Cyberbullying: How School Counselors Can Help

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Abstract

Cyberbullying has negative impacts on students. Students, parents, and school staff may have little information and training on this form of bullying. School counselors can use their role as leaders, advocates, and resources to collaborate with community agencies, school staff, parents, and students to establish school policies, build awareness, and develop interventions for cyberbullying in schools.
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Cyberbullying: How School Counselors Can Help

In the past, students relied on face-to-face interaction and communication via the telephone to stay in touch with friends. At the present time, students are using different technologies to interact with others including Internet blogs, chat rooms, instant messaging and text messaging. While an Internet-enabled world allows for students to have valuable resources and entertainment, it also puts students at risk for experiencing unfriendly environments (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008).

School counselors can provide school faculty, staff, parents, and students with information pertaining to cyberbullying. Conducting need assessments, establishing school policies, and promoting and participating in prevention and intervention strategies also fit under the role of professional school counselors. School counselors may also use theory-based techniques while combating cyberbullying. Adlerian techniques can help school counselors to promote socially acceptable behaviors.

Cyberbullying

Definition

A clear definition of cyberbullying is vital for conducting research and establishing school rules and regulations on the matter. “Cyberbullying is defined as an individual or a group willfully using information and communication involving electronic technologies to facilitate deliberate and repeated harassment or threat to another individual or group by sending or posting cruel text and/or graphics using technological means” (Mason, 2008, p. 323). This hurtful communication can be sent to an individual victim, to third parties, or to public environments where other online users visit and view the material (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Students communicating online are usually found to fall into one or more of the cyberbullying roles:
According to Willard (2005), cyberbullying may occur in seven ways:

1) flaming involves sending angry, rude, or vulgar messages directed at a person or persons privately or to an online group; 2) harassment involves repeatedly sending a person offensive messages; 3) denigration is sending or posting harmful, untrue, or cruel statements about a person to other people; 4) cyberstalking is harassment that includes threats of harm or is highly intimidating; 5) masquerading is pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material that makes that person look bad or places that person in potential danger; 6) outing and trickery involves engaging in tricks to solicit embarrassing information about a person and then making that information public; and 7) exclusion describes actions that specifically and intentionally exclude a person from an online group. (as cited in Beale & Hall, 2007, pp. 9-10).

Forms

According to Patchin and Hinduja (2006), victims of cyberbullying are usually harassed through computers and/or cellular phones. Patchin and Hinduja along with Willard (2005) illustrated when using a computer, cyberbullies can send hurtful messages through e-mail or instant messaging, post insulting comments in chat rooms, on personal Web sites, or blogs (Mason, 2008). Students can take advantage of e-mail programs which will block messages from unwanted senders, but unfortunately these programs do not guarantee cyberbullying will stop. Instant messaging is a fast way for students to communicate with users in real time when they are online. Students are often able to block messages from undesirable users, but screen names can be switched to hide students’ identities (Beale & Hall, 2007).
Patchin and Hinduja (2006) also found when using a cellular phone, cyberbullies can send harassing text messages and pictures (Mason, 2008). Text messages, also known as small text messaging, allow students to send and receive short messages up to 160 characters long via mobile phones. Palm Pilot, Blackberry or Pocket PC are all personal digital assistants (PDAs) which allow students to access and browse the Internet and receive and send e-mail throughout the day (Beale & Hall, 2007). It is important to note that electronic communication devices are not the cause of cyberbullying, but rather tools accessed by students which can be used in both anti- and pro-social ways (Juvonen & Gross, 2008).

**Prevalence**

Students now have access to electronic devices and use these devices on a daily basis to contact others. In a study done by Lenhart et al. (2005), a sample of 1,100 students ages 12 to 17 years and their parents participated in a telephone survey to obtain data on adolescents’ online habits. It was found that 51% of the students used the Internet on a daily basis and 74% used instant messenger for up to 60 minutes per session (Mason, 2008). Researchers Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) found that out of 1,498 adolescents ages 10 to 17 surveyed, approximately 24% e-mailed hurtful material about another person, approximately 26% utilized chat rooms on a daily basis and approximately 25% used instant messaging daily (Mason, 2008). These studies demonstrate the amount of time and availability of access students have to electronic devices.

Because of an increased amount of time on the Internet and availability to cellular phones, students have an increased chance of being victims and offenders of cyberbullying. In a study by Patchin and Hinduja (2006), data from 384 adolescents illustrated that more than 29% were victimized online, almost 11% admitted to online bullying, and more than 47% witnessed cyberbullying. Although many of the behaviors were classified as relatively minor (e.g., name
calling or showing disrespect), more than 20% of these adolescents express feeling threatened. Victims in the study were shown to be negatively affected by cyberbullying at school, at home and with friends (Mason, 2008).

In another study, Li (2006) studied 264 seventh- to ninth-grade students and found 53% of the students reported that they knew someone being cyberbullied. The study revealed that, when comparing males to females, more than 22% of males and almost 12% of females were cyberbullies; yet there were no significant differences between males and females being victims of cyberbullying. Also, more than 40% of student victims of cyberbullying did not know their cyberbully (Mason, 2008).

*Compared to traditional bullying*

Understanding traditional bullying can aid school personnel and parents in “comprehending the reality and growth” of cyberbullying (Mason, 2008, p. 324). Researchers Quiroz, Arnette, and Stephens (2006) categorize traditional bullying into two behaviors: direct and indirect. According to Willard (2006), direct bullying is a physical behavior such as hitting, tripping, shoving, threatening verbally, or stabbing (Chibbaro, 2007). Olweus (1993) describes indirect bullying, or relational/social bullying, as “deliberate social exclusion or isolation” (Mason, 2008, p. 324). The face-to-face contact between victims and offenders of traditional bullying usually allows for easy identification of the bully (Chibbaro, 2007).

