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Cyberbullying in Schools

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**Abstract**

With the ever-changing digital world, educators need to be aware of the negative aspects of a student’s online communications. Technology has changed the way students interact with one another. The perceived anonymous nature of many social media websites has emboldened students to target their peers with negative, hurtful texts and images. Parents as well as educators can help students navigate their online life so that they can effectively deal with cyberbullying. This project created a guide that provides strategies for helping students, parents, and educators reduce cyberbullying. Also, this project includes the current cyberbullying laws that can have an impact on students’ lives.

*Keywords:* cyberbullying, digital aggression, sexting, cyberbully, victim.
In 1982, computers entered California schools with the implementation of a tax credit law valued at $25 million (Williams & MacDonald, 1984). The computer revolution predicted for education floundered for many years due to lack of relevant software (Apple, 1992). Real change began in the last decade as educators worked to accommodate the use of the Internet within classrooms and as a form of communication (Kuhlemeier & Hemker, 2007). Online technology has expanded exponentially across the globe changing the way people communicate with each other, find new information and use it as a form of entertainment (Greenblatt, 2010). While there are many benefits to the access provided by the worldwide web through the use of computers and cell phones, it also exposes people to digital aggression. Digital aggression can occur through the use of electronic communication tools like email, instant messaging, webcams, texting, blogs and social networking sites (Beran, Rinaldi, & Bickham, 2012; Kowalski & Limber, 2007). In 2004, a Canadian educator, Bill Belsey, coined the term ‘cyberbullying’ which means, “to use information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated and hostile behavior by an individual or group, that is intended to harm others.” (Butler, Kift, & Campbell, 2004, p.1)

Victims of traditional bullying are exposed to physical attacks, (e.g. pushing, hair pulling, & hitting), rumors, name-calling and social exclusion. Most of this abuse occurs on school grounds, in school buses or close to the school (Beran, Rinaldi, & Bickham, 2012). Traditional bullying is usually site specific and students can have a respite from the abuse when they are in their home or out with their family (Tokunaga, 2010). In this
situation if a student’s parents feel the school environment is unsafe they can take their child to another school for a fresh start away from their tormentors (Wong-Lo, Bullock, & Gable, 2011). Due to advances in technology cyberbullying requires very little in the way of computer skills, can occur 24 hours a day, and many bullies perceive it to be a safe way to intimidate and harass a targeted individual (Whelan, 2011).

**Purpose of Project**

The purpose of this project is to provide guidance for students, as well as inform parents and educators about cyberbullying. Education is an important way to discourage cyberbullying among students (Wong-Lo, Bullock, & Gable, 2011). Since many students choose to be bystanders it is important that they receive information about safety strategies that include responding to and reporting cyberbullying (Agatston, Kowlaski, & Limber, 2007; Qing, 2005). Old approaches to bullying need to be expanded, if a child moves to another school the cyberbully can follow them electronically, as a result there is no safe haven away from cyberbullying (Slonje, Smith, & Frisen, 2013). There are several aspects of cyberbullying that are different to traditional bullying. Cyberbullies have round the clock access to their victim; twenty-four hours a day they can send harmful messages via the Internet. Another factor is the anonymous nature of Internet social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and blogs along with a lack of adult supervision when students are accessing the Internet (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Slonje, Smith, & Frisen, 2013). Cyberbullies have access to an unlimited audience for their online activities, and once inappropriate messages have been sent to the Internet they are very difficult to remove (King, 2010; Wong-Lo, Bullock, & Gable, 2011).
According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) another form of online harassment is referred to as ‘sexting’. “Sexting involves sending or receiving sexually explicit or sexually suggestive nude or semi-nude images or video, generally by cell phone” (Patchin, Schafer, & Hinduja, 2013). Sexting can transform into cyberbullying once the original image that was private between two individuals is posted on the Internet without the permission of the person in the image (Walker, Sanci, & Temple-Smith, 2011). This usually occurs when the couple experiences a “break-up” and as soon as the image is online it is available for viewing by a mass audience and the cyberbullying revolves around this private, intimate image (Katzman, 2010).

Significant emotional harm can be attributed to cyberbullying because of the way students connect to each other through social media websites.

“Online intimidation might be particularly distressing, inasmuch as youth are likely to confront cyberbullying incidents alone at home. Moreover, youth may be especially reluctant to tell adults about incidents confronted online if they are concerned about parents restricting their use of these increasingly popular forms of social contact.” (Juvonen & Gross, 2008, p.3)

When cyberbullying escalates to continuous malicious acts it can lead to depression, loneliness, and in some cases, suicide (Whelan, 2011). The Centers for Disease Control (2013) have issued a report noting the link between cyberbullying and suicide. The first case to have received national media attention occurred in 2006 (King, 2010). Missouri teenager Megan Meir was involved with an online relationship on MySpace supposedly with a boy, Josh Evans. After a series of aggressive messages Josh posted “the world would be a better place without you”, after which Megan hung herself in the closet. The
police investigation linked the suicide to cyberbullying; unfortunately the perpetrator was the mother of one of Megan’s girlfriends, who was pretending to be a teenage boy (Tokunaga, 2010). Since that time, emotional problems due to cyberbullying have been researched regarding the amount of cyberbullying students have experienced. Unfortunately this research has not reduced the number of youth suicides linked to cyberbullying, but it has shown that cyberbullying is an accepted part of life for students.

Advances in technology have reduced the cost of smart phones allowing more students instant access to the Internet (Beran, Rinaldi, & Bickham, 2012). The cell phone has become an intrinsic element of youth culture as it is the major form of communication and social interaction (Qing, 2007). Young people tend to be technologically savvy and capable of moving from one virtual platform to another with ease. These changes in technology are creating difficulties for school administrators and law enforcement. Laws are slowly changing to include electronic harassment, however legislators are struggling between the need to protect victims and the First Amendment Rights of Minors, as well as the Fourteenth Amendment Rights of Parents (Williams, 2012). This project will provide a handbook that focuses on strategies to combat cyberbullying in all its forms.

