

Cyberbullying: What to Do If Someone is Harassing You Online

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Online Desk: Cyberbullying has emerged as a widespread concern in the contemporary digital era, as harassment across diverse online platforms has become increasingly frequent. This type of bullying poses significant threats to the mental health and overall well-being of individuals. This underscores the importance of addressing this issue promptly and effectively.

What is Cyberbullying or Cyber Harassment?

Cyberbullying, also known as cyber harassment, refers to the use of digital communication tools such as social media platforms, messaging apps, or online forums to intimidate, threaten, or harass individuals. This form of bullying encompasses various actions, including sending hurtful messages, spreading rumours, sharing embarrassing photos or videos without consent, and creating fake accounts to impersonate and harass someone.

Cyberbullying can occur anonymously, making it difficult to identify perpetrators. Also, it can have profound and lasting effects on the mental and emotional well-being of victims.

Types of Cyberbullying

Harassment

Harassment entails sending mean or threatening messages to someone online. It can be done through text messages, emails, social media posts, or online chat rooms.

Exclusion

Exclusion involves intentionally leaving someone out of an online group or activity. For instance, a cyberbully might create a social media group and exclude their target.

Outing and Doxxing

Doxxing includes sharing someone's private information online without their consent. For example, their home address, phone number, or embarrassing photos.

Impersonation

Impersonation means creating a fake online profile and pretending to be someone else. The cyberbully can then use this fake profile to send mean messages or damage the victim's reputation.

Trickery

Trickery mainly is deceiving someone into sharing personal information or embarrassing photos. For example, a cyberbully might create a fake survey to obtain personal details.

Cyberstalking

This involves using technology to harass, intimidate, or threaten someone. This includes sending threatening messages or tracking the victim's online activity.

Flaming

Flaming is described as posting angry or insulting messages on someone's social media page or online forum.

Trolling

Trolling entails posting inflammatory or off-topic messages in an online forum to upset other users.

Fraping

A frape happens when someone changes another person's information on social media without them knowing or giving permission.

Impacts of Cyber Harassment

Emotional Distress

Cyberbullying can lead to profound emotional turmoil, including feelings of sadness, humiliation, and anger. Victims often experience heightened anxiety, constantly anticipating the next hurtful encounter, which undermines their sense of safety and well-being.

Psychological Effects

Research shows a significant correlation between cyberbullying and psychological challenges. Victims of cyberbullying frequently endure elevated levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and even suicidal ideation.

The relentless influx of derogatory messages and harassment often fosters sentiments of powerlessness and diminished self-worth. Also, the incessant negativity and pressure can prove overwhelming for those targeted.

Social Isolation and Self-Esteem Damage

Cyberbullying can cause individuals to retreat from both online and offline social interactions, fearing additional harassment or scrutiny from their peers. This can foster feelings of isolation and solitude. Additionally, cyberbullying can profoundly impact an individual's self-esteem, as the recurrent attacks can engender feelings of worthlessness and insecurity.

Academic Consequences

The emotional distress caused by cyberbullying can impact victims' ability to concentrate on their studies and perform academically. Consequently, this can lead to a decline in grades and overall academic performance of the bullied person.

Physical Health Issues

The prolonged stress and anxiety caused by cyberbullying can manifest in physical health problems such as headaches, insomnia, and gastrointestinal issues. Victims may also experience changes in appetite and energy levels.

Long-term Effects

The effects of cyberbullying can extend beyond the immediate harassment, affecting victims' long-term mental health and well-being. Some individuals may carry the trauma of cyberbullying into adulthood, impacting their relationships and overall quality of life.

Bystander Effects

Observing cyberbullying can exacerbate mental health issues and foster an atmosphere of apprehension and vulnerability. It can instil fear of becoming a target, erode trust in online interactions and impact individuals' well-being.

What to do If You Experience Cyberbullying in Bangladesh

Stay Calm

It is essential to maintain composure and refrain from impulsive reactions to harassment. Responding to the bully may exacerbate the situation, as it gratifies their desire for a reaction. So, try to resist the temptation to engage with their messages or posts.

Document Evidence

It is important to document instances of cyberbullying, whether through screenshots of messages or posts or by noting down dates and times. This evidence will prove invaluable should you need to report the bullying at a later stage.

Reach Out for Support

It is highly recommended to discuss your experiences with a reliable friend, family member, another trusted adult, or mental health professional. They can provide valuable support and advice on navigating through the situation effectively.

Block the Bully

You may utilise privacy settings to block the person responsible for the harassment from reaching out to you further. Most social media platforms and messaging apps offer the option to block individuals. It can effectively prevent any further contact with them.

Report the Abuse to the Platform

Utilising the available reporting tools to report instances of cyberbullying is crucial. Most social media platforms and online forums provide mechanisms for reporting abusive behaviour. Report the cyberbullying to the relevant website or platform, as they typically have anti-bullying policies and may take disciplinary action against the perpetrator, such as suspending their account.

Seek Legal Advice

In instances of severe cyberbullying, it is advisable to seek advice from a legal professional. The available remedies for cyberbullying may vary depending on individual circumstances. Victims are advised to seek legal counsel from a lawyer knowledgeable about cyberbullying and relevant laws for guidance.

File a Report

Victims of cyberbullying have the option to file a criminal complaint with the police under the Cyber Security Act of 2023. This act criminalises cyberbullying and imposes imprisonment and/or fines on offenders found guilty.

Cyber Crime Help Desk

Bangladesh Police operates a Cyber Crime Help Desk for women (https://www.police.gov.bd/en/police_cyber_support_for_women) where victims can report incidents of cyberbullying and seek assistance. Evidence and proof (links, screenshots, etc) of cyberbullying can be

forwarded via email to cybersupport.women@police.gov.bd

Also, victims can lodge complaints through multiple channels, including the dedicated hotlines at the Police Headquarters, the nearest police station or the official Facebook page of “Cyber Police Centre, CID, Bangladesh Police.”

Alternative Reporting

Cybercrime victims also have the option to file complaints with the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) by calling their hotlines or emailing btrc@btrc.gov.bd.

BTRC pledges to take action within 24 hours, with perpetrators brought to justice within 3 days of filing the complaint. The government has also introduced a cyber-crime helpline at +88-02-55007183 for victims to report their complaints.

Consider Civil Suit

Victims can pursue a civil suit for damages against the perpetrator, seeking compensation for emotional distress and reputation damage caused by cyberbullying. In cases of criminal intimidation, the perpetrator may be liable under the Penal Code 1860.

Seek Restraining Orders

Although the term “restraining order” is not specifically defined in Bangladesh’s law, victims can apply under relevant sections before a competent executive magistrate to prohibit a perpetrator from making unlawful contact.

Take Care of Yourself

The emotional strain of cyberbullying can impact your mental well-being. You should prioritise self-care by reaching out to loved ones, participating in activities that bring you joy, and seeking professional assistance if necessary. Concentrate on self-nurturing activities to alleviate stress during this demanding period.

Verdict

Cyber harassment is a serious issue that can have profound consequences on individuals’ lives. It is crucial to recognise the signs of cyberbullying, take proactive measures to protect oneself and seek support if victimised. By working together to combat cyberbullying, we can create safer and more inclusive online communities.