



# Cyber Bullying: Overview and Strategies for School Counsellors, Guidance Officers, and All School Personnel

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**C**yber bullying or bullying via information and communications technology tools such as the internet and mobile phones is a problem of growing concern with school-aged students. Cyber bullying actions may not take place on school premises, but detrimental effects are experienced by victims of cyber bullying in schools. Tools used by cyber bullies are presented and the impact on victims is discussed. Intervention strategies for school counsellors, guidance officers, and school personnel to adopt with students and parents are presented.

■ **KEYWORDS:** cyber bullying, electronic bullying, cyber bullies, school bullying, internet bullying

Alex Teka of New Zealand ended her life in 2006 at age 12. Media reports indicated that in the year before she died, she was allegedly a victim of cyber bullying, and was sent abusive and threatening e-mails and text messages by fellow students at her school. The bullying allegedly escalated after her mother complained to school authorities (Tomazin & Smith, 2007).

Chantell, age 15, was injured in a hit-and-run accident in Brisbane. She was allegedly the victim of cyber bullying via instant messaging and cell phones, initiated by a former friend after a feud over a boy. The online violence escalated into this serious physical attack which is being investigated by Brisbane police (Doneman, 2008).

In the United States, Megan Meier, ended her life in 2006, aged 13. She had engaged in an online relationship with someone she thought was a 16-year-old boy named 'Josh' on the social networking site MySpace. The profile of 'Josh' was allegedly created by the mother of a former friend of Megan's, set up with the intention of gaining Megan's trust. Just prior to Megan taking her own life, 'Josh' sent cruel and hurtful messages to her (ABC News, 2007).

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In 2003, Ryan Patrick Halligan took his life at age 13. His story, pieced together by his father after his death, and poignantly reported in a web site set up by his parents in his memory (Ryan Patrick Halligan, n.d.), outlines some of the challenges Ryan faced in the months leading up to his death; among them, rumours that he was gay, sexual advances made online by a 'boy' whose identity was unknown, encouragement and support for suicidal ideation, and support followed by rejection from a female classmate. Many of these interactions were conducted via instant messaging. All of the incidents described above highlight the pernicious nature of the misuse of information and communications technology (ICT), referred to as cyber bullying.

Cyber bullying involves the use of ICT to intimidate, harass, victimise, or bully an individual or a group of individuals. It has been defined as 'the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others'. (Belsey, n.d., p. 8). Cyber bullying may include sending or posting harmful material or using digital technology to inflict social cruelty on victims (Willard, 2006). Forms of digital communication that may be used as bullying tools include: email, instant messaging, social networking sites, chat rooms, web sites, blogs, and text messages, pictures, or video clips via mobile phones. Cyber bullying involves sending or posting harmful or cruel text or images using the internet or other digital communication devices (CSRIU, n.d.). The intent of cyber bullying actions is to threaten, harm, humiliate, and engender fear and helplessness in the victim (Strom & Strom, 2005). Cyber bullying or the use of technology to harm others has been referred to as the 'dark side' of technology (Campbell, 2005).

Bullying continues to be an issue of concern for students in schools around the world. With the increasing use of digital communication by students in schools, cyber bullying, a type of bullying, is on the rise. In 1997, a survey in Australia of more than 38,000 students between the ages of 7 years and 17 years reported that approximately one child in six was bullied by peers each week in Australian schools (Rigby, 1997). A study conducted in 2004 by the National Coalition Against Bullying (NCAB) and the teen magazine *Girlfriend*, examined the incidence of cyber bullying. Results indicated that of the 13,000 Australian girls who participated, 42% reported being intimidated or denigrated online or by mobile phones (as cited in Tomazin & Smith, 2007). With greater numbers of Australians using the internet every day, the potential for cyber bullying to continue to rise is of concern.

