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**COMBATING CYBER BULLYING,  
THROUGH ALTERNATIVE SAFE  
SPACE & DELETING HATE SPEECH**

# Cyber Bullying

## A growing global menace

Cyberbullying is bullying using the internet medium via cellphones, computers and tablets. Besides normal calls, it more often takes place on social media, instant messaging apps or SMS, gaming platforms, chatrooms etc.

This repeated behaviour attempts to scare, anger or shame the targeted by:

spreading lies or post embarrassing photos or videos (real or morphed) on social media

sending hurtful, abusive or threatening messages, images or videos via personal or public messaging platforms

using fake personas or impersonate a real person online and send hurtful messages through fake accounts

All this, to blackmail a minor emotionally, physically or target the families financially. Over and above, its very important to note that cyberbullying and real life, face-to-face bullying also occur alongside each other. The critical difference is that cyberbullying leaves a digital footprint that becomes a record as useful evidence to help stop the abuse also prosecute the perpetrator either by law or by concerned family members.



# Virtual actions, real agony

As internet penetration grows and so does the use of smartphones and other connected devices in the hands of a younger population, the situation is rife for abuse. A global recent survey by Microsoft has thrown some astonishing data on the scale of the problem. uncovered that children want to talk to parents about the issue, but not a single step was taken by parents to address the problem. The malaise is global and so is the misery. But in India, with its unique socio-economic and cultural challenges, cyberbullying is an evil that's spreading faster than we can contain it.

**The ground reality in India** - The below survey data is just the tip of the iceberg. For every case known or reported, there may be hundreds of others that are yet to come to light. Consider these statistics:

- India ranks at number 3 in the list of online bullying cases globally
- 53% Indian children have been bullied online
- 1 in 4 have been bullied more than once
- 43% have fallen prey to cyberbullying or anti-bullying
- 70% of cyberbullying or anti-bullying activities are on Facebook
- 80% teens use mobile phones - making it the most popular medium for cyberbullying
- 81% get away with cyberbullying compared to face-to-face bullying
- 90% teens have ignored cyberbullying while few took steps to stop it
- Girls are more preferred victims of cyberbullying as compared to boys
- Cyberbullying victims are 2-9 times more prone to committing suicide

*-(Global Youth Online Behaviour Survey - Microsoft)*

This shocking data demands an equally strong response - beginning with an urgent need to increase education about online behaviour in India amongst both children and adults.

## The driving factors behind India's increased cyberbullying

India possesses a large youth population who have adopted a digital lifestyle at an early stage. This has led to the wanton consumption of unhealthy content from varied local and global sources. Over and above, there are other factors as well that have accelerated the harmful trend of cyberbullying in the country:

- Cheap internet, with almost everyone accessing it daily
- Heightened peer and social pressures
- Lack of digital literacy in both minors and adults
- Parental guidance is reducing, leading to external influences taking over a young mind
- Unhealthy and overt influence from TV and web content, films, celebrities and influencers
- Therapy is considered a taboo
- No guidance to talk to about feelings or anyone to confide in
- Not empowered to take a stand and protect oneself

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## Ways to spot and stop cyberbullying

Notice. That's the very first thing. Recognize any change in mood or behaviour and explore what the cause might be. Talk without pre-conceived notions and try to determine if these changes happen around your child's use of devices and internet. Empathize with the symptoms and discuss further without scaring or judging or hurting the child. Only then you will be able to spot any instance of cyberbullying.

### The symptoms to spot are:

- Considerable increase or decrease in your child's usage of a mobile, laptop or tablet
- Display of emotional responses such as sadness, anger or happiness to the activities on their device
- Tendency to avoid discussion on their online activities
- Hiding of the device screen when others are close by
- Indifference to social activities and gatherings, and outdoor activities or hobbies
- Sudden deactivation of social media accounts or opening of new ones
- Becoming depressed and withdrawn



Once it is determined that the child is a victim of cyberbullying, there are several key steps that can be taken to stop it.