**Preview Literature**

Research has shown that students believe adults cannot help them with cyberbullying problems (Feinburg & Robey, 2009). However, despite this perception educators can help reduce cyberbullying in today’s youth. Schools need to address ways to prevent cyberbullying. Teachers and administrators should be educated about the
psychological impact of cyberbullying because it can affect a student’s academic performance and health (Gamez-Guadix et al., 2013). Support needs to be provided to students who report cyberbullying, and every report of cyberbullying should be investigated (Qing, 2007). School officials should contact law enforcement if there is a perceived threat of violence, or a student is considering suicide (Feinberg & Robey, 2009). Education about cyberbullying is an important step towards helping students, both perpetrators and victims, understand the outcomes that can occur from this form of online aggression. Students need to be taught “online etiquette” and strategies for removing the cyberbully from their digital experiences (Feinberg & Robey, 2009). Education is the key to helping students cope with this relatively new phenomenon of cyber-aggression (Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009). Current and future students live in a digital age, and educators need to be prepared to make anti-cyberbullying curriculum an integral part of a student’s learning (Grigg, 2010).

How can educators convince students that online harassment is a form of bullying? Victims of cyberbullying feel isolated and have a tendency to become hypervigilant about their safety and emotional well-being (Feinburg & Robey, 2009). This occurs because the victim is unsure of the identity of the cyberbully and how many other people are involved. Each person they interact with at school could be part of the online harassment, or a voyeur. Perpetrators often believe that they are not involved with anything harmful, or are retaliating in defense of a friend. This perception occurs because of the anonymous nature of cyberbullying and the fact that the perpetrator does not see the effect of their harassment on the victim (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Adolescence is a time for building a personal identity away from close family members, and peer pressure
can escalate the harassment of a victim as they are at a vulnerable stage of their development (Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009). Educators need to be involved with changing the perception of cyberbullying from one of harmless social interaction, to one of malice and intolerance.

**Preview of Methodology**

The Project Handbook will address three major areas: social justice and tolerance for others, cyberbullying prevention and digital safety, and the relationship between digital citizenship and the law. The handbook will consist of a series of strategies designed for teachers to present students and for school administrators to present to parents. Strategies and information selected for inclusion in this project were chosen to raise awareness of the negative effects of cyberbullying along with best practices for coping with digital aggression.

**Significance of Project**

Can strategies be taught to help students effectively deal with cyberbullying? Cyberbullying requires a multidisciplinary approach, as modifying traditional anti-bullying programs does not appear to have any effect on reducing this form of harassment (Whelan, 2011). While traditional bullying and cyberbullying are linked through the negative impact of a bully on a victim, extending the strategies to combat online aggression is needed (Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009) as adolescents spend more and more of their lives in virtual platforms. Schools need to provide classroom lessons on digital citizenship and social justice. Students should be taught how to protect themselves from cyber aggression (Qing, 2007). The administration should educate students and parents about the current laws regarding all forms of cyberbullying. If schools create a
positive environment along with specific strategies that target cyberbullying, students might be more likely to report a problem (Whelan, 2011).

Summary of Chapter

Cyberbullying is an experience that all students would like to avoid. Educating our students about the dangers of cyberbullying and how to combat it is essential to raising healthy, well-adjusted children. Teachers and parents need to help students navigate the digital world without causing harm, or being harmed by cyber-aggression. Technology is a wonderful resource for connecting with others and learning new information (Greenblatt, 2010). Schools are using the positive side of the Internet to help educate children; however adults have largely ignored the negative aspects of digital life (Qing, 2007). Research is building on the amount and type of cyberbullying that students are exposed to as well as on ways to combat this phenomenon (Gamez-Guadix, Orue, Smith, & Calvete, 2012; Kowlaski & Limber, 2007; Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009; Patchin, 2013). Despite the newness of the research, educators agree that students need to be taught how to be good digital citizens.

Definition of Terms

Cyberbullying: Refers to any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicate hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others. It does not include any negative physical interaction between the bully and victim.

Cyberaggression: Refers to intentional harm delivered by the use of electronic means to a person or group of people irrespective of their age, who perceive such acts as offensive,
derogatory, harmful or unwanted. These behaviors include bullying, harassment, stalking, abuse, assault or hostility.

Bystander: Refers to a person who views cyberbullying text or images and does nothing to help the victim. This also includes people who forward cyberbullying text or images to others.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The majority of youth in the United States are connected to the Internet in some way: usually through laptops, iPads, cell phones, and gaming systems (Greenblatt, 2010). While this use of technology has many positive outcomes, it has now led to a host of negative victimization actions that effect the psychosocial and academic areas of students lives (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Tokunaga, 2010; Wong Lo, Bullock, & Gable, 2011). Cyberbullying is a term that encompasses online bullying, electronic bullying with images, and Internet harassment that occurs repeatedly with the objective of causing harm (Kowalski, & Limber, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). There are two major differences between traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Traditional bullying occurs face to face, usually at or close to school and the victim knows the bully. With cyberbullying the harassment occurs twenty-four hours a day, and many times the victim does not know who is bullying them or how many people are involved (Wong-Lo et al, 2011).

Why is cyberbullying a problem?