According to Internet World Stats, as of December 31, 2007, there were 1,319,872,109 internet users in the world (Internet World Stats, 2008a). The United States was first on the list of the top 20 countries with the highest number of Internet users. Other countries in the list of top five for the highest number of internet users were China, Japan, Germany and India. Internet usage increased by 265.6% from 2000 to 2007 (Internet World Stats). Australia had 15,504,532 internet users as of December 2007, with 75.9% of the population using the internet (Internet World Stats, 2008b). This placed Australia in the 18th rank among the top 20 countries with the highest internet usage. New Zealand reportedly had 74.9% of its population using the internet (Internet World Stats, 2007b).

Between 2001 and 2006, the number of Australian homes that had access to the internet increased from 35% to 63%. In 2006 to 2007, 64% of Australian house-

holds had home Internet access and 73% had access to a home computer (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). The Australian CensusAtSchool reported that of the 60,509 school girls who responded to their survey, 52,396 reported having access to the internet at home; of the 51,664 school boys who participated, 44,304 reported to having access to the Internet at home (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006).

The problem of bullying is one that has received significant attention in professional counselling literature. This literature is now being supplemented by investigations into cyber bullying. An action is considered to be bullying when: (1) the person being bullied is harmed by the physical, verbal or social/emotional tactics employed by the bully, (2) there is a power imbalance or unfair match between the bully and the victim, that is, the bully is perceived to be either physically stronger or more verbally or socially skilled than his or her victims, and (3) the harmful actions are repeated over time (Hazler, 1996). Bullying with the additional aspect of cyber bullying includes a fourth component: the bullying actions take place face to face or via cyberspace, using ICT such as the Internet or mobile phones.

There is limited empirical work focused specifically on the psychosocial impact on victims of cyber bullying. Ybarra (2004) reported that youth who reported depressive symptoms were significantly more likely to report experiencing internet harassment. There is more extensive research on the psychosocial impact of bullying on victims. It is plausible that victims of cyber bullying and bullying would experience similar negative effects (Fleming, Greentree, Cocotti-Muller, Elias, & Morrison, 2006). Victims of cyber bullying do not feel that they have any safe haven or sanctuary. With traditional bullying, once a target was in their home they were usually safe from the actions of the bully. But ICT can easily penetrate homes via the internet, mobile phones, and pager systems (Strom & Strom, 2005).

In their meta-analytical review of studies focusing on peer victimisation and psychosocial maladjustment, Hawker and Boulton (2000) reported significant effect sizes for depression, loneliness, low social and low global or general self-esteem, and anxiety. Rigby (2005) noted that children who are bullied were more likely than others to 'experience comparatively low levels of mental health' (p. 204), including lower self-esteem and social adjustment, and higher levels of psychological distress such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. Rigby also indicated that bullies were likely to be a risk for higher levels of depression and suicidal ideation. Unlike more overt forms of bullying, cyber bullying can often go undetected unless the victim turns to someone for help. Thus negative effects associated with cyber bullying could also be undetected.

In addition to psychosocial effects of peer victimisation, school counsellors/guidance officers/school personnel and parents/caregivers must also consider effects that manifest in the physical health and academic performance of students. Nishina, Juvonen, and Witkow (2005) noted that when victims of bullies internalise feelings of depression, anxiety, and loneliness resulting from victimisation experiences, they are likely to disengage from school and consequently their academic performance suffers. Victims may be more susceptible to illness due to the increased levels of cortisol combined with suppressed immune system functioning and reduced powers of concentration according to Hazler, Carney, and Granger (2006), who researched the physiological effects of bullying. Ybarra, Diener-West, and Leaf (2007) reported

that youth who were harassed online were also more likely to report two or more detentions or skipping school in the previous year. Of particular concern, was the finding that such youth were eight times more likely than all other youth to also report carrying a weapon to school in the past 30 days (Ybaraa, et al., 2007).