Cyberbullying is similar to indirect, traditional bullying because it is repetitive, intentional, and a form of psychological violence (Dehue, Bolman & Völlink, 2008). Similar to traditional bullying, cyberbullying tends to increase through the elementary school years, peak during middle school years, and decline in high school. Another link between cyberbullying and traditional bullying is seen in the victims and offenders. According to Hinduja and Patchin
Cyberbullying not only are students who are bullied at school significantly more likely to be victims of cyberbullying, but students who bully at school also seem to bully online (Mason, 2008).

Unlike traditional bullying and because of restrictions on mobile phone and computer use at school, cyberbullying is often experienced outside of school. Even if students are experiencing cyberbullying outside of school, frequently the problems associated with bullying (e.g., trouble with classes or anxiety) will surface in school at some point (Smith et al., 2008). Cyberbullies differ from traditional bullies because the cyberbully is often anonymous. In a study done by Ybarra and Mitchell (2004), students were found to exert more power and dominance while participating in cyberbullying because they were able to keep their identity unknown (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008).

The likelihood of hurtful statements to another student increases when students believe they will remain anonymous. It may also be easier for students to blame an incident on another student who may have been using their screen name or email account (Beale & Hall, 2007). Parents and guardians may be unfamiliar with the modes of communication their student is using and therefore may be unaware if the student is participating in or the victim of cyberbullying (Dehue et al., 2008).

**Impacts**

Cyberbullying can have negative ramifications on physical, social, emotional, and cognitive functioning, development, and well-being of both victims’ and offenders’ (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). The negative effects of cyberbullying are similar to the negative effects of traditional bullying. Victims of traditional bullying often experience academic and personal/social problems (Chibbaro, 2007). Research has shown that victims of cyberbullying may experience suicidal ideations, eating disorders, chronic illness, while other victims run away
from home (Mason, 2008). The cyber world can reach a large number of students, so being a victim of cyberbullying even once may have severe effects on students (Smith et al., 2008). Olweus (1993) observed that persistent bullying in school may also lead to depression and be associated with long-term negative effects on victims throughout their adult life (Mason, 2008).

Research done by Tattum (1989) demonstrates how bullying behaviors do not just impact the victims. Many adults, who engaged in bullying during school, participate in antisocial activities during their adult life (Mason, 2008). A study conducted by Olweus et al. (1999) found 60% of boys characterized as bullies in middle school had been convicted of at least one crime by the age of 24. The study also determined that 40% of bullies had been convicted three or more times (Mason, 2008). Longitudinal studies are needed to continue research on the impacts of cyberbullying (Juvonen & Gross, 2008).

Perceptions of students

In a study conducted by Vandebosch and Van Cleemput (2008), students ranging from sixth- to twelfth-grade were asked to participate in focus groups about their perceptions of cyberbullying. Participants in the focus groups were asked to describe negative aspects of the Internet and mobile phones to determine challenges and concerns students have when using these forms of information and communication technologies (ICT). Answers included, but are not limited to, being contacted by strangers, hacking, cyberbullying, threats, stalking and finding negative content of websites (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008).

When asked to define cyberbullying, students involved in the study used personal or interpersonal experiences involving ICT to describe examples of forms of cyberbullying. One example given was hacking which involved breaking into another student’s account, changing the password and sending offensive messages to their contact list. Participants in the focus
groups agreed upon three characteristics associated with cyberbullying: (1) an act intended to hurt by the cyberbully and perceived as hurtful by the victim, (2) a repetitive pattern of actions online or offline and (3) a relationship established by a power imbalance (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008).

The students involved in the study depicted a difference between cyberbullying and teasing via the Internet or mobile phone and acknowledged the fact there may “be a difference between the way things were intended and the way things were perceived” (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008, p. 501). Students in the focus groups who had participated in cyberbullying described their intentions to harm others by using the Internet and mobile phones as desires to harass or attack another person, schemes for revenge, a way to show off their technological skills and power, and a relief from boredom. Perceptions from the victims of cyberbullying depended on the form of cyberbullying and the relationship between the students involved. For example, receiving a virus from a stranger was not considered cyberbullying, but a threat or an insult was considered to be a hurtful form of cyberbullying. The relationship between the victim and the cyberbully determined how messages were perceived. Insults between friends were perceived as jokes whereas insults from a third party were identified as a form of cyberbullying (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008).

According to the students in the focus groups, repetition did not include only bullying via the Internet or mobile phone. Incidents of traditional bullying were also counted in the characteristic of repetition. The characteristic of power imbalances also played a role in how students perceived cyberbullying. Actions taken by students against weaker students were almost always considered cyberbullying while the same actions between students considered to be equals were described more as “cyber-teasing”, “cyber-arguing” or “cyber-fighting”
Students participating in the study who perceived him or herself as powerful in his or her daily life were also the victims of cyberbullying.

The ability for students to hide their identity allows for attacks on familiar persons as well as strangers. While some students admitted to insulting strangers in a chat room, other cyberbullies followed the path of traditional bullies and strategically picked their victims based on victims’ real-life characteristics. Victims of cyberbullying in the study confirmed that it was difficult to know the identity of the cyberbully, but often had an idea of who the cyberbully may be or was told by a third party (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008).

