

# Cyberbullying and Sexting Handout

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## Adolescent Brain

- Second brain growth spurt- allows more capacity and myelination of neurons which leads to abstract reasoning.
  - Brain Areas to Know:
    - Hippocampus (Hippos on Campus) – responsible for behavioral inhibition, attention, and long-term memory formation.
    - Amygdala (Emotional Amy) – processes emotional content and remembers level of danger. This can be activated and prod basal ganglia into action.
    - Basal Ganglia (Basic Gorillas) – controls motor movement and leads person to act, typically without consulting frontal lobe.
  - Motor and sensory areas of brain mature early while frontal lobe develops more gradually.
  - The frontal lobe does not fully mature until the mid-20's, therefore adolescents have difficulty with activities such as abstract reasoning, reading and understanding emotions, and inhibiting impulses.

## Adolescent Decision-Making

- Imaginary audience – confusion between adolescents' own thoughts and those of others. Leads to becoming more self-conscious.
- Personal fable – belief that something is totally unique about you. Leads to feelings of isolation regarding experiences.
- Optimistic bias – tendency to assume that accidents, diseases and other misfortunes are more likely to happen to others than you.

## Goal for Adolescents – Become an Adult!

- Society encourages the development of several characteristics in order for adolescents to reach their goal of becoming adults.
  - Identity – figure out who they are and where they fit into society.
  - Autonomy – show independence by distancing from parents.
    - Usually shows up by adopting teen culture that excludes parents
  - Attachment/Relationships – focus is on more abstract similarities such as personality matches for both friends and dating relationships.
    - Friends – provide companionship and intimacy. Source of most positive and negative emotions. Resource for advice and information on social relationships and leisure.
    - Parents – influence peer network, friendship selection, and safety net for adolescent to take risks.
  - Empathy – ability to relate to others and anticipate what others are thinking
    - Perspective-taking – gradually improves from understanding others have different perspectives from you to mutual perspective-taking to third person perspective to perspective within a larger society.
    - Important for peer relationships and later moral development.

### Media Impact on Development

- Media *assists* development in the areas of identity, autonomy, dating, and relationships with friends.
- Media *inhibits* development in the areas of empathy and family relationships.

### Technology Interaction with Adolescent Goals

- Social networks and Cell Phones (IM/Text Messaging)
  - o Encourage focus on quantity of friends over quality.
  - o Encourages constant contact with peer group
  - o Allows for peer feedback in identity formation
  - o Allows more autonomy with the perception of a safety net
  - o Inhibits social feedback
  - o Decreases empathy
  - o Increases depersonalization of communication
- Video Sharing / YouTube
  - o Allows exploration of media for identity formation
  - o Increases autonomy in viewing content
  - o Friendships enhanced by common experiences
  - o Allows for distancing from parents

**Bullying** - Form of aggression in which a more powerful individual or group repeatedly inflicts negative act upon individuals who are less powerful (Olweus, 2001).

- Bullying and Development
  - o Identity issues - bullying peaks in middle school
  - o Autonomy issues - not report as admit weakness
  - o Relationship – Friends - establish hierarchy in friendship groups and social dominance hierarchy
  - o Relationship – Dating - establish boundaries for who can date who

### Cyberbullying

- Definition - Cyberbullying involves use of information and communication technologies such as e-mail, cell phone text messages, instant messaging, and defamatory personal Web sites, to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others. - Bill Belsey

### Beware the Invisible Man – Anonymity

- Internet offers anonymity where there is no perceived accountability or punishment for your actions. This contributes to breakdown in social boundaries and lawless behavior.
- Anonymity provides younger adolescents the cover to experiment with identity issues.
- Disinhibition and depersonalization go along with anonymity allowing for greater willingness to cyberbully someone and to do it in a more extreme manner

### Inside a Cyberbullying Episode

- Exposure to a harassing message:
  - o Amygdala directly processes profanity and bypasses Hippocampus.
  - o Stressors of high arousal messages coupled with unpredictability and lack of control can lead to depression.
  - o Messages can also target important self-image domains that contribute to overall self-esteem (Harter)
    - Domains – scholastic competence, social acceptance, athletic competence, physical appearance, job competence, romantic appeal, behavioral conduct, and close friendships.
      - Self-esteem is most strongly linked to physical appearance and social acceptance from peers in adolescence.