- **Do not respond or retaliate:** Sometimes, all the perpetrators are looking for is a reaction – which in their mind is a sign of success as it gives them the power to elicit a response as and when. Disconnect the child from this situation or distract the perpetrator. If matters get serious, cyber-crime lawyers and police can be roped in.
- **Document:** Keep a record of what is happening and where. Take screenshots of harmful posts or content if possible. Most laws and policies note that bullying is a repeated behavior, so records help to document it.
- **Report:** Most social media platforms and schools have clear policies and reporting processes. If a classmate is cyberbullying, report it the school. You can also contact app or social media platforms to report offensive content and have it removed. If a child has received physical threats, or if a potential crime or illegal behaviour is occurring, report it to the police.
- **Support:** Peers, mentors, and trusted adults can sometimes intervene publicly to positively influence a situation where negative or hurtful content posts about a child. Family and public intervention can include posting positive comments about the person targeted with bullying to try to shift the conversation in a positive direction. It can also help to reach out to the child who is bullying and the target of the bullying to express your concern. In case professional support is required, never hesitate to seek a counsellor or mental health expert.



While these are broad guidelines, there are also other ways to protect and prevent cyberbullying from happening in the first place.

**Protect your account:** Never share your social media or email passwords. Use biometric authentication at all times if available. Keep your digital device safe and don't let anyone snoop thru it.

**Keep your social profile and interaction safe** - Social media presence has become the part and parcel of everybody's life but while posting and interacting with people on social platforms, one needs to be mindful of:

- Posting what isn't hurtful or embarrassing to oneself or anyone else, including family, friends or even strangers. Privacy settings let you control who sees what. Choose it wisely.
- Do not open emails from sources you do not know and do not download attachments unless you are expecting an attachment from someone.
- Do not download free or illegal media which can lead to other issues as well.

**Help stop cyberbullying  
in India. Your educated  
voice can empower  
many others  
who suffer in silence!**

Tomorrow Will  
Bring good things  
Stay alive to see it.

## Laws for cyber bullying in India:

There is no specific legislation that provides for the specific cyberbullying laws in India, however provisions such as Section 67 of the Information Technology Act and a few others help deal with cyberbullying to an extent. .

**Section 67** prescribes punishment for publishing or transmitting obscene material in electronic form for a term which may extend to five years and also with fine which may extend to ten lakh rupees.

**Section 507** states that if anyone receives criminal intimidation by way of an anonymous communication then the person giving threats shall be punished with imprisonment for up to two years. By virtue of word anonymous the offense of anti-bullying and cyberbullying is included in this section.

**Section 66 E** prescribes punishment for violation of privacy. The section states that any person who intentionally violates the privacy by transmitting, capturing or publishing private pictures of others shall be punished with up to three years imprisonment or fine up to three lakhs. The other prevalent laws are:

**Sec.66A** – Sending offensive messages through communication service, etc

**Sec.66C** – Identity Theft

**Sec.66D** – Cheating by personation by using the computer resource

**Sec.67B** – Punishment for publishing or transmitting of material depicting children in any sexually explicit act, etc. in electronic form

**Sec.72** – Breach of confidentiality and privacy

**Sec.503** Indian Penal Code (IPC) – Sending threatening messages through email

**Sec.509** IPC – Word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman

**Sec.499** IPC – Sending defamatory messages through email

**Sec .500** IPC – Email Abuse





Sure, these laws are helpful, but not to the extent they should be – all because of a loophole regarding age. Because these laws are framed towards adults, minors are exempted from all these penal provisions since children or school students are considered juveniles and they are treated differently under the Juvenile Justice Act. In such matters, it is best to seek legal counsel for justice.

### **Painful cyberbullying incidents of the past**

2017: An MBBS student in Kerala jumped to her death from her college terrace. An examination of her Facebook profile showed her displeasure over the nasty comments made one of her peers. Police suspect cyberbullying provoked her

2017: Students at Delhi’s Ramjas College are attacked by the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP). A 20-year-old student, Gurmehar Kaur from Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi, couldn’t have imagine that her online campaign against the violence would would lead to her being mercilessly trolled and even abused with death and rape threats extensively on social media platforms.

These are just a couple of famous cyberbullying cases that caught the attention of national media. But what of the thousands of others that go unreported - many young lives that may have ended soon, or of those who have resigned to being scarred and scared for life?

If your child or anyone you know is a victim of cyberbullying and receiving sexual, physical or financial threats, or you sense any illegitimate online activity, please write to: [complaint-mwcd@gov.in](mailto:complaint-mwcd@gov.in)

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