Why is cyberbullying a problem that schools should address? Students who are exposed to cyberbullying have lower self-esteem, higher rates of depression, are often involved in risky behavior, and have problems academically. For example, “… reported academic consequences including poor concentration, low achievement, and absenteeism” (Beran, Rinaldi, & Bickham, 2012, p.6). Also, the victimization of a student can lead to suicidal thoughts in which some have already taken their own life (Bauman, Toomey, & Walker, 2013; Butler, Kift, & Campbell, 2010; Gamez-Guadix et al., 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Patchin, 2013).
**Classroom Cyberbully**

First, the initial cyberbullying of a teenager usually occurs from someone the victim knows, although many times they are not sure who started the harassment (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Mishna et al., 2009). Most victims realize that the cyberbully must know them because of the personal nature of the attacks, however due to the anonymity of the cyberbully the victim feels helpless to respond, in other words, powerless (Whelan, 2011). Even if they have a good idea who the perpetrator of the harassment is, how do they stop the aggressor from posting comments or images about them? After all, “…they can communicate harmful messages without identifying themselves, which makes it particularly difficult for victims to respond initially” (King, 2010, p.3).

**Unlimited Viewing Audience**

Technology allows the bully to send the harmful messages or images to an unlimited amount of people. What may start as a negative comment from one student to another can quickly escalate to involve large groups of aggressors adding harmful comments, and/or distributing damaging photos and videos, which have the ability to reach an unlimited viewing audience (Katzman, 2010). Consequently, social networking websites and chat rooms provide a public way for cyberbullies to humiliate their intended target (King, 2010).

**No Safe Haven**

One of the factors that make this type of bullying so damaging is the continual onslaught of negativity directed toward the victim. Twenty-four hours a day the victim can be exposed to online aggression. Many times the student is alone at home when they
are dealing with the digital attacks. The cyberbully is not face to face with the victim, which means they do not see the effect their harassment has on the victim (Gamez-Guadix et al., 2013; Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Previously, educators treated the online environment as a separate virtual world from the offline environment of the school classroom setting. It is now known that online environments are extensions of the classroom, to the point that the effects of cyberbullying are amplified beyond the initial classroom contact to include the entire school (Slonje, Smith, & Frisen, 2013). An even wider audience of mass unknown users might work as amplifiers of the intended defamation and harassment of the target, so that the cyberbullying moves from a local to an unlimited audience (Festl & Quandt, 2013). Exacerbating this problem is the difficulty of deleting or removing inappropriate images or messages from the Internet once they have been posted (stopbullying.gov, 2014).

Factors that affect Cyberbullying

**Access to Technology**

Another factor is that the technical skills required to participate in cyberaggression are very low, any student with a cell phone is able to initiate digital bullying, join a harassment group, or simply be a passive bystander (Slonje, Smith, & Frisen, 2012). All of which adds to the loneliness and alienation of the intended victim (Kraut, Patterson, & Kiesler, 2004; Sahin, 2012). With constant improvements being made to the tools available for cyberbullying, the victim receives no respite from the aggression. It can occur in school, on the way home, in their bedroom, to the point that they can receive a message anywhere (Gamez-Guadix et al., 2013). Despite research indicating that approximately 20% to 40% of teenagers report being victims of
cyberbullying: often times the parents and school officials are unaware that it is occurring
(Addington, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Tokunaga, 2010; Wong-Lo et al., 2011).
Students do not report cyberbullying for fear of making the problem worse, as well as the
perceived threat that their parents may take away their electronic devices or revoke online
privileges (Agatston et al., 2007). Another reason is their inability to prove conclusively
who the perpetrator is (Mishna et al., 2009).

**Perceived Power Imbalance by Victims**

Why is cyberbullying such an attractive option to bullies? The online bully is
enticed by the anonymity the technology platform provides, as opposed to traditional
bullying which may be viewed by teachers or support staff (Butler et al., 2010; Mishna, et
al., 2009). The cyberbully does not believe that their actions can be traced back to them,
unlike traditional bullying which usually has other students as witnesses with the
potential to report them to school administrators. Cyberbullying provides peer
involvement as other students in the school are linked to the websites where negative
comments or images can be posted (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Overall, student surveys
have shown that victims feel that there is “no safe haven” away from the cyberbullying
(Mishna et al., 2009; Slonje et al., 2012), and that they are completely powerless to stop it
(Feinburg & Robey, 2009). “Moreover, the bully’s anonymity in itself places the target at
a disadvantage and invests the bully with a measure of power over the target” (Butler, et
al., 2010). Cyberbullying can be worse in many ways than traditional bullying because
people feel emboldened to say things online that they would never say to a person’s face
since the perception of anonymity provides them a shield from the consequences of their
actions (Feinburg & Robey, 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Subsequently, adolescent
victims can become hypervigilant in their school and social environment as they feel the need to protect themselves from hurtful encounters (Feinburg & Robey, 2009). As a result teenagers can be exposed to significant emotional harm.

Lack of Direct Interaction

Another attractive aspect of cyberbullying from the bully’s perspective is the lack of physical involvement; the digital bully does not need to be big or aggressive in person. In general, cyberbullies lack empathy or remorse for their target because they are not receiving the direct feedback that is associated with traditional bullying. Studies have shown that they downplay their actions; in some cases the cyberbully may feel like the person deserves to receive these messages or images because of an offline altercation at school (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012; Slonje et al., 2012). Others feel justified in their actions, especially girls, as they are bored and for this reason, “want to have some fun” against a less socially skilled peer (Feinburg & Robey, 2009).