**Perceptions of parents**

In a study by Dehue et al. (2008), questionnaires concerning house rules on the use of the Internet and text messaging were sent to the parents of 1,211 students in their final-year of primary school or first-year of secondary school. The questionnaires measured parents’ perceived prevalence of their student participating in or being the victim of cyberbullying. Results from the study revealed high percentages of parents reporting house rules concerning the Internet and text messaging. Of the parents questioned, 60% set rules about the frequency at which their student was allowed to use the Internet and 80% set guidelines for what was allowed and not allowed to be done while on the Internet (Dehue et al., 2008).

The percentages reported on the prevalence of cyberbullying were very interesting. Only 4.8% of parents perceived that their student took part in cyberbullying on the Internet or via text messaging compared to the 17.3% of students who claimed they took part in cyberbullying on the Internet or via text messaging. A low percentage of parents (11.8%) also reported that their student was a victim of cyberbullying on the Internet or via text messaging whereas 22.9% of students reported being cyberbullied (Dehue et al., 2008).
Researchers Lenhart, Madden and Hitlin (2006) discovered parents to be extremely worried when considering the concept of cyberbullying because it “involves technologies with which parents are unfamiliar” (Juvonen & Gross, 2008, p.498). Parents hope their student will report any cyberbullying activity, but research shows that this is not often the case. Students are often reluctant to tell adults about incidents of cyberbullying because they are nervous about their parents restricting use of popular technologies (Juvonen & Gross, 2008).

Laws and policies

Cyberbullying is a challenge for educators because it occurs in a virtual environment. Although cyberbullying may be done at home on the weekends, educators should have a clear definition of their legal obligations regarding cyberbullying (Shariff, 2004). In accordance with the First Amendment, Willard (2003) confirmed that school officials have restrictions “when responding with formal disciplinary actions in situations involving online speech by students” (Mason, 2008, p.331). Shariff (2005) and Willard (2003) both illustrate that although the basic legal standard allows school officials to place educationally based restrictions on student speech in order to uphold a positive school climate, applying the standard to students’ online speech off school grounds is unknown (Mason, 2008).

In the past, rulings passed down by the Supreme Court were based on students’ First Amendment speech rights. In the case of Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District (1969), the court recognized that “unless the speech materially and substantially disrupts learning, schools cannot restrict it” (Mason, 2008, p.332). In the context of cyberbullying, research has found that harassment due to cyberbullying influences learning and emotional well-being (Mason, 2008). In the Bethel School District No. 403 et al. v. Fraser, a minor, et al. (1986) case, the Supreme Court acknowledged that schools cannot ignore threatening or offensive
speech and that schools can prohibit speech that undermines the schools’ educational mission. In the context of cyberbullying, research done by Shariff (2005) states that the ruling supports the idea that schools should teach how to act appropriately in society (Mason, 2008). In the case of *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* (1988), the Supreme Court ruled that schools could “exercise control over school-sponsored speech” and did not have to “tolerate speech that goes against the values held by the school system” (Mason, 2008, p. 332). In the context of cyberbullying, Shariff (2005) also acknowledged the ruling to allow schools to have control over inappropriate and harassing speech that originates from school computers (Mason, 2008).

Current legal rulings applied the same legal standards mentioned above but, according to Willard (2003), due to unclear guidance pertaining to off-campus speech, the results have varied (Mason, 2008). In the case of *J.S. v. Bethlehem Area School District* (2000), a student’s offensive speech about his teacher on a website designed by the student was considered a significant disturbance and the student was expelled. Although the website was created off-campus, the student discussed materials on the website at school and school-sponsored events which caused the teacher to feel threatened and the courts to rule in favor of the school (Mason, 2008). In contrast, in the case of *Killion v. Franklin Regular District* (2001), a student created a derogatory “top 10” list about the school’s athletic director. The student was suspended from school, but because the list was created at the student’s home and sent to his friends from his home computer, the student sued the school claiming his freedom of speech had been violated. The courts ruled the suspension violated the student’s free expression and determined that the student’s actions did not cause a disruption in the school or interfere with teachers’ abilities to control their classrooms (Mason, 2008).
School Counselors Role

As the number of students affected by cyberbullying increases, the need for schools to establish ways to both prevent and intervene with cyberbullying increases. Ideas for dealing with the issue of cyberbullying include establishing school policies, awareness campaigns, and school counseling interventions. School counselors play the role of student advocates, collaborative consultants and resources which make them key contributors to the struggle against cyberbullying (Chibbaro, 2007).

Awareness

Awareness is the first step in prevention. Addressing the problem of cyberbullying should be done through promoting awareness of the issue and its impacts on teachers, parents, and students. It is vital that students are aware of the impacts that online chats, instant messaging, text messaging, and social networking sites can have on his or her social lives (Diamanduros et al., 2008).

Faculty and staff: Students often do not report incidences of cyberbullying to trusted adults, so it is important that educators are aware of warning signs for both cyberbully victims and offenders. Researchers Hinduja and Patchin (2007) identified cyberbully victim warning signs as the following:

1) suddenly stops using the computer; 2) appears anxious when an instant message or e-mail appears on the computer screen; 3) seems angry or depressed following use of the computer; 4) appears uncomfortable about going to school or going outside in general; 5) avoids talking about what he or she is doing on the computer; and 6) becomes unusually withdrawn from friends and family members (Diamanduros et al., 2008, p. 695).

