

# CYBERBULLYING AND THE HARM IT GENERATES

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## THE CYBERATTACK GRID™

### METHOD AND SIZE OF ATTACK

		EMAIL sent to				WEB-BASED Attack Website or Social Networking Site number of visits			
		Target only ☒	up to 100 ☒	101 to 500 ☒	over 500 ☒	up to 100 ☒	101 to 500 ☒	501 to 1,000 ☒	over 1,000 ☒
A T T A C K  I N T E N S I T Y	100								
	90								
	80								
	70								
	60								
	50								
	40								
	30								
	20								
	10								

Note: Any threat of physical harm falls in the far right column, regardless of the method or size.

The Cyberattack Grid™ illustrates that verbal attacks delivered by email, text messages, websites and social networks are all harmful and that as the attack is spread, it becomes more harmful.

Cyberbullying is dangerous because of its method of delivery allows the attack to be delivered to wherever the target is and to spread the poison literally around the world.

When a bully uses a website to attack their target, they're making the attack available to anyone in the world who has access to the internet. The information put out into cyberspace is potentially available indefinitely.

When social networking sites are used, the bully not only spreads their poison, they enlist all their contacts to spread the poison, as well.

When a bully uses email or text messaging to attack, they invade their target's personal space — the bully can reach their target anywhere, any time. And if the message is sent to a list, everyone on that list can spread the poison by simply forwarding the message to their own list.

Instead of an attack from one bully at one time in one place, the one attack has now multiplied into many attacks. The person who's been targetted is no longer facing just one bully, but a cybermob.

By using email, websites and social networking sites, the bully effectively increases the power of his/her attack exponentially. The attacker effectively enlists the email recipients, visitors to the website(s) and networking members into their own personal attack army with very little effort compared to the number of people they enlist. Emailing and networking takes very little effort and can quickly reach thousands (depending on the recipients' lists and network affiliations). Websites take a little more work, but they stay in cyberspace for unknown long periods of time and can be accessed by anyone around the world who has a computer. That's a far greater reach than any print newspaper or magazine.

Much of the research on cyberbullying focuses on the sense of invisibility and invulnerability that attackers have and on the mechanics of cyberbullying.

In reality, attackers aren't truly invisible since they can be tracked, albeit with a lot of technical expertise and some time.

The sense of invulnerability is greater than in a "regular" bullying attack, although we shouldn't forget the surge of feeling powerful that comes along with the adrenaline rush in both cyberbullying and regular bullying.

When someone has been physically attacked — usually after verbal bullying and/or verbal cyberbullying — the attackers are prosecuted criminally, as they should be. But when someone has been attacked verbally — whether by spoken or written words — punishing the attacker seems to be more difficult, possibly because the connection between the verbal attack and the wounds those words leave are not as easily seen as the wounds left by a physical attack.

To gain a better understanding of the harm created by verbal attacks, we can take defamation as our starting point. Defamatory statements are known to be harmful statements, whether spoken (slander) or written (libel). The courts recognize that when a defamatory statement is published in a widely-circulated newspaper or magazine, the harm is increased. We have yet to come to grips with the fact that publishing harmful words and/or pictures on the web causes a lot of harm, as much as — if not more than — the harm caused by circulating such statements in a large newspaper.

There is little, if any, recognition that a cyberattack is an attack designed to alienate and isolate the target from the social group and from society. It's one thing to be the victim of gossip in your local group (whether school, university, workplace, neighbourhood). Time will usually lessen the brunt of the attack, although it won't remove it entirely. It's quite another thing to have the local group expanded in time and space by the internet, so that anyone, anywhere, at any time can access the attack, thereby reviving and refreshing it. Information on the internet never completely goes away because somewhere, in some computer, the information is cached.

Cyberbullying should be thought of as equivalent to an extreme physical attack and dealt with accordingly.

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