college.
- 6) **Video Game Chat.** XBOX live, Wii and PS3 each have online networks that create the potential for harassment, teasing and cyberbullying.
- 7) **You Tube:** The posting of embarrassing videos is another way a cyber-bully can impact their target. This could be video taken in class via cell phone, in the bathroom of a residence hall or from around campus. The real damage lies in the immediate and often viral spread of the material. A video posted on You Tube can have over 500,000 views in a matter of days.

**So, what do I do?** There is no easy answer to the question of cyber-bullying. The same qualities that make the Internet and technology powerful tools for social change are also the qualities that create the opportunity for cyber-attacks.

Tell students to make sure to have their privacy settings engaged on social media sites. This can be confusing since many students assume their information is private when, in fact, others can see it. It also may be frustrating for the student to

be told by caring adults to “just unplug or don’t look at it if what they are saying bothers you.” Canceling a Facebook account, avoiding the Internet or not receiving text messages may solve the immediate problem, but these require the student to sacrifice the ability to use these functions. While Facebook, the Internet and text messaging are not quite a constitutional right, these are commonly used services by college students. The Internet allows for research, Facebook is often used to communicate information about organization meetings and text messages are commonly used for class cancelations and emergencies. Most students are not willing to give these up.

If a student is the target of cyber-bullying, tell him/her to consider talking to the conduct or judicial affairs department on your campus and/or to campus law enforcement. Many states now have anti-bullying statutes that cover cyber-acts. Have the student keep a log of cyber-bullying and include screenshots, saved conversations and other evidence. It may also be helpful to have him/her talk with someone in counseling to help discuss the stress and emotions they are experiencing.

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