Cyberbullying and the Law

The first step a school can take to help reduce cyberbullying is to include policies that define cyberbullying and tie this information to policies regarding traditional bullying, sexual harassment, cell phone, and computer usage (Feinburg & Robey, 2009). If an investigation determines a student is involved with repeated online aggression, how should the school administration deal with this problem? According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2014), “Law enforcement should be contacted if threats of violence, child pornography, or sexually explicit photos/video are involved with the cyberbullying.” A study of middle school students (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012) found that only 2.7% of cyberbullying victims reported the electronic aggression to the
police. Parents, students and educators are unclear about the nature of cyberbullying laws. California has legislation on bullying which now includes cyberbullying on and/or off campus and electronic harassment (Sabella, Hinduja & Patchin, 2013).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, cyberbullying is not going away and school officials need to address the problem of digital harassment. The majority of students do not report cyberbullying attacks to adults since the general adolescent consensus is that it cannot be stopped (Bauman et al., 2013; Mishna et al., 2009). Furthermore, students do not want to report cyberbullying for fear of losing their computer and/or cell phone privileges (Mishna et al., 2009). Additionally, most students do not know who the cyberbully is, so if they make a complaint they believe that anyone who they think is involved can deny posting the offending material. Another reason for not telling adults is the fear that it could make the problem worse through the cyberbully elevating the level of derogatory messages and involving a wider audience (Feinburg & Robey, 2009).

As a result of these prevalent attitudes by students, schools need to develop strategies and have a concrete plan for helping teenagers navigate the issues surrounding cyberbullying. A positive school environment and empathy for others can be enhanced through social justice curriculum, along with teaching students how to be good digital citizens is essential to helping reduce the incidence of cyberbullying in a school population (Feinburg & Robey, 2009). Equally important is the need for schools to incorporate cyberbullying into all relevant school policies with the necessary procedures for intervening in an appropriate manner. Also, students should be kept up to date with current laws regarding cyberbullying and to understand that there can be repercussions
from their Internet actions (King, 2010). In the final analysis, there is a need for digital citizenship education in schools that also addresses how to combat cyberbullying. In the next chapter the outline for producing a Anti-Cyberbullying Handbook that focuses on digital citizenship is to be discussed. The handbook will provide guidance to students and parents through strategies that empower students to deal effectively with cyberbullying.
Chapter Three: Methodology

In the last decade the term cyberbullying has entered the national consciousness (Slonje, Smith, & Frisen, 2012). Cyberbullying is an extension of traditional bullying that is being experienced by an increasing number of middle and high school students around the world (Beran, Rinaldi, & Bickham, 2012). In the past cyberbullying was ignored by schools, as it was perceived as a problem that occurred outside the school boundaries. Research from the last decade has shown that cyberbullying usually begins from classroom interactions (Agatston et al., 2007; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Mishna et al., 2009; Tokunaga, 2010). Ramifications to students from cyberbullying include self-esteem issues, hypervigilance about personal and emotional safety, lower grades, and absences from school. “Students do not see the school district personnel as helpful resources when dealing with cyberbullying” (Agatston et al., 2007). Most online aggression goes unreported, as students perceive that adults don’t understand the problem and prefer to ignore it (Mishna et al., 2009; Slonje et al., 2012).

Many forms of cyberbullying are occurring currently and research has shown that students are victims of this form of online abuse (Agatston et al., 2007; Bauman et al., 2013; Beran et al., 2012; Festl & Quandt, 2013; Gamex-Gaudix et al., 2013; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Sahin, 2012). The purpose of this project is to provide a guide to the prevention and reduction of cyberbullying by developing a handbook that is to be used by students, parents and educators to help negate the detrimental effects of cyberaggresssion. “Not many intervention or prevention programs exist that deal specifically with cyberbullying” (Slonje et al., 2012). Cyberbullying affects victims psychologically, emotionally, socially and academically, which can have a major impact
on the student’s future (Wong-Lo et al., 2011). Chapter three will explain the design of the project and the steps that were taken in its creation, including the resources used.

Handbook Design

A cyberbullying handbook was created for this project consisting of a series of strategies that explain how to protect a digital footprint and prevent cyberaggression. The target audiences for this project were high school students, their parents, teachers, and school administrators. A handbook guide for these groups was created in two separate units. Within the first unit of the handbook, workshops explain how students can prevent cyberbullying, as well as participate in a series of workshop lessons that have been designed to hinder digital aggression through the promotion of social justice. Individual workshops were designed for use by high school teachers and their administration. The first section of the handbook is intended as a resource that teachers present to high school students. Section two of the handbook is a guide for parents and administrators to use to help students combat cyberbullying.

This project was designed as a guide to best practices for facilitating the prevention and/or reduction of cyberbullying at the high school level. Its design is similar to materials provided by school districts in that it was easy to navigate through the division of sections for each target audience. As a result this handbook is a whole school guide to combating cyberbullying: by teachers, administrators, students, and parents.
Intended Audience

This handbook is intended for use by high school teachers who teach grade nine through twelve. Teachers who use this handbook can integrate it into their curriculum through social justice issues and digital citizenship. Teachers can share this handbook with their students. Another intended audience was school administrators and parents, as the handbook provides administrators with methods for demonstrating how parents can help their child combat cyberbullying.

Resources

Various researchers on cyberbullying have created informational lists on ways to prevent cyberbullying from occurring. In particular, Hindjura and Patchin author a cyberbullying website that was an excellent resource for this project. Another informational resource on reducing the effectiveness of cyberbullies is the Centers for Disease Control. All informational websites are included in handbook so that teachers, administrators, and parents have access these resources.

Instrument

A handbook was developed that could be downloaded from its electronic format into a hardcopy that can easily be reproduced. The table of contents for the handbook identifies the sections for each intended audience. Within each section of the table of contents are the activities and strategies to be used, which allows the reader to move directly to the desired section of the handbook.