- Overall threats to identity, relationships, and social standing result in either protective behaviors (i.e. responding aggressively) or learned helplessness (i.e. depression).

### **Cyberbullying Characters**

- Victimization - roughly 18-30% of adolescents report being cyberbullied.
  - Gender – Girls are more likely to be victimized than boys.
  - Cyberbullies are most frequently students at school though a significant amount of cyberbullying occurs anonymously.
  - Victims typically are intense internet users that create content, take more risks online, have many friends and feel popular, and have psychosocial problems offline.
  - Often reluctant to report to parents and school personnel for fear of losing privileges.
- Cyberbully – roughly 10% admit to cyberbullying others though likely underestimate.
  - Intense internet users, often perpetrators of offline bullying, and have little parental oversight of internet use.
- Results – victims and cyberbullies have a range of poor outcomes including higher rate of psychopathology, psychosomatic issues, and low school achievement.

### **Cyberbullying Vocabulary** – cyberbullying is not restricted to one type and often involves multiple modalities.

- Flaming - online “fights” using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language
- Harassment - repeatedly sending offensive, rude, and/or insulting messages
- Denigration - sending or posting cruel gossip or rumors about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships
- Impersonation - breaking into someone’s account, posing as that person and sending messages to make the person look bad, get that person in trouble or danger, or damage that person’s reputation or friendships
- Outing and trickery - sharing someone’s secrets or embarrassing information or images online and/or tricking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information, which is then shared online
- Exclusion - intentionally excluding someone from an online group, like a buddy list
- Cyberstalking - repeatedly sending messages that include threats of harm or are highly intimidating

### **Sexuality & Dating** – puberty and drive for adulthood combine

- Dating begins in middle school (Girls begin at 12 yrs. and Boys at 13 yrs.)
- Romantic relationships – 33% report in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and 80% by 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- Dating Sequence:
  - Same-gender groups hope to find other-gender groups.
  - Adolescents take part in social gatherings arranged by adults, such as parties and school dances that include interactions between boys and girls.
  - Mixed-gender groups arrange to go to some particular event together.
  - Adolescent couples begin to date as pairs in activities such as movies, dinners, concerts, or just hanging out.
- Reasons for dating – recreation, learning, status, companionship, intimacy, and courtship.
  - Recreation rate as most important followed by status and intimacy.
  - Dating related to popularity and positive self-image.
  - Boys focus on physical attractiveness while girls focus on support and intimacy.
- Dating scripts – males tend to be more proactive and girls reactive in relationships.

### **Sexual Harassment**

- 48% of students experience sexual harassment in a school year
  - 20% have been sexually harassed online
- Top reasons for harassment include: just part of school, thought it was funny, just being stupid and getting back at someone.

