**Essay Title:** Why do teenagers use cyber bullying to harass others? What are its effects on the victim and what can be done about it?

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**Reflective Project Title:**

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**Essay Title:** Why do teenagers use cyber bullying to harass others? What are its effects on the victim and what can be done about it?

**Abstract:** This essay looks at why teenagers use cyber bullying to harm others, its consequences on the victim and the measures that can be taken by teenagers, schools and parents to stop such kind of anti-social behaviour.

Cyber bullying can be through many ways such as through chat rooms, emails, through interactive gaming etc. Any type of bullying whether it is cyber bullying or any other bullying is harmful for the victim and in case of cyber bullying it can be very serious since the one who bullies can remain anonymous and cause harm which is there for everyone to see for a long time unless the victim does something to remove such offensive messages from the internet/mobile phones etc. To help the victim not only the victim himself/herself should take some steps, but also in certain cases the school and parents should come together to help him/her and this way cases of cyber bullying can be reduced.

For this essay I did a questionnaire with one of the classes of Year 7. The questionnaire sheds some light on the type of bullying prevalent today among students, what they have done about it and the suggestions to stop further bullying. I have also looked at website articles on this topic

**Introduction:** Bullying refers to a series of violent behaviour, for example where one person with a lot of internal rage, violence etc. takes it out on another person, the victim is usually innocent. It mainly occurs in schools where teenagers are not supervised enough by the teachers and this gives opportunities to the bully to attack the victim without getting caught and that's why many teenagers who are the victims of the bully suffer alone without telling others or teachers. Another main reason why the victim doesn't speak aloud is due to the fact that they get threatened by the bully, also there is the stigma attached to it. In UK at least 16 children commit suicide every year because of bullying and this presents a very sad picture.

There are different types of bullying which happens among teenagers they are as follows:

- Physical bullying: In this case the bully physically harms the victim, it mainly happens before or after school, during break time and whenever the teacher does not look. E.g. of physical bullying include punching on the face, kicking, touching in an inappropriate way, pranks, teasing, pushing etc.
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- Emotional bullying: "Emotional bullying is any form of bullying that causes damage to a victim's psyche and/or emotional well-being. Examples include spreading rumours about people, keeping certain people out of a "group", ignoring people on purpose, eye rolling, silent but hurtful body motions such as pointing, face making". ¹

- Verbal Bullying: When the bully verbally abuses the victim, then it is verbal bullying. Examples of verbal bullying are - calling names, speaking in foul language to the victim, negative comments at the person's looks, clothes, etc.

- Sexual bullying: It can be physical or non-physical and it is based mainly on gender and sexuality of the person. "It is when sexuality or gender is used as a weapon by boys or girls towards other boys or girls — although it is more commonly directed at girls". ²

- Cyber-bullying: "Cyber bullying is defined as the use of ...email, text messaging, websites or discussion forums, to intentionally hurt, defame or intimidate another." ³

In this essay I am mainly going to talk about cyber bullying among teenagers.

Nowadays because of the advancement in technology, cyber bullies use different means to cause trouble to others. In conventional form of bullying in schools, the bullying ends in the school and you do not have to face the bully at home but in case of cyber bullying the bullying continues even at home.

Cyber bullying has increased in recent years. "In a national survey of 10-17 year olds, twice as many children indicated they had been victims and perpetrators." ⁴

**Forms of Cyber bullying:** Cyber bullying can happen in various forms such as through:

**Email:** A bully can send threatening emails to the victim, such mails are related to racism etc.

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² Ibid


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Instant Messenger and chat rooms: "Sending instant messenger and chatroom messages to friends or direct to a victim". The bully can invite others to join in the bullying process and thus harm the victim.

Social networking sites: Social networking sites are a great way to chat with someone but it can become dangerous if someone tries to bully you. The bully usually tries to set up profiles on social networking sites to make fun of the victim and the bully invites others as well to join him/her and this makes it worse for the victim.

Mobile phone: A person can bully others by sending hate text; video messages; photo messages; repeated abusive phone calls. The bully can also pose as a stranger and send text to the victim anonymously "over short distances using Bluetooth technology". The bully can also share videos of physical attacks on individuals (happy slapping).

Interactive gaming: When teenagers play games on computer they can chat as well as play game with others and sometimes when they play they can become abusive with other players and threaten.

Sending viruses: People can bully by sending virus to other computers and this can destroy the computers of the victim and can also destroy important data stored in the computer.

Abusing personal information: Social networking site help the bullies to easily get the personal information or photos of the victim and this can create a lot of problem for the victim.

The graph in the next page shows how many students are involved in bullying. The graph is based on the questionnaire which I did with Year 7 Al students. (See Appendix 1)

http://www.direct.gov.uk/YoungPeople/HealthAndRelationships/Bullying/DG_070501 visited on 13/01112

Ibid
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From the graph you could see that the number of students cyber bullied are only 2 out of 27 while majority of the students i.e. 21 out of 27 are bullied using other methods. It means the cyber bullying is not really that prevalent at least among Year 7a1 students. But there are still some students who are cyber bullied and in the future these incidents of cyber bullying are only going to increase. Interestingly there are only 6 out of 27 students who have not been bullied till now and this is a matter of concern.
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**Ethical Issue surrounding cyber bullying:**

Cyber bullying is a very big ethical issue in itself and this issue give rise to 3 main questions which I am going to discuss in the following paragraphs. These questions are - What are the effects of cyber bullying on the victim? Why do teenagers bully others? And what can be done about it?