Handbook Creation

To begin this research, I first reviewed the literature on cyberbullying and established a need for a logical course of action against this relatively new form of
bullying. For this project, two templates were used to create the strategies against cyberbullying. Chapter One of the handbook has strategies that provide step-by-step instructions on actions that will protect students from cyberbullying. Within Chapter One are a series of activities that feature how students can protect themselves from cyberbullying. Chapter Two focuses on cyberbullying laws and the impact it can have on student’s lives. Chapter Three provides parents with a series of guidelines to help their children deal with cyberbullies. While Chapter Four focuses on administrators imparting information to parents through the handbook, so they can assist their child if the issue of cyberbullying confronts them. The two major steps in the procedure of creating this handbook plan included content and design.

**Content**

Content for this handbook was selected from various governmental websites and peer reviewed articles on cyberbullying. Cyberbullying laws for California were included in simplified language that teenagers could understand. Also, I was interested in providing direction for adults dealing with the issue of cyberbullying that has begun between students.

**Design**

The handbook is divided into two categories; one is a series of informational strategies that students can use to protect their digital footprint and includes the necessary steps to stop a cyberbully. Teachers use the handbook as a guide for explanations about how students can monitor and protect their digital footprint. The second category targets administrators by providing information to pass on to parents about protecting their child from cyberbullying and the ramifications of California law.
After the digital topics were established, they were placed in a scaffolding sequence.
Each section was written in detail to include the information researchers deemed necessary to help prevent cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). Also, the handbook template was modeled after a template that I received from a fellow teacher in the Masters program at CSUSM (Newman, R, personal electronic correspondence, 2014).

While reviewing the key elements for a useful handbook I decided what to include, presented the information in a concise manner, and ensured that the choice of information was drawn from reviewing current literature. Overall, I determined that the content of the handbook was consistent with the purpose of the project.

**Conclusion**

This methodology chapter explained the process that was used to design the cyberbullying handbook. The intended audience and design for this project was discussed, along with the resources that facilitated the compilation of the handbook. I hope with this project that teachers and administrators use this tool to combat the growing problem of cyberbullying in our high schools. “Schools should include cyber bullying as part of their bullying prevention strategies and include classroom lessons that address reporting and bystander behavior” (Agatston et al., 2007). The pivotal goal of this project was to create a user-friendly handbook with specific activities and strategies aimed at helping students, teachers, parents and administrators’ combat cyberbullying. Furthermore, it is important that students understand the consequences of negative personal information found in their own digital footprint. Hence the following chapter will focus on the strategies and information located in the cyberbullying handbook.
Chapter Four: Project

Cyberbullying Handbook

A guide to cyberbullying prevention
Leanne Sloman

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Introduction

Chapter 1: Student Guide
Introduction

Technology has changed the way students interact with each other. The perceived anonymous nature of many social media websites has emboldened students to target their peers with negative, hurtful text and images.
Research has shown that cyberbullying usually begins from social interaction between students at school. This handbook is designed to help high school students, teachers, parents, and administrators effectively deal with cyberbullying. Students need to learn how to protect themselves from cyberbullies and to understand ramifications of choosing to participate in cyberbullying. Even in the digital world, students’ actions have consequences; words can wound. Education is the key to cyberbullying prevention, and reading this handbook is the first step on that journey.

Chapter One

A students’ guide to cyberbullying prevention
Digital Protection

1A. Password Protection

Make your password a mixture of letters, numbers, and punctuation marks.
Your password should be 8 or more characters in length.
Do not use a word or numbers that can be easily decoded.
If friends know your password now, change it immediately.
Do not store passwords anywhere on your computer/cell phone for convenience.

NEVER SHARE YOUR PASSWORD
2. Log Out
Make sure that every time you log in to your account, you log out when moving to another task.
- Do not provide anyone the opportunity to impersonate you. You are responsible for all information (text and image) released from your accounts; including Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, online video games, email, cell phone number, and any other site where you or your parents have an account.

NEVER LEAVE YOUR CELLPHONE OR LAPTOP UNATTENDED.

3. Unidentified or Unsolicited Messages/Images
Never open any message or image sent to you if you do not know the sender. Unidentified messages could contain viruses that will automatically infiltrate your devices. Computer viruses have the ability to highjack your devices and any information they contain.
DELETE THESE TEXTS/IMAGES WITHOUT VIEWING THEM.

4. Search your name regularly
Look for any personal information about yourself that may cause problems.
Make sure to search all the major search engines for your name on a regular basis. For example: Google, Yahoo, Bing and any others you can think of. Remember colleges and employers regularly do searches of people they are interested in having join their academic community or business. TAKE STEPS TO REMOVE ANY PROBLEMATIC MATERIAL AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

5. **Privacy on Social Networking Websites**

Remember to configure your privacy controls on all social networking websites. Without these controls, your images and personal messages can be stolen.

Update your privacy controls on a regular basis. Read all alerts from your website providers. While privacy setting are very important, remember once an image or text is posted on the Internet, it is possible a diligent hacker may compromise the website you are using at some future date.

NO WEBSITE IS 100% SAFE FROM A CYBER-ATTACK.
How to Respond to Cyberbullying

1. Stop!

After receiving an unwanted message or image, disengage from the technology. Walk away from the device and do something you enjoy for a few minutes. If the message is sent from someone you trust, talk to him or her in person (It may be a miscommunication, which often happens online). If the sender is unknown, then ignore it. Do not fuel the flames. The sender is trying to get a reaction from you. In many instances, the sender will move to another target if they do not receive a response.

DO NOT RESPOND TO THE MESSAGE ONLINE.

2. Block!

If the cyberbully persists in sending more messages, then block that person from your cell phone, social website, or online video game. If you do not
know how to do this, then ask a trusted adult. Another way is to contact your network provider and ask for help or look the information up online. Be specific in the type of device you are using.
It is hard to cyberbully someone they can’t connect with.