According to Shariff (2005), there are three unique characteristics of cyber bullying. First, it easily allows anonymity on the part of the bully, with many victims being unaware of the identity of the cyber bully/cyber bullies. This could make it more traumatising for victims because of the unknown identity, and a lack of awareness that it is possible to trace ‘anonymous’ bullies. Second, it allows participation by an infinite audience (Shariff, 2005), which leads victims to believe that everyone is aware of their humiliation. David Knight, a Canadian adolescent, suffered the effects of having someone set up an abusive website about him where hurtful and untrue comments about his sexuality, his personal hygiene, and his appearance (among other things) were posted. He was reported to have said, ‘rather than just some people, say 30 in a cafeteria, hearing them all yell insults at you, it’s up there for 6 billion people to see. Anyone with a computer can see it.’ (Leishman, 2005). Third, sexual harassment is a prevalent aspect of cyber bullying (Shariff, 2005). This element may contribute to victims being unwilling to seek help because of the additional embarrassment linked to sexual harassment.

## ■ Reasons for Engaging in Cyber Bullying

There is limited research on specific traits and motivation exhibited by cyber bullies. However, specific traits identified in bullies in general could shed light on the profile of cyber bullies. Bullies tend to perceive hostile intent in the actions of others, react quicker to anger than do others, use force sooner than others, hold to rigid beliefs, view image as the way to power, and use aggressive actions to protect their image (Hazler, Carney, Green, Powell, & Jolly, 1997). They are seen as controlling others through verbal threats and physical actions and tend to have little empathy for the problems of victims (Hazler, et al., 2006).

Impulsivity during adolescence could be a contributory factor to the incidence of cyber bullying with pupils. Young people may act without fully considering the possible consequences for themselves or their victims. Examining components of impulsivity could help us understand why cyber bullying actions are initiated. Researching impulsivity in adolescents, d’Acremont and Van der Linden (2005) found support for four dimensions of impulsivity that had previously been found to be present in adults by Whiteside and Lynam (2001). These elements include urgency, lack of premeditation, lack of perseverance, and sensation-seeking. Impulsivity may account for cyber bullying actions that are taken in haste to retaliate against someone or to avenge a slight, imaginary or real. A cyber bully could be someone who after a relationship ends, forwards emails of a sexual nature sent by a former boyfriend or girlfriend while the relationship was still intact. While the intent may be to retaliate against the person by whom the bully believes to have been hurt, the full ramifications of the retaliatory actions are often not considered. What in the bully’s mind is considered to be a harmless prank may turn out to be a devastating blow to the victim. Two instances that may have stemmed partially from impulsivity have been

reported in the media: (1) a partially clothed photograph taken in a locker room without the knowledge of a male victim was circulated, and (2) the head-shot of an ex-girlfriend was pasted on a pornographic image and circulated (Mitchell, 2004).

## ■ Incidence of Cyber Bullying

In recent years attempts have been made to obtain empirical data on the incidence of cyber bullying. A survey, commissioned by the National Crime Prevention Council and conducted by Harris Interactive, reported that more than 40% of teens in the United States are victims of cyberbullying, but only 10% of this number tell their parents about it (United Press International (UPI), 2008). The study also reported almost 50% of teens reported that cyber bullies engage in cyber bullying because of a lack of tangible consequences for such behaviour (UPI). Li (2006), in a survey of 264 junior high school students in Canada reported that 55.6% of males and 54.5% of females were aware of cyber bullying, while 25% of males and 25.6% of females reported having been a victim of cyber bullying. A study conducted in the United Kingdom found that one in four 11 to 19 year olds reported that they had been cyber bullied (NCH, 2002). The same organisation reported in a more recent study that one in five (20%) 11 to 19 year olds reported experiencing bullying via email, internet chatroom, or text. The most prevalent form of bullying reported in this study took place by text messaging on mobile phones (NCH: The Children's Charity, 2006).