Hinduja and Patchin identified cyberbully offender warning signs as the following:
1) quickly closes programs or switches screens when someone walks by; 2) uses computer at all hours of the night; 3) becomes abnormally upset if he or she cannot use the computer; 4) laughs excessively while using the computer; 5) avoids talking about what he or she is doing on the computer; and 6) uses multiple online accounts or an account that is not his or her own (Diamanduros et al., 2008, p. 695).

Although school counselors may not be qualified to provide training for faculty and staff, they can heighten awareness of cyberbullying and intervention strategies (Chibbaro, 2007). Strategies including workshops, online training, informational brochures and pamphlets, and lesson plans on cyberbullying are helpful tools for promoting awareness of cyberbullying. An in-service workshop or training session including essential information such as the definition of cyberbullying, its prevalence among students, the impact that it can have on students, the need to develop prevention and intervention programs, and the importance of developing school policies would insure that all school personnel had similar instruction on the topic of cyberbullying (Diamanduros et al., 2008).

School counselors could provide school personnel with additional information that could be accessed at their own convenience and independently. A website that offers lessons on Internet safety and cyberbullying is WiredSafety.org (Diamanduros et al., 2008). Educator’s Guide to Cyberbullying: Addressing the Harm Caused by Online Social Cruelty, a written guide by Willard (2009) provides school personnel with a definition of cyberbullying, the impacts of cyberbullying, explanations for cyberbullying behaviors, effective strategies to address cyberbullying, the legal concerns related to cyberbullying, and how schools can develop a comprehensive approach to address cyberbullying (Willard, 2009d).
School media specialists and technology teachers are important members of the staff that should have a heightened awareness of cyberbullying. According to Willard (2006), misuse of the Internet typically occurs in the media center while students are casually using the school computers (Chibbaro, 2007). These school personnel could teach students the ethical and security issues associated with the use of technology (Diamanduros et al., 2008). The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) is a helpful organization for school personnel and school counselors to utilize. The ISTE developed specific technological expectations for students at different grade levels called the National Educational Technology Standards (NETS).

The responsibility of educating students about cyberbullying and Internet safety is not on the shoulders of any one individual; collaboration among all school personnel is needed. School counselors can collaborate with teachers to design guidance lesson plans pertaining to cyberbullying. Lessons can be taught by school counselors, teachers, or co-lead and should include classroom presentations, activities, and discussions about cyberbullying. The lesson plans should include a definition of cyberbullying, dangers associated with cyberbullying, the consequences of cyberbullying, and the importance of safe and responsible Internet use (Diamanduros et al., 2008). It is important to keep students engaged in the lessons and activities. School counselors can incorporate word finds, puzzles, videos, role-playing, or pamphlets/brochures into the guidance lessons.

Parents. Cyberbullying goes beyond school doors; therefore, school counselors should include parental awareness in their campaign against cyberbullying. As noted earlier, parents are often unaware of their students’ activities online or the fact of their legal obligation to monitor students’ online behaviors (Chibbaro, 2007). Research done by Meadows et al. (2005) suggests
that if parents suspect their student is the victim of cyberbullying, parents should print and save all alarming messages and be more attentive to students’ online activities (Chibbaro, 2007). School counselors can promote awareness of cyberbullying at informational sessions for parents after school. These sessions should include information about the signs and impacts of cyberbullying as it relates to current research (Diamanduros et al., 2008). Additional resources containing beneficial information include the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use and West Regional Equity Network.

*Students.* It is important to teach students how to identify cyberbullying at school and while they are away from school. Furthermore, it is also vital to teach and practice cyberbullying assertiveness and resolution skills, giving students’ confidence to stand up for themselves if ever a victim of cyberbullying. Every student should know and understand the policies related to cyberbullying and the methods of reporting cyberbullying (Chibbaro, 2007). School counselors can provide students with Cyberbullying NOT: Student Guide to Cyberbullying a resource which describes types of cyberbullying, ways to prevent cyberbullying, and what to do if cyberbullying occurs (Willard, 2007c).

*Needs Assessment*

A needs assessment is essential in preventing bullying in schools (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). School counselors need to complete a needs assessment to determine the prevalence of cyberbullying in their school. Students can be asked to take surveys, either on paper or online, to assist school counselors in understanding the needs of students. School counselors can also utilize measures such as observations, student self-reports, focus groups, and class meetings (Diamanduros et al., 2008; Beale & Hall, 2007).
Answers to questions on surveys should give school counselors an idea of how frequently students are using the Internet, chat rooms, text messaging, and instant messaging. By realizing how often students are using technology for social networking, school counselors can better understand if there may be a risk of future cyberbullying experiences. Questions on both direct and indirect experiences of cyberbullying should be included in the surveys. Answers from direct experience questions will inform school counselors the prevalence of students who have experienced cyberbullying in school. Answers from indirect experience questions (e.g., Do you know someone who is a cyberbully or who is being cyberbullied?) will help school counselors recognize the prevalence of bystanders related to cyberbullying (Diamanduros et al., 2008).

Willard provides school counselors with a formal assessment survey called, Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: The Student Needs Assessment Survey which provides data on the prevalence of technology use and the occurrence of cyberbullying in the school. The 30-item survey provides school counselors with information on: basic demographic data, parental involvement, personal involvement in cyberbullying, degree to which students believe that cyberbullying activities are occurring, effectiveness of districts’ current policies and practices, bystander responses, students knowledge on effective ways to prevent and respond to cyberbullying, and students comfort levels in reporting incidents to adults (Willard, 2009b).