**Sexting** - sending sexually explicit messages and/or semi-nude or nude photos to others.

- Text Messaging
  - o Sent sexually flirty or suggestive messages - 39% of all teens
  - o Received such messages - 48% of teens
- Picture/Video Messaging - 20% of all teens reported sending nude pictures to others.
  - o As teens get older, the more likely they have sent pictures.
  - o Many young people feel that is fine to send nude photos to others even though there could be negative consequences
  - o Those with unlimited texting plans more likely to send and receive.
- Reasons Why (self-report)
  - o To be “fun or flirtatious” - 66% of teen girls and 60% of teen boys
  - o “Sexy present” for boyfriend - 52% of teen girls
  - o Respond to received sexually explicit messages - 44% of teens
  - o Sent “as a joke” - 40% of teen girls
  - o Sent to “feel sexy” - 34% of teen girls
  - o Felt “pressured” to send – probably underreported (12% of teen girls)
  - o Pressure to send sexy message or image (others)
    - 51% teen girls say pressure from guy reason girls engage in sexting.
    - 18% teen boys say pressure from girls reason boys engage in sexting.
- Implications
  - o Teens usually know the messages often get shared with those other than intended recipient.
  - o Teens acknowledge sending the messages have impacted their behavior.
    - More aggressive and forward through text messages.
    - Sending messages makes it more likely for dating and hooking up with others.
  - o Media focus on sex - movies, television, and internet-pornography
  - o Factors increase willingness of teens to engage in sexting behavior.
  - o Possible lead to blackmailing of adolescent

### **Communication with Parents**

- Most parents trust their teens to do what’s right online.
- Roughly half of teens’ say their parents know some but not all of what they do online.
- One-third of teens don’t tell their parents what they are doing online and would change their behavior if they knew parents were watching.
- Parents are less likely to monitor teens’ activities as they get older.
- Teens more likely to hide what they do online from parents as they get older.

**\*\*\* Open communication with your child is the best way to deal with cyberbullying.**

### **If Your Child is a Cyberbully**

- Establish very clear prohibitions about behaving in this manner.
- Warn against taking any action in retaliation or asking anyone else to engage in retaliation.
- Immediately install monitoring software, and inform your child about this.
- Direct your child not to access the internet anywhere but at school or at home.
- Take away cell phones and any other internet-enabled devices.

### **How to Prevent Cyberbullying**

- Keep home computer(s) in easily viewable places, such as a family room or kitchen.
- Talk regularly with child about on-line activities he or she is involved in.
- Talk specifically about cyberbullying and encourage child to tell you immediately if he or she is a victim of cyberbullying, cyberstalking, or other illegal or troublesome online behavior.
- Encourage your child to tell you if he or she is aware of others who may be the victims of such behavior.

- Explain that cyberbullying is harmful and unacceptable behavior. Outline your expectations for responsible online behavior and make it clear that there will be consequences for inappropriate behavior.
- Although adults must respect privacy of youth, concerns for child’s safety may sometimes override privacy concerns.
  - Tell child that you may review his or her online communications if you think there is reason for concern.
- Consider installing parental control filtering software and/or tracking programs, but don’t rely solely on these tools.

**When Child has been Victimized**

- Sending inappropriate language may violate “Terms and Conditions” of e-mail services, Internet Service Providers, web sites, and cell phone companies.
  - Consider contacting these providers and filing a complaint.
- Consider contacting the cyberbully’s parents.
- If the cyberbullying is coming through e-mail or a cell phone, it may be possible to block future contact from the cyberbully.
- Contact your school - If the cyberbullying is occurring through your school district’s Internet system, school administrators have an obligation to intervene.
- Consider contacting an attorney in cases of serious cyberbullying.
- Contact police if cyberbullying involves acts of:
  - Threats of violence
  - Extortion
  - Obscene or harassing phone calls or text messages
  - Harassment, stalking, or hate crimes
  - Child pornography
- If uncertain if cyberbullying violates your jurisdiction’s criminal laws, contact local police, who will advise you.

**Resources:**

- Stop Cyberbullying - <http://www.stopcyberbullying.org/index2.html>
- iSafe - <http://www.isafe.org/>
- A Thin Line – MTV - <http://www.athinline.org/>
- Cyberbullying.us - <http://www.cyberbullying.us/>
- Wired Safety - [www.wiredsafety.org](http://www.wiredsafety.org)
- Wired Kids - [www.stopitnow.org/organization/wired-kids](http://www.stopitnow.org/organization/wired-kids)
- Stop Bullying Now - [www.stopbullyingnow.com/](http://www.stopbullyingnow.com/)