In the United States, i-SAFE.org conducted a survey of 1500 students in Grades 4 to 8 in 2004. Their findings indicated that 42% of students in the sample reported being bullied while online, and one in four reported it happening more than once. Fifty-eight per cent of students reported that someone said mean or hurtful things to them online, and more than four out of 10 said that this happened more than once. Interestingly, 53% of students admitted that they said something mean or hurtful to someone online, and more than one in three reported doing this more than once (i-SAFE, 2004). Of these 53% noted above, the study did not inquire if they said something mean or hurtful in retaliation of an online attack on them.

Patchin and Hinduja (2006) reported from their analysis of 384 respondents under the age of 18 that 11% reported bullying others while online, 29% reported being the victim of online bullying, and more than 47% reported witnessing online bullying. In their survey, cyber bullying was most prevalent in chat rooms, followed by computer text messages and email. Patchin and Hinduja obtained information on aspects of cyber bullying such as exclusion and threats. Among their participants, 60% reported being ignored by others while online, 50% reported feeling they were not respected, 30% reported being called names, 21.4% reported being threatened by others, 19.8% reported being picked on by others, 19.3% reported being made fun of by others, and 18.8% reported having rumors spread about them. Data in this study were collected online linking the questionnaire to the official website of a popular music artist. Participants were invited to respond to questions about cyber bullying experiences. It is possible that those who responded to the survey were those who had suffered negative experiences related to cyber bullying, resulting in the high percentages of incidence reported (18% to 60%).

Kowalksi and Limber (2005) studied cyber bullying in middle schools in the United States. Results indicated that that 18% of the sample ( $N = 3767$ ), 25% of girls ( $n = 1915$ ), and 11% of boys ( $n = 1852$ ) reported being cyber bullied at least once within the two months before participating in the survey. Of the students who reported being cyber bullied, 53.2% reported that the cyber bully was from their school, while 37% reported the cyber bully was their friend.

A large segment of the total users of the Internet are children and youth under the age of 18. In fact, internet users under the age of 18 tend to view the internet primarily as a social tool contrasted with older internet users who tend to view it as a tool to work, pay bills, or shop (Belsey, n.d.). Schools provide opportunities for students to have access to the internet for a variety of academically related reasons, and large numbers of school students have mobile phones, often provided by parents to ensure the safety of their children. All these ‘advances’ in ICT have led to young people being in almost constant communication with each other through cyberspace, and have also increased the reach of cyber bullies.

Bullies with access to the worldwide web can therefore traumatise victims on a scale that was previously unimaginable. The Internet and mobile phones lend themselves to relational bullying, where victims’ social relationships can be damaged. Bullying actions include exclusion, spreading rumours, breaking confidences, ridiculing, and garnering support for physical attacks on identified victims. The exponential manner in which cyber bullying spreads increases the extent of harm it can potentially cause.

## ■ Cyber Bullying Tools

The great gains that we have experienced in ICT carry with them great potential for misuse. Cyber bullying actions may include the wide dissemination of: (1) embarrassing information (true or fabricated) about individuals, their families and/or friends; (2) confidences intended for the sender alone; (3) photographs taken with or without consent of the subject; (4) videos clips taken without consent or made by the victim for a select audience; and (5) social exclusion can also be practiced on victims by cyber bullies influencing groups to ‘block’ someone from their list of friends/contacts. The aim of the cyber bully is no different from that of a conventional bully: it is to embarrass, threaten, shame, hurt, or exclude the victim. Below are some of the common ‘tools’ utilised by cyber bullies.

### Instant Messaging (IM)

Instant messaging began as real-time communication between two or more people using typed text on computers connected by the internet. AOL (an American internet services company) initially had the most popular instant messaging services, AOL Instant Messenger (abbreviated to AIM). It was reported to have 53 million users in 2003 (Nielsen Netratings, March 2006 as cited in Reimer, 2006). AIM now has several other competitors. Windows Live Messenger appears to be the most popular, offering an IM service in 26 languages, in more than 60 countries, and reportedly used by more than 240 million accounts each month. In addition to text IM, the program offers full screen video conversation, file sharing, and calling capabilities (Microsoft PressPass, 2006).