ALWAYS BLOCK A CYBERBULLY

3. Tell!
Talk to a person you trust and let them know what is happening. If you are feeling overwhelmed, then make sure your parents or a teacher/counselor have been given information about the cyberbullying.
You are not alone; many students are cyberbullied by their peers.

* If you are not comfortable talking with an adult, then go to www.teenangels.org for advice. Click on the ‘wiredsafety’ tab, then scroll down the ‘need help’ tab, go to the section to report cyberabuse (yellow bar), and email a trained teenangel about your problem. These teenage volunteers have received cybersafety training for two years before volunteering on this website.
NEVER REMAIN SILENT, TALK TO SOMEONE YOU TRUST.

4. Make a Plan
Print hardcopies of all messages and images sent to you.
Do not retaliate. It can make it hard for an adult to understand who is the original instigator.
If the cyberbullying increases, then you must talk to an adult, especially if more than one person is involved or the cyberattacks are non-stop.
If the cyberbullying is occurring on blogs or forums, take screen shots of the offending material.
Show your hardcopies to a trusted adult, ask for advice.
ALL MESSAGES CAN BE TRACED BACK TO THE SENDER.
1. Protect Your Private Information

Your personal information such as name, age, address, or phone number should not be shared on the Internet. It can be used for identity theft or by predatory adults. Do not share information online that has the potential to embarrass you. Any personal information you share online is only a click away from being forwarded. Information can be shared at an exponential rate (go viral).

NOTHING ONLINE IS PRIVATE

2. Write in a clear manner

Make sure what you are writing is not going to be misunderstood by the reader. Use emoji’s to help express your meaning. Stop and reread your text or post before you click the send button. Ask yourself if you would be OK receiving this message? Would your close family members be offended or hurt by the message you are about to send?

BE CONSIDERATE OF OTHERS
3. Do Not Cyberbully

Sometimes students react to a classroom interaction by attacking the person online. It is never appropriate to send hurtful text or images.

If you forward an inappropriate text or image, then you are considered a bystander who is involved with cyberbullying.

If you join with others to send hurtful or cruel messages to an individual, then you are considered a cyberbully, even if it is in defense of a friend. If you cannot say your message in person, then stop!

All online posts, texts, and images can be traced back to the source. Cyberbullying can have unintended consequences for the victim and the bully.

Making threats online can have serious consequences for the sender, especially if law enforcement becomes involved.

THINK BEFORE YOU PRESS SEND

4. Sexting
Once an image has been sent electronically, it is no longer private. Use the following as a personal test: if you feel uncomfortable with the idea of showing the image to your family, stop and delete it.

Many private, inappropriate images are sent with the intent that they remain private between two individuals; however, this rarely happens. Always assume that at some point in the future that image will be shared with others. Sending an image that is not appropriate provides that person with a way to hurt you if you have a disagreement.

Sexting can turn into cyberbullying when the individuals who shared images have a disagreement or in many cases stop dating. Once an image is shared it is almost impossible to remove it from the Internet. Sexting is considered a form of child pornography if the person in the image is less than 18 years of age. EXPECT THE IMAGE TO BE SHARED AND VIEWED BY MANY PEOPLE.
5. **Be Smart and Keep Safe**

Be alert to ‘grooming’. When a stranger is very friendly, understanding, funny, and seems to be easy to relate to, beware! People can be completely different in person than they are online, especially if they are trying to establish an inappropriate relationship with you. Tell a trusted adult immediately.

If it seems too good to be true, then it probably is an Internet scam. Do not click on unsolicited emails or messages for you will be exposing your device to hacking. Tell a trusted adult and let them view the message. They can decide if law enforcement should be contacted.

Report any cyberbullying to the website provider. Reputable websites will block offenders. Do not use websites that have omitted a way to report cyberbullies. If you are receiving unwanted texts, then report this information to your cell phone provider. They will block that number from your cellphone.

SEEK HELP FROM SOMEONE YOU TRUST
CHAPTER TWO

Cyberbullying Laws

California Law

2A

1. Education Code

   In 2008, the California Department of Education changed the Bullying Laws to include Cyberbullying.
According to California Education Code 32261 a student may not engage in an act of bullying, including, but not limited to, to bullying committed by means of an electronic act directed specifically against a student or school personnel.

The ‘electronic act’ means the transmission of communication, including, but not limited to, a message, text, sound or image by means of an electronic device, including, but not limited to, a telephone, wireless telephone, or other wireless communication device, computer, or pager.

School officials can also suspend or recommend a pupil for expulsion for bullying, including, but not limited to, bullying by an electronic act.

2. **School Policy**

According to California Education Code 2324.1 schools are required to have a policy regarding harassment, which includes cyberbullying.
Every incident of cyberbullying reported to administration must be taken seriously and documented.

3. **Cyberbullying can be a Hate Crime**
   Cyberbullying can also be considered a hate crime if it fits the discrimination parameters. Students may not be harassed electronically due to gender, sexual orientation, disability, nationality, race or ethnicity, and religion. There can be serious legal consequences for breaking this rule.

4. **Bystanders can be Disciplined**
   Students are also prohibited from perpetuating bullying or harassing conduct by spreading hurtful or demeaning material even if the material was created by another person (forwarding offensive emails or text messages).

5. **Discipline Policy for Cyberbullying**
   Schools can discipline students who participate in cyberbullying according to the local School Board policy on bullying. These
can be located in the student handbook provided by your school. Schools have jurisdiction over off-campus behavior if it creates a hostile school environment.

6. Put simply...

A student can be disciplined for cyberbullying, or for being a bystander (forwarding harmful messages).

A student can be disciplined even if the cyberbullying occurred off-campus.

Students should read the student handbook each year to familiarize themselves with the school policy on cyberbullying.