Online surveys are also available for school counselors to use with students. The Cyberbullying Quiz (WiredKids.org, n.d.) assess whether students have been victims of cyberbullying. The survey, “Are You A Cyberbully” (Stop Cyberbullying, n.d.) assess behaviors such as “using another person’s screen name, teasing someone online, impersonating someone online, posting pictures of someone without their consent, and posting rude things about someone online” (Diamanduros et al., 2008, p. 697). School counselors can use these
assessments to obtain data and build students’ awareness of appropriate and inappropriate behavior online.

School personnel should also participate in a needs assessment. School counselors will be able to determine what school personnel already know about cyberbullying, whether cyberbullying is a concern for them, whether they have knowledge of cyberbullying occurring in the school, and whether district policies are effective (Diamanduros et al., 2008). Willard provides school counselors with a needs assessment called Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Staff Needs Assessment Questions. The assessment consists of open ended questions to allow for school personnel to reflect on their concerns related to cyberbullying (Willard, 2009a).

School Policies

Research done by Dyrli (2005) suggests that school districts need to have clear policies concerning cyberbullying at school and away from school (Chibbaro, 2007). Beale and Hall (2007) urge school districts to “petition state legislatures to add an electronic bullying component to existing state laws that prohibit traditional bullying” (p. 10). The addition of cyberbullying to the legislation would allow schools to take action against cyberbullying even if the incident occurred off school property, not during school hours, or not on school computers as long as the incident had an adverse effect on a student or school (Beale & Hall, 2007). Minnesota, for example, has legislation in place that makes each school board adopt a written policy regarding intimidation and bullying in all forms, including, but not limited to, electronic forms and forms involving Internet use. If a policy is not in place, school counselors could lead the development of or updating of school policies pertaining to cyberbullying (Chibbaro, 2007).

School policies should be based on the needs of the students and the school. School counselors can advocate for the establishment of a committee to develop cyberbullying policies.
Members of the committee should include the principal, school board lawyer, school psychologist, disciplinary officers, technology lab instructors, media specialists, school counselor(s), a parent representative, and a student representative (Diamanduros et al., 2008).

Cyberbullying policies should clearly state that cyberbullying is a strictly prohibited behavior. It is important for policies to address incidents of cyberbullying on the Internet, personal cell phones, PDAs, and personal computers while both on and off school grounds. Consequences related to cyberbullying behaviors should also be included in policies. School counselors can develop contracts which include consequences as well as “consent for schools to take action in situations involving behaviors that can have a negative effect on the safety of students, staff, and/or the educational environment” (Diamanduros et al., 2008, p. 702). Having students, school personnel, and parents sign cyberbullying contracts ensures that everyone understands the consequences of cyberbullying and the actions that will be taken.

School counselors should make sure that anti-cyberbullying policies include the organization of a prevention and intervention program. The effectiveness of the prevention and intervention programs should be assessed on an annual basis. The following are other important components of anti-cyberbullying policies:

1) specific definitions of cyberbullying and harassment; 2) graduated consequences and remedial actions; 3) procedures for reporting; 4) procedures for investigating; 5) a clear statement that the students will be disciplined if his/her behavior (on or off campus) results in a considerable disruption of the educational environment; and 6) procedures for educating students, teachers, staff, and parents about cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).
Prevention

School counselors are in a key position to establish a committee to organize anti-bullying and cyberbullying prevention strategies. Members of this committee could include the school psychologist, counselors, and teachers. Researchers Storm and Storm (2005) established specific components of a cyberbullying prevention plan which include the following:

1) the right for students to feel safe at school and home; 2) definition of cyberbullying; 3) how cyberbullying occurs; 4) prevalence of cyberbullying; 5) impact that cyberbullying has on victim and the cyberbully; 6) understanding the electronic messages can be traced; 7) the legal ramifications of cyberbullying; 8) the need to take a stand against cyberbullying; 9) the need for victims to report incidences of cyberbullying to adults; 10) the need for bystanders to protest and report incidences of cyberbullying; 11) the need to keep personal information private; 12) Internet safety and online etiquette rules; and 13) the need to be respectful of others when using the Internet and being responsible users of technology (Diamanduros et al., 2008, p. 698).

Students and students’ parents can also be involved in the prevention of cyberbullying. Mentoring programs in which older students mentor younger students about cyberbullying and appropriate Internet and computer use can be established throughout the school. Mentoring programs also build students’ leadership skills and encourage the building of friendships (Diamanduros et al., 2008, p. 698).

School counselors can encourage parents to get involved in the prevention of cyberbullying by asking families to keep computers in a common area, talking to students about Internet safety, what cyberbullying is, and the consequences of cyberbullying (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Encouraging parents to report suspected incidences of cyberbullying to school
personnel is also very imperative. Parents need to express to their child the importance of keeping private information confidential, reporting cyberbullying incidences, and saving all cyberbullying documentation. Students should be reminded that it is not appropriate to send retaliating messages back to cyberbullies.

School counselors should be aware of resources available for parents. For example, Willard (2009e) provides information about ways for parents to prevent their student from becoming a victim of cyberbullying or a cyberbully in the Parents Guide to Cyberbullying (Diamanduros et al., 2008). School counselors can suggest other helpful resources such as scripts written by Hinduja, Patchin and Burgess-Proctor (2006) which are designed to foster communication between parents and students on the issue of cyberbullying. School counselors can also help parents design a contract with their student which states expectations for both the student and parent regarding Internet use and safety (Diamanduros et al., 2008).