Cyber bullies can use IM in a variety of ways including setting up 'fake' profiles to hide their identity, excluding peers by blocking them, or by saving and printing out or forwarding IM's sent to one person (often in confidence or with the implicit idea that the IM is being sent to that person alone) to large numbers of people.

### **Mobile Phones**

Mobile phones can be used by cyber bullies in one of three ways: text messaging, pictures, and video clips taken using mobile phones. These may be forwarded to large groups of people with the intent of hurting or embarrassing the victim. Pictures or videos may have been taken with or without the consent of the victim. Threatening messages may be sent via mobile phone (e.g., warning the victim that they will be attacked or harmed in some other way if they go to school or the mall). Circulation of pictures or video taken by mobile phone can be particularly damaging to the victim's self-esteem, as in the case of the young male who was photographed in the locker room (Mitchell, 2004).

### **Chat Rooms**

Chat rooms are a form of synchronous conferencing. The primary purpose of chat rooms is to converse with other people for social interaction or knowledge sharing. Chat rooms allow for verbal, audio, and video chat (chat room, n.d.). Examples of how bullying in chat rooms could manifest include explicitly sexual talk without the consent of the victim, attacks on the victims thoughts or feelings, and shaming or embarrassing tactics. The victim would often have built rapport with several in the chat room and may not know what he or she did to warrant such harsh treatment.

### **E-mail Messages**

E-mail provides the opportunity to reach large numbers of people with damaging or hurtful messages. Once again the dissemination of such messages may be multitiered (i.e., the first wave is sent out by one individual to their 'contact' list, and then the 'contacts' forward it on to their own contacts). Verbal, audio, and visual material can be sent via email. With the forwarding capabilities of e-mail programs, very large numbers of people can be reached in a very short time.

### **Social Networking Sites**

Social networking sites have become extremely popular with school students. MySpace.com, founded in July 2003, advertises itself as a 'place for friends' (myspace.com, n.d.). According to MySpace.com, the 100 millionth account in the United States of America was created on August 9, 2006, with the site drawing new registrations at the rate of 230,000 per day. MySpace expanded its reach to Australia in 2006, and according to a newspaper report in November 2006, based on Nielsen NetRatings data, MySpace had 1.9 million unique visitors during the month of October 2006, and had about 7000 new users joining each day (Sinclair, 2006). MySpace provides an interactive network of photos, weblogs, user profiles, web forums and groups, as well as other media formats. The site is open to individuals 14 years of age and older, but relies on users to accurately report their age.

Similarly, facebook, started in February 2004 by three students at Harvard as a college-wide networking website, expanded its client base to people of any age, and reports 70 million active users (facebook Press Room, 2008). These sites can be used

to chat, post photographs and films, share files, and so on, and again the potential to reach large numbers of people with a single action is immense. Cyber bullies can use an identity which is unknown to the victim and/or could use their site to post harmful or derogatory material about others.

### **Blogs**

A blog is defined as an authored online diary or chronology of thoughts published on a webpage. It is also referred to as a weblog or a web log (blog, n.d.). Blogs can be used to embarrass, make fun of, or attack individuals or groups of people. Anything that is posted on a blog is identified as the author's views. Cyber bullies could post comments about a classmate's looks, intelligence, personal hygiene, or sexual preferences.

## ■ Strategies for School Counsellors, Guidance Office, and School Personnel to Address Cyber Bullying

School personnel are often unsure of how to proceed with students who are being cyber bullied because of a policy vacuum on this topic (Shariff, 2005). This lack of clear direction may account for inaction on the part of adults in schools, and a resultant unwillingness on the part of students to seek help from them. Protecting young people from forms of relational aggression and/or verbal, social, and emotional bullying via cyberspace is becoming an essential responsibility. Schools have a mandate to ensure that they are providing their students with a quality educational environment. Ignoring complaints about cyber bullying because it did not happen on school grounds is not justifiable because the effects of cyber bullying are experienced in school.

