



Cyberharassment, Stalking and Cyberbullying

Teens say that "cyberbullying" is sooo "middle school." They are too mature to do those kinds of things in high school. Think again! While it might be called cyberharassment instead, or might not even have a name in high school, when people take over your accounts, pass nasty rumors, have a quiz on how ugly, fat or stupid you are...they are cyberbullying you. Cyberbullying is when one minor uses technology as a weapon to hurt another minor. Whether they are passing around a nude pic of their victim to embarrass her, or sending around IMs lying about what she said or did, or reprogramming his cell phone, it's cyberbullying. When they steal or misuse your password and pretend to be you online, it's cyberbullying. So, call it what you want, teens use technology to hurt each other all the time.

All fifty states have cyberharassment laws and if you send a message online designed to harass or annoy someone anonymously, you can go to jail for up to two years under federal law too.

Often offline bullies start this stuff. But sometimes you start it when you overreact to something someone else did or said. "They started it" doesn't matter. The best way to handle any harassing message you may receive is to "stop, block and tell!" You should stop and not answer back. It only feeds the harassment campaign. You should block the person or message. Why torment yourself further or give them access to you? And you should tell someone you trust, preferably an adult. Teens have committed suicide when cyberbullying gets out of control. Talking to someone can help you keep things in perspective. Using an adult to confide in means you are never confiding (without knowing it) in the cyberbully. (Seventy percent of cyberbullying occurs anonymously, so you never know if it's your best friend or worst enemy. But you know for sure it's not your teacher, guidance counselor or your parents.)

And if you are tempted to answer back...do something else. Parry Aftab and Teenangels call this "Take 5!" Do something you love to do for five minutes to help you calm down. Just make sure it doesn't involve a cell phone, computer game device or computer, so you won't do something you will regret later.