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**Reporting Cyberbullying**

2B

1. First Steps To Take
   Document and report the cyberbullying behavior as soon as possible.
Do not respond to or forward any cyberbullying messages. Save screen shots, emails, and text messages. Keep hardcopy evidence of cyberbullying.

2. Online Service Providers
   Report the cyberbullying problem immediately.

   Take hardcopy evidence to the cell phone service provider. Report the cyberbullying to the social media website. Review terms and conditions of use, or the rights and responsibility sections as these will tell you what content is accepted at the website. The cyberbully may be breaking the contract.

3. Reporting to Schools
   Discuss the cyberbullying with a teacher, counselor, or administrator. Bring hardcopy evidence to show cyberbullying.
Document the problem. Do not delete emails and texts until they have been reviewed and documented by an adult.

4. Reporting to Law Enforcement
Cyberbullying is to be reported to law enforcement when it involves one of the following:

- Threats of violence
- Child Pornography (inappropriate images of an individual less than 18 years of age).
- Taking a photo or video of an individual in a private area (for example, school locker rooms).

6. Sexting and the Law
Law enforcement considers sexting a form of child pornography according to California Penal Code, Section 311. If you distribute or possess an image that shows a person under the age of 18 years engaging in or personally simulating sexual
conduct and are tried as an adult, then you can be convicted as a sex offender and be given a maximum of 6 years imprisonment. As a bystander (who forwards images) you can be convicted of sexual exploitation of a child and be punished with a fine of no more than $2000, and/or one year in jail.

SEXTING IS A FELONY IN CALIFORNIA

Chapter Three

Parent Guide
Digital Protection for your Child

1. **Educate yourself**
   Start by keeping up with the technology your teenager is using. You need to know how to operate all the devices in your house, including your teenager’s cell phone. DON’T BE A TECHNOPHOBE

2. **Monitor Your Teenager**
   Ask your teenager what websites they visit, then look them up for yourself. Talk frequently
to your teenager about their online life. Respect your teenager’s privacy, but make them aware that you might monitor their online life and communications if you feel concerned. Insist on a list of all passwords used by your teenager to be used in an emergency. Remember to update the list on a regular basis. Consider using filtering (to block inappropriate websites) or monitoring software.

Ask your teenager to confide in you if they are experiencing online problems. Stress that they will not lose their Internet privileges or cell phones. If your child does confide in you, it is important to remain calm and not take away their Internet access.

KNOW ABOUT YOUR TEENAGER’S ONLINE LIFE.
3. **Teach Your Teenager**

Remind your teenager not to put personal information online and to make sure all images are appropriate. Draft a list together of what information should be excluded from the Internet (e.g. home address, phone numbers, school, and age).

Set clear expectations for responsible online behavior and ‘netiquette’. This should include all cell phone transmissions. Carefully explain the laws on sexting and your expectations.

Provide boundaries for your teenager and set consequences for not adhering to an online code of behavior. Be aware that the code of conduct should also extend to any computer your teenager uses, whether at a friend’s house, school, or at a public library.
Encourage your child to think about who will be viewing their online text and images. Everyone leaves a digital footprint, and it is almost impossible to remove information or images from the Internet. If a college or employer looks at their digital footprint, what impressions will they form about them?

TEACH ‘NETIQUETTE’

**Warning Signs Of Cyberbullying**

3B

1. Your son or daughter may become withdrawn and reluctant to go to school.

2. Your child may become hyper-vigilant over viewing texts and certain websites, or they may suddenly start ignoring texts and stay away from websites they normally visit.

TALK TO YOUR TEEN
Response to Cyberbullying

1. Make hardcopies of all inappropriate messages and images. Remind your teenager to not respond online to the cyberbullying.

2. Report cyberbullying to your teenager’s school. If threats of violence occur, then report the cyberbullying to Law Enforcement.

3. File a compliant with the website or cellphone provider. Look at their terms of use and privacy policies as the cyberbully may be infringing on the company’s policies.

4. Pay attention to your teenager’s online messages; be alert to the possibility that he or she may be
cyberbullying others, even if unintentionally. Sending repeated negative messages is considered cyberbullying, even if it is in defense of a friend. Explain the consequences of hurtful messages.

BE ATTENTIVE TO YOUR TEENAGER’S ONLINE LIFE

Chapter Four

Educator’s Guide
Digital Protection in the Classroom 4A

1. Teach

Make sure students understand what constitutes cyberbullying. Many students believe that if they are defending a friend or stating their opinion, it is not cyberbullying. Explain to students that if negative messages or images are repeatedly sent to an individual, it is an act of cyberbullying. Forwarding negative messages and images also constitutes cyberbullying; therefore, students need to understand the bystander rules. Students need to be familiar with the school rules on cyberbullying so that they understand the consequences of their actions.
Cyberbullying off campus on private devices is still breaking the school rules and offenders can be disciplined.

2. Post the Rules
Have signs in classrooms that state the rules regarding school digital policies. Rules should be written in a clear, concise manner that reminds students about the use of technology in and out of the classroom. Review these rules with the students at the start of each semester.

2. School Climate
Work towards creating a positive climate in the classroom where differences between individuals are accepted. Integrate tolerance of others and cyberbullying prevention into the curriculum. A positive school climate reduces the incidence of
cyberbullying. Encourage peer mentoring of isolated students.

PROMOTE PREVENTION

TERMINOLOGY

Cyberbullying: refers to any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicate hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others.

Bystander: refers to a person who forwards negative or hostile messages or images.