Successfully preventing and minimizing all forms of bullying involves establishing a comprehensive, multilevel strategy that targets bullies, victims, bystanders, families, and communities. The most effective school-based bully prevention programs not only focus on individual students, but “seek to change the culture and climate of the school (Whitted & Dupper, 2005, p. 169). Classroom-level approaches should be designed to help support teachers and other school personnel in the school. Student-level approaches should be designed to target individuals or small groups of victims and bullies.

School-level approaches. At this level, school personnel are developing “classroom and school-wide rules that prohibit bullying and promote adult modeling of respectful and nonviolent behavior” (Whitted & Dupper, 2005, p. 169). It is important that all school personnel recognize bullying as a problem and understand their role in discouraging bullying behaviors. School
counselors need to enlist the help of principals and administrators to spread a strong message that bullying will be taken seriously and not tolerated. Administrators need to fully support the program and ask teachers’, parents’, and students’ input on policies addressing bullying (Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

Bullying prevention policies need to be in writing and distributed to everyone in the school community. Policies should include a clear definition of bullying, including the definition of cyberbullying, with examples. In order to encourage the reporting of cyberbullying, policies need to include a confidential reporting system. Policies need to describe how schools will address incidents of cyberbullying by means of consistently enforced anti-bullying guidelines and procedures for school personnel, students, and volunteers (Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

Classroom-level approaches. School counselors can “encourage teachers to integrate bullying prevention material into their curriculum” (Whitted & Dupper, 2005, p. 171). Classroom meetings are an excellent way to help facilitate conversations between students about bullying. Incorporating classroom meetings into the classroom develops students’ knowledge of how to intervene, build empathy, and encourage prosocial behaviors (Olweus, 1999). Together, teachers and school counselors can teach students the importance of bystanders in stopping bullying, the responsibility of students intervening if they observe a bullying incident, ways to report bullying, and ways to stand up for victims of bullying. As a classroom, teachers and students should establish and enforce class rules against bullying (Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

Student-level approaches. School counselors can work with students individually or in small groups to develop social skills (e.g., assertiveness skills) and problem-solving skills through the use of role play and practice with peers. Research done by Vessey, Carlson, and Joyce (2003) suggests that victims of bullying be taught to “recognize attributes that place them
at risk of becoming [a target], to understand the consequences of their choices, and to modify their behaviors to minimize their chances of becoming [a victim]” (Whitted & Dupper, 2005, p. 171).

School counselors and all other school personnel need to send a clear message to bullies that bullying and cyberbullying are not tolerated behaviors in or out of school (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Students need to have a better understanding of family, school, and legal limits of online speech, the negative ramifications of online behaviors, and Internet privacy protection. School counselors need to communicate with and provide resources for parents of both victims and bullies (Olweus, 1999).

**Intervention**

Although awareness and prevention efforts are important, educators need to have an intervention plan in place. School counselors can advocate for a team of school personnel who will be responsible for the development of an intervention plan. The team should consist of the principal, school psychologist, the media specialist, school counselor, teacher, or any other important student support staff member.

Having established procedures to follow when incidents of cyberbullying are reported will help schools to avoid taking actions that may be reactive and mistake-prone (Diamanduros et al., 2008). Willard (2009d) suggests several intervention strategies for cyberbullying. School personnel, students, and parents should be taught how to preserve evidence on school and home computers and cell phones. Evidence is vital for justifying an intervention, especially if incidents become a legal matter. School counselors can offer technical assistance or find someone who can to school personnel and parents if needed.
A threat assessment needs to be done if incidents of cyberbullying create concern of substantial disruption, violence, or suicide. School counselors should report to principals and law enforcement officials if they believe cyberbullying speech appears to be dangerous or if there are threats of violence. School personnel can then assess response options. If a similar situation happens on-campus, disciplinary actions may be justified. Even though situations may occur off-campus, if they do not cause disruptions on-campus, disciplinary actions may not be justified. If so, school counselors need to provide assistance to all parties involved.

School personnel need to identify the perpetrator(s). School counselors can acquire the assistance of technical services personnel to obtain the identity of the perpetrator(s). Technical assistance may need to be offered to parents as well. It is important to keep in mind that perpetrators may be disguising their identity.

School counselors need to provide assistance and support to the victim even if disciplinary actions cannot be taken. Counseling, mediations, and technical support can be offered to both students and parents. It will be vital for school counselors to have contact with outside resources and agencies (e.g., community mediation services, legal assistance, and law enforcement) so they can assist both cyberbullying victims and perpetrators.

Guidance on how to stop cyberbullying will be an essential obligation for school counselors. Students can be taught to send one message stating clearly, “Do not communicate with me again or I will contact the appropriate authorities”. School personnel, students, and parents can forward messages to the Internet Service Provider (ISP) and request that the account be terminated. Web sites should be notified if negative speech is present on the site and victims should request for the speech to be removed. School counselors can also educate students and parents about filter and block functions on instant messenger, e-mail, and cell phones. Willard
(2009d) suggests using the filter function on the computer in order to preserve evidence. If negative speech is coming from cell phones, the number should be traced and the phone company should be notified of any incidents. It may also be a good idea for victims of cyberbullying to change their phone number and e-mail address.

School counselors can also use informal resolution strategies in combating cyberbullying. Contacting the perpetrator’s parents for assistance in the matter can be a good place to start. If parents are unwilling to assist in the process, school counselors may want to suggest to parents to seek legal counsel. School counselors can offer to facilitate both counseling and mediations at school. It is vital for school counselors to recognize that cyberbullies are hurt students too. The goal of school counselors should be to get to the root of the matter for both the victim and perpetrator(s) (Willard, 2009d).

