



It is critically important that parents understand the significance of cyberbullying and what a devastating impact it may have on children. Simply defined, cyberbullying is when a person uses electronic means to bully, intimidate, or harass another person. Cyberbullying has the potential for a destructive outcome; there are cases of children actually committing suicide after becoming the victim of a cyberbully.

While bullying has always been a problem, cyberbullying takes traditional bullying and amplifies it many times over. Before the Internet, bullies would pick on someone on or around the schoolyard where only a limited number of people would see what was occurring. There is no doubt this still causes distress to the child but generally in a short amount of time the episode would be over with and forgotten by witnesses.

With today's technology an embarrassing, hurtful or harassing message or image about your child or of your child could be broadcast on the Internet, sent via text message or sent with many other communication mediums within a matter of seconds. For example, a bully could take an embarrassing picture of your child with a camera equipped cell phone and have it posted on a social networking site such as MySpace, or that image could be sent to other cell phones as a picture message and it could even be uploaded to a social video site such as YouTube all within just a few moments. The reality is instead of a limited number of people knowing about your child's embarrassing moment there is now a potential for millions of people to see that moment and even save it for a lifetime to be reviewed again and again.

If your child is a victim of cyberbullying, there are some things you can do to help. First, save any evidence you have and document it well - this may include Internet blogs, text messages, voice mails, etc. Second, if the cyberbully posted something on a website for instance, immediately contact the site administrator and ask that the content be removed - most websites have an acceptable use policy and the cyberbully most likely violated that policy. Third, if the conduct is related to school or affects school life, contact school administrators and ask for assistance. Finally, consider contacting law enforcement - depending on what is occurring there may be a crime that has been committed (unfortunately there is no actual cyberbullying law in Oregon).

The harsh reality is these acts are being committed in our own community and acts of cyberbullying in Southern Oregon have been already investigated. Keep in mind that cyber bullies are much more aggressive than traditional bullies due to their perceived anonymity, making them more dangerous. Hopefully through education and determination from both children and parents we can combat the far reaching effects of cyberbullying. Becoming your child's advocate and having open lines of

communication with them is the best place to start in protecting them from all types of online predators – especially cyber bullies.