ONLINE RESOURCES

www.cyberbullying.us
www.olweus.org
www.stopbullying.org
www.teenangels.org
Chapter 5 Conclusion

Over the past decade, technology has altered the way teens and pre-teens interact with one another. Along with the benefits that technology brings, there are also drawbacks like cyberbullying and peer isolation. Some of the aftermath of cyberbullying is reduced academic achievement, absence from school, hypervigilance, and in dire cases, suicide. Ultimately educators need to understand cyberbullying and create positive school environments. As stated by Dedousis-Wallace, Shute, Varlow, Murrihy, & Kidman (2013), “education about indirect bullying may be most effective if it focuses on feelings rather than facts, and provides practical intervention strategies.” Acknowledgement that cyberbullying is an issue that needs to be addressed by educators is the first step in helping students involved in this form of aggressive behavior.

The project discussed in previous chapters addresses techniques to reduce cyberbullying of teenagers and ways for them to protect themselves from cyber-attacks. It provides relevant information on this form of electronic bullying for teenagers, parents, and teachers. The project also included information on current cyberbullying laws. This chapter will discuss the project implementation, lessons learned, educational implications, limitations of the project, and future research.
**Project Implementation Plans**

I intend to show the cyberbullying handbook to my principal and request it be given to my students via the school website. I would provide access to the advisors of various clubs within the school and ask if they would like to present this handbook to their club members. Also, I will turn the handbook into a slideshow of my pages and upload the cyberbullying slideshow video onto You-tube, which will allow free access for all interested parties. I will provide the hyperlink to the cyberbullying handbook for parents in the school district where I will be teaching. The cyberbullying handbook will be available for download if interested people would like to print a hardcopy.

**Educational Implications**

Student safety should be a top priority of all schools, and this handbook has the goal of helping students, parents, and teachers’ deal with cyberbullying. Publishing this handbook on the Internet will allow a greater number of students, parents, and teachers’ access to information about cyberbullying and its subsequent laws. Programs that educate about cyberbullying can influence the school environment in a positive way. Schools must make every effort to connect with their students, so that teenagers can handle the emotional stress of being cyberbullied. According to Williams (2012), “parents and schools are among the most influential figures in teen lives.” It is the schools’ and parents’ responsibility to educate students about the methods for preventing or reducing
cyberbullying, as teenagers can be emotionally damaged due to the harmful effects of this form of bullying.

Lessons Learned

One lesson I have learned from the literature review is that the problem of cyberbullying is much more complex than I originally thought. Sometimes the cyberbully is a student who has been harassed and bullied in real life, and they can transfer from victim to cyberbully, so that students who start as victims can end up as online bullies. Cyberbullying is a very complex issue that usually begins as an interaction between two students and quickly escalates to include other members of the school population. It can even move beyond the school as bystanders become involved and forward the hostile, negative images and texts. Students can feel isolated and fearful for their own safety when being a target of cyberbullying, due to the non-stop anonymous nature of the messages they are receiving.

Another lesson I have learned is that information about cyberbullying prevention is not in one easy location on the Internet. Applying the information I have gathered from the Internet and various other sources into a compact handbook that is easy to read and understand was a challenge, which made me aware of how difficult it would be for teenagers to access relevant and accurate information on this subject.

Furthermore, I have learned that teenagers often do not think that the messages they are sending are a form of indirect bullying. By reading the handbook, I hope that teenagers will realize what actions constitute cyberbullying. By establishing a guide to cyberbullying laws, students can easily reference the handbook to make themselves aware of the dangers of non-compliance. As more students become educated about the
impact cyberbullying has on others, as well as the ramifications of being identified as a cyberbully, I anticipate that students will think a little harder before they press the send button.

**Project Suggestions**

As technology changes and expands in students’ and staffs’ lives, the project can be adapted to accommodate new technology. Another aspect of cyberbullying that is subject to change is the way schools relate to law enforcement on this issue, as the laws on cyberbullying are evolving.

“In response to the public’s outcry for action, legislators across the nation are drafting laws that criminalize both sexting and cyberbullying. Many of these laws, however, have been met with opposition because of their infringement of the First Amendment right of minors to exercise freedom of expression and the Fourteenth Amendment right of parents to direct the upbringing of their children.”

(Williams, 2012)

Therefore, recommendations about how to deal with cyberbullying with regard to the law need to be fluid and adaptable. As the laws on cyberbullying change, the handbook will need to be altered to reflect any new laws.
Limitations of Project

The handbook is designed for teaching high school students. Some editing of material would be required if middle school students were to use it. Since I did not complete my own student questionnaires on cyberbullying in high school, I have needed to rely upon research conducted by others. Technology changes so rapidly that my handbook only reflects adult’s current knowledge, as teenagers are reluctant to share their experiences on this subject. As has been observed by other researchers, cyberbullying keeps up with technological changes, and this area of student’s lives will need constant monitoring by educators and parents. If I had been teaching in the classroom when I was completing the project, I would have liked to conduct my own research with students on their experiences with cyberbullying. Access to students was difficult without being employed by a school district, so I have shelved that idea for the future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this project has provided a guide for cyberbullying prevention and states the ways students can be breaking the law when they participate in this form of indirect bullying. Educating students about good digital citizenship was a priority for the project. Chapter one provided a preview of the methodology, a literature review, and introduced the purpose and significance of the project. Chapter two reviewed current literature on the subject of cyberbullying. Chapter three discussed the plan for creating the cyberbullying handbook, while chapter four was the handbook that included information on digital citizenship and Internet resources for cyberbullying issues. Chapter five reflected on the lessons I have learned, the limitations of the project, and educational
implications for the future. My intention for this project is to distribute the cyberbullying handbook to as many students, parents, and educators as possible so that cyberbullying can be reduced in teenage lives. Cyberbullying is a reality that teenagers have to deal with in high school, and education is the key to understanding how to prevent or reduce this form of indirect bullying. Creating a handbook about cyberbullying is one way to teach students about the effects of spreading negative words and images to others. Think before you send, is the message I wish to convey with this project.

References


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