*Strategies for the bully.* Although some cyberbullies’ identities are unknown, school counselors need to work with cyberbullies who have been identified. It is important for cyberbullies to be shown alternatives to their negative behaviors. Roberts and Morotti (2000) recommend five approaches for working with students engaged in bullying behaviors. These strategies include:

1) making nonthreatening contact with bullies; 2) intensive listening to what the bully is saying at both the surface and metacommunicative levels; 3) laying the groundwork for the bully to begin to learn about self and creating opportunities for change; 4) giving individual attention and support; and 5) providing long-term follow up and care (Roberts & Morotti, 2000, p. 150).

Cyberbullies must be confronted by adults about their behaviors. Instead of confronting cyberbullies immediately after an incident when emotions are high, school counselors can better
address the situation in a calm and rational approach between episodes of cyberbullying incidents. Dialogue between the school counselor and cyberbullies should be age-appropriate. At no time should the school counselor accuse the student of being in the wrong, but rather probe cyberbullies for their perspective as to what is occurring. School counselors can give cyberbullies an opportunity to explain and justify their actions while working toward acquiring accountability and accepting responsibility (Roberts & Morotti, 2000).

Listening is probably the most important thing school counselors can do for cyberbullies. School counselors, school personnel, and parents must remember that bullies are usually sad and unhappy individuals who hide their true emotions behind a mask of aggression. While listening for both surface and metacommunicational themes, school counselors should be assessing for cues within students’ stories which reveal relevant features about students’ home life, parental disciplinary styles, feelings of alienation, self-esteem, fear, or anger (Roberts & Morotti, 2000).

School counselors can help cyberbullies to find appropriate ways to interact with others. Behavioral contracts and social skills-training interventions are essential for helping cyberbullies focus on achievable and concrete behavioral changes. Involving teachers and parents in the formation of contracts will help to create a supportive atmosphere for cyberbullies in both school and home environments (Roberts & Morotti, 2000).

School counselors can work individually with cyberbullies to determine the causes underlying cyberbullying behaviors. Cyberbullies need to be supported in efforts to change their negative behavior. It is important to consider that these negative behaviors may have been learned over a long period of time, so change at the age of intervention may be very difficult for cyberbullies. School counselors can be positive role models for students and provide self-esteem enhancing approaches (Roberts & Morotti, 2000).
Although schools may experience understaffing or outrageous student-to-counselor ratios, it is critical for school counselors to provide long-term counseling services and long-term support. School counselors need to ask schools for the appropriate time and educational resources necessary for long-term behavioral change initiatives. It takes immense time and patience from both school counselors and cyberbullies to build relationships and work on establishing more socially acceptable behaviors (Roberts & Morotti, 2000).

*Strategies for the victim.* Roberts and Coursol (1996) recommend five intervention strategies for dealing with victims. These strategies include “immediate response to the victim, listening approaches, reintegration and skill building, adult involvement, and long-term commitment to the victim” (Roberts & Coursol, 1996, p. 206).

School counselors should immediately assess the cyberbullying incident and ensure the health and safety of the victim. It is important for school counselors to explain to victims they may need to breach confidentiality if an incident of cyberbullying must be reported due to school policy or state statutes (e.g., mandated reporting). School counselors can obtain informed consent and permission from students so they do not feel betrayed by trusted adults (Roberts & Coursol, 1996).

School counselors can listen to victims’ stories while providing a safe environment in which victims can move from learned helplessness toward empowerment and self-efficacy. During individual sessions, school counselors should listen for the presenting circumstances that led to the immediate instances of victimization. School counselors also need to be listening for the “deeper components of the experience and identify the major factors that may contribute in making individuals more vulnerable in school environments” (Roberts & Coursol, 1996, p. 207).
With the help of school counselors and other school personnel, students who are continuously victimized can be given the opportunity to become better skilled in peer interaction. Through school wide guidance lessons, small groups, and individual counseling sessions, students can build self-esteem skills and learn assertiveness strategies for standing up to cyberbullies (Roberts & Coursol, 1996). School counselors can help victims to develop personal guidelines for online involvement, evaluate the positives and negatives of being part of the online community, recognize when an online situation has gotten out of control, and conduct a self-assessment of their involvement that may be contributing to victimization (Mason, 2008). Victims should be reminded to report incidents of cyberbullying to trusted adults and to save all evidence.

School counselors and other school personnel should help “give students the tools of empowerment and choice so that they will request parent and teacher involvement” (Roberts & Coursol, 1996, p. 208). Parental support and encouragement at home will help to keep students in attendance at school. Teacher involvement may increase observations by authorities in classrooms, between classes, and during less structured activities (e.g., lunch, recess, and free periods) (Roberts & Coursol, 1996). It is important for victims to know that they can trust, confide in, and utilize parental and teacher support to combat cyberbullies.

Once victims’ health and safety are ensured, school counselors can begin long-term commitment to the victims. Victims of cyberbullying need to rebuild their sense of belonging within the school through constructive and supportive interventions. Support groups (e.g., stress reduction, assertiveness training, and anger management) should be formed to decrease the likelihood of students becoming repeat victims of cyberbullying (Roberts & Coursol, 1996).
School counselors should work collaboratively with victims’ families to support and protect students throughout their educational journey.