**What are the effects of cyber bullying on the victim?**

Since cyber bullying is not only limited to the schools but can also happen in the privacy of the victim's home, in very difficult cases because of cyber bullying the victim can become mentally stressed, depressed and also become very anxious. In some cases the victim may even attempt to commit suicide. The victim may lose self-esteem and may also lose confidence in himself/herself because of the negative remarks made by the bully. The victim may often get angry and withdraw from everyone else and this will affect his/her social skills and he/she may grow up to be someone who lacks good communication skills. According to Willard (2006)\(^7\) the victim might remain absent from school for many days because of the bullying and this will result in poor grades.

In case of cyber bullying the victim may "revisit the written taunt over and over again and relive the experience"\(^8\) because of this as I have said earlier the victim would have serious mental disorders and sometime physical disorders as well.

**Why do teenagers get involved in cyber bullying?**

There are many reasons as to why teenagers bully others. First of all this type of bullying "gives a sense of power"\(^9\) to the bully over his/her victim. The bully, by using abusive words victimises the other person and has very little empathy for his/her victim as there is no face to face contact between the victim and the bully. Ybarra and Mitchell

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\(^8\) http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/articles/brownjackson_cassidy.html. visited on 15/01/112
\(^9\) http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/studentsupport/psychologicalservices/pdf/Cyberbullying.pdf visited on 15/01/112
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(2004a)\textsuperscript{10} notes that the main difference between internet bullying and face to face bullying is that in cyber bullying you can withhold your identity while in conventional type of bullying you cannot. Therefore another main reason why the teenagers like to cyber bully is because they can remain anonymous and at the same time attack their victim. Even if the bully knows the victim, the victim would not necessarily know the bully. According to Me Kenna& Bargh (2000)\textsuperscript{11} and Willard (2003)\textsuperscript{12}, the possibility of remaining anonymous, gives the opportunity to the bully to communicate in abusive ways online, that they normally would not do in a face-face encounter. Also many teenagers think that since others are involved in cyber bullying it is alright to do it, which means that in some cases the teenagers might be doing it to please others or just for the fun of it since others are doing it as well. The teenagers might also bully others if they have problems at home and have a negative attitude towards life. They can sometimes resort to bullying because they themselves might be emotionally or physically stressed.

Nowadays teenagers "adopt 'avatars', which are individualised personas that users can create for online interactions" \textsuperscript{13} These so called 'avatars' created by the bullies enables them to shift the blame for what they have done to the avatar instead of themselves, thus they do not feel guilty and they continue to harass the victim. Also teenagers who have been bullied in the school use cyber bullying to take revenge on the teenagers who have bullied them at school.

What can be done about cyber bullying?

Teenagers themselves can do certain things to stop bullying for example they can ignore the bully, avoid public chat rooms etc. The teenagers should know that "cyber-


\textsuperscript{13}http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/articles/brownjackson_cassidy.html visited on 18/01/12
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Space is public space therefore they should be very careful with regard to the type of information they give to the people, because some can take advantage of it and bully them. Also it is best to report any cyber bullying incidents to the teacher /parent/a trusted adult.

In the survey (See Appendix1) which I did on bullying, the following suggestions were made by the Year 7 a1 students in order to stop bullying, they are as follows:

"Tell the teacher"
"Ignore the bullying and the bully will get bored"
"Tell an adult or a friend"
"Stand up for yourself"
"try to contact someone you can trust to help you"
"try and ask the person why they are doing this” "by teaching the bully a lesson"
"block them from you chat room"
"Tell you family and friends " "Get school counselling"
"Tell the bully how you feel"

These are some good suggestions made by the students, but one of the suggestions which is to teach the bully a lesson is not a good one since it will only aggravate the matter, the best thing to do is to ignore the bully and if necessary report the matter to a trusted person. The suggestions show that the teenagers themselves know what has to be done when they are bullied and this does help in reducing bullying.

In the same questionnaire (see appendix 1) the students who were bullied were asked how the bullying stopped and the table which follows gives information on how it stopped and the number of students who resorted to a particular method to stop the bullying:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps taken by students in year 7 to stop bullying</th>
<th>Number of students.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ignored the bully</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stood up for themselves and told the bully to stop</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talked to school authority / had a civilised discussion with the bully</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The victim moved on to a different place so the bullying stopped</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As the victim got older the bullying stopped</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So out of 21 students who were bullied, 15 students took some step to stop the bullying and one of the steps which was often taken by the students was to stand up against the bully and to tell them to stop and this is much better than retaliating. Very few students talked to school authorities or had civilised discussion and this means that students need to be encouraged more by the school to approach the teacher or counsellor for help and to discuss things with their friends.

Schools in UK have anti-bullying policies in place. In the school where I study they have this policy in place. In this school many sites that give access to student's emails such as Hotmail, MSN Yahoo mail etc. are blocked, this is one of the steps taken by the school towards preventing cyber bullying. In this school, teachers can also monitor the students' activities in areas of the school where students use ICT and they can report any incidents of bullying to the Child Protection officer in the school if it happens. Mobile phones are one of the