Li (2006) reported that only 64.1% of junior high school students surveyed ( $N = 264$ ) believed that adults in schools took actions to stop cyber bullying when they were informed that it was occurring. School counsellors and other school personnel's lack of familiarity with many forms and capabilities of electronic communication tools could hamper their efforts to assist students experiencing cyber bullying. Gaining relevant knowledge about cyber bullying and its modalities, and being viewed as a knowledgeable resource person is thus an important first step for school counsellors to take.

Information and communications technology providers are beginning to directly address the issue of cyber bullying, and it would behoove school counsellors to become familiar with such material. For example, MySpace developed a guide to assist school personnel in understanding how this social networking site works (MySpace.com, 2006). The guide provides concrete steps to take in instances of cyber bullying experienced on MySpace. The Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (n.d.) has published materials online to assist children and parents with addressing bullying via mobile phones. School counsellors can be proactive leaders in this effort by identifying helpful resources and communicating such information within their school community, thereby ensuring that their students are empowered to take action if they are victimised.



School counsellors can take a leadership role in offering training to parents and students, to make issues of cyber safety and cyber bullying more visible and comprehensible. Without specific instruction on standards of behaviour and etiquette related to cyberspace, young people do not always make the best choices. And parents often do not take notice of the grip that ICT has on their children until something untoward happens. School counsellors can serve as valuable community resources by educating parents, students, and the wider community. They may also consider partnering with counsellor education programs located within their region to deliver this training via Master's students in school counselling programs who are fulfilling practicum, internship, or field work hours at school sites.

Articulation of the importance of issues such as cyber bullying by professional organisations for counsellors and educators is one more way of drawing attention to potential problems. For example, the American School Counselor Association's position statement (ASCA, 2000, revised 2006) on student safety and the internet states that professional school counsellors have a responsibility to protect students from potential dangers related to technology and to promote healthy student development. The position statement specifically mentions cyber bullying as one of the dangers of technology of which school counsellors should be aware.

It would be beneficial for school counsellors/personnel to solicit support from federal and state departments of education to develop and regularly update specific policies related to cyber bullying. In Victoria, a document titled, 'Cyber bullying — Policy, Strategies, and Advice' was published in 2007 to assist school personnel (State of Victoria, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008). In the United States, several states have passed, or are examining, legislation requiring that cyber bullying be included in school district harassment prevention policies. State and national school counselling organisations could also consider lobbying ICT service providers to provide clear direction to users of their services on how to address cyber bullying.

### **Specific Actions School Counsellors/Guidance Officers/School Personnel Can Take With Students to Prevent Cyber Bullying**

Educating students about cyber bullying and empowering them to take action appears to be of increasing importance, especially considering research indicating that students are more likely to report instances of cyber bullying to their friends rather than discuss it with adults in their lives. Patchin and Hinduja (2006) reported that 56.6% of their sample responded to online bullying by telling an online friend, while 25.7% told a friend. By contrast only 19.5% reported telling their parent(s) and 16.8% reported telling a brother or sister about it. Training that focuses on reducing retaliatory cyber bullying and reducing impulsive behaviour is important, as is training that specifically targets bystanders, cyber bullies and victims.

An organisation that has taken the lead in the area of youth education about internet safety and cyber bullying is i-SAFE (i-safe.org, n.d.). Their i-Mentor program is focused on training peer mentors to educate fellow students about online dangers. *Bullying. No Way!* (2004) provides valuable resources to make students aware of cyber bullying, and provides links to anti cyber bullying mobile movies made by students. These types of peer education programs can be introduced by school counsellors to empower students and to mobilise them to get involved and be part of the

solution. Trained high school students could be a valuable resource in educating elementary and middle school students. Recognition programs for students who demonstrate leadership in this area can be instituted by school counsellors.