*Adlerian Perspective*

School counselors facilitate development and meet students’ needs by using applications from different theorists. Adlerian principles have useful applications for working with students in the schools (Pryor & Tollerud, 1999). Adlerian theory suggests that by understanding how a student understands and experiences his or her world, school counselors can “develop effective interventions that teach students how to adapt and cope with life’s difficulties in a cooperative and socially responsible manner” (Fallon, 2004, p.49).

*Goals of Misbehavior*

School counselors can use Adlerian techniques to help students realize their misbehavior and to learn how to develop greater self-control. Adler believed that every behavior has a goal and a purpose (Fallon, 2004). Understanding the goal and purpose of students’ behaviors will help school counselors to understand students’ motives and how to best help students change their problem behavior (Pryor & Tollerud, 1999).

Understanding the four main goals of misbehavior will help school counselors choose the most beneficial intervention. The goal of attention seeking usually results in adult’s feeling annoyed (Fallon, 2004). If students are participating in cyberbullying activities to gain attention, school counselors and teachers should withhold attention and pay attention to students once their behavior is appropriate (Pryor & Tollerud, 1999).

When the goal of misbehavior is power, students feel that they only counts if they can force others to do what they want. Adults will feel challenged and may want to engage in power struggles with these students. If students are participating in cyberbullying activities to gain
power, school counselors and teachers need to avoid engaging in power struggles. Clear limits (e.g., not hurting self or others) need to be set with students. School counselors need to remember not to restrict students’ speech because the goal is to help them express their thoughts and feelings. Once limits are set, school counselors can use logical consequences if students continue to misbehave. Logical consequences are related to what students have done, are fair, and are consistent (Fallon, 2004).

The goals of revenge and inadequacy may be an indication to school counselors that there are significant problems/issues. School counselors may need to refer students to community resources. When the goal of misbehavior is revenge, students believe they must hurt others because they do not feel a sense of belonging. Adults will feel hurt and outraged (Fallon, 2004). If students are participating in cyberbullying activities for revenge, school counselors and teachers will need to set clear rules, encourage students, and show students that they are liked by others (Pryor & Tollerud, 1999).

When the goal of misbehavior is inadequacy, students have learned to feel that they do not matter to others, are too discouraged to try, and believe they will fail. Adults will often feel like giving up on students (Fallon, 2004). If students are participating in cyberbullying activities due to a feeling of inadequacy, school counselors and teachers will need to give extra encouragement and help students see that they are valued (Pryor & Tollerud, 1999).

Encouragement

Encouragement helps students change their motivation to misbehave (Fallon, 2004). If school counselors and other school personnel can provide students with nurturing environments, students may desire to change their misbehavior into more appropriate and constructive behaviors (Pryor & Tollerud, 1999). Victims of cyberbullying and the cyberbullies themselves
both need encouragement. School counselors can show students respect and acknowledge their ability to be positive members of society.

**Sense of Belonging**

Belonging, one of the basic concepts of Adlerian psychology, is a basic need of all students. Individuals need to belong, or to feel a sense of significance and importance. Students want to feel included and connected to their school. A student’s sense of security is determined by his or her feeling of belonging (Edwards, 1995). School counselors should recognize that both the victim of cyberbullying and the cyberbully may experience the loss of his or her feeling of belonging.

A sense of belonging is associated with a student’s self-esteem, his or her relationships with other students and teachers, and academic success. When a student’s lacks a sense of belonging, he or she may become alienated. Alienation is associated with disruptive behaviors (e.g., hostility, lack of sense of responsibility, and withdrawal) and poor academic achievement (Edwards, 1995).

The school counselor’s first step for promoting a sense of belonging is to find ways to encourage teachers’ feeling of belonging. Teachers and school personnel will encourage belonging in their classroom and school once they feel a sense of belonging. Building school personnel’s sense of belonging can be done by helping them get to know more about each other (Edwards, 1995). School functions, team building activities, and pairing teachers with teachers from other grades are all ways school counselors can foster a sense of belonging throughout the school.

Once school personnel are modeling belonging throughout the school, school counselors can offer strategies to encourage belonging in students. Albert (1991) suggests promoting the
three C’s of belonging: connect, capable, and contribute. Students can connect during a cooperative learning activity which allows students to discover that they may have common interests with other students. Teachers facilitate connections with students by greeting students and by making encouraging comments each day. Helping students feel capable may be difficult if they are discouraged. School counselors can encourage teachers to set up experiences where students are guaranteed to succeed. Students should be encouraged to contribute to the classroom and school in positive ways. Teachers can assign students jobs or tasks throughout the day to display to students the importance of their contributions (Edwards, 1995).

Conclusion

In this age of education, students are provided with limitless information and resources through networks and wireless communication. As educators adopt the use of technology to widen opportunities for new knowledge, it is important to acknowledge the potential negative ramifications of using technology (Diamanduros et al., 2008). School counselors are not the only adults responsible for the safety of students, but they may be an important resource for faculty, staff, parents, and students seeking information or help.

As leaders, school counselors can address the issue of cyberbullying by enhancing the awareness of school personnel, parents, and students. As advocates, school counselors can promote the implementation of school policies and procedures concerning cyberbullying. As collaborators, school counselors can work with school personnel to create and execute cyberbullying prevention and intervention programs (Chibbaro, 2007). It is important to remember that “combating cyberbullying will require administrators, teachers, counselors, parents, and students to work together to ensure that all students are afforded a safe and fear-free
learning environment” (Beale & Hall, 2007, p. 10). School counselors can also utilize Adlerian techniques in order to promote socially acceptable behaviors.
References


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