Students should be educated about the consequences of engaging in cyber bullying. They must be made aware that their identity could be traced even if they have used an online name, and they must understand that criminal charges could be filed against them under several State and Commonwealth laws. For example, the *Commonwealth's Crimes Act 1914*, part VIIB, section 85ZE notes that it is an offence for 'a person to knowingly or recklessly use a telecommunications service supplied by a carrier in such a way as would be regarded by reasonable persons being, in all the circumstances, offensive' (State of Victoria, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008).

Continuing with efforts to develop character traits such as empathy and kindness in students, and to teach social skills are more important than ever. Students could greatly benefit from the implementation of model programs endorsed by organisations like the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA, n.d.) to develop and value social skills. The implementation of classroom-based programs that teach social-emotional skills, reduce impulsive and aggressive behaviour, and develop empathy and anger management techniques are valuable. Two such programs are *Second Step: A Violence Prevention Program*, and *Steps to Respect: A Bullying Prevention Program* (Committee for Children, n.d., a, b). Incorporating realistic cyber bullying scenarios into bullying prevention training and having students discuss relevant issues related to the scenarios is another beneficial way of addressing the issue with students directly. As with all school counselling initiatives, a proactive, preventative approach is preferable to a reactive response once a problem has surfaced.

### **Specific Actions School Counsellors Can Take with Parents and Caregivers to Prevent Cyber Bullying**

It is vital that parents/caregivers understand cyber bullying and the mechanics of cyber bullying. Parents have an obligation to monitor their children's activities online (Shariff, 2005), and many parents do set in place rules forbidding their children to talk to strangers online or divulge personal information. However, parents seldom talk with their children about the dangers that may arise from their 'friends' or school mates. School counsellors can provide parents with information on the various dangers associated with cyberspace.

Parents should be aware of and monitor usage of ICT by their children, and should have clear internet and mobile phone agreements with their children (The Alannah and Madeline Foundation, 2007). Effective parenting is closely linked with open lines of communication between parents and children. They should be aware of research indicating that numbers as low as 10% of young victims turn to their parents for help (UPI, 2008). School counsellors can promote the importance of parents having open discussions with young people about cases of cyber bullying that may be publicised in the media. Young people may be reluctant to share experiences of being cyber bullied because they are afraid of overreaction on the part of parents that may include banning them from using the Internet, mobile phone, or other forms of ICT. There may also be fears of retaliation from the cyber bully (CSRIU,

2006; Willard, 2005). School counsellors can help parents with information on how to address this issue without being unnecessarily punitive.

It is also important for parents to teach their children electronic communication etiquette and help them understand what constitutes acceptable behaviour and what does not. There are resources available to help parents understand how they can prevent their children from becoming either victims or perpetrators of cyber bullying. Directing parents to websites with educational materials specifically developed for parents can help them identify appropriate resources (see for example CSIRU, 2005; NetAlert, 2007).

The lines between in school and outside of school have become blurred and more easily traversed due to various forms of electronic communication. Willard (2005) suggests that schools be vigilant about incorporating cyber bullying and online safety into their safe schools agenda. Many schools have relied on the technology committee to deal with these issues. But protecting students from cyber bullying requires more complex interventions than deciding which screening programs to install on school computers (Willard). School counsellors can position themselves as an important resource person in this regard.

ICT tools continue to become more widely used and more sophisticated. As students in schools embrace these forms of communication at younger and younger ages, school counsellors and guidance officers are well positioned to effectively address issues of cyber bullying in their schools and communities. Stone (2005) reminds us that school counsellors have a legal and ethical responsibility to address harassment that interferes with every student's right to an education in a safe environment. Implementing policies and practices that encourage students to respect each other, whether online or face-to-face (Stone) remains an important responsibility of the school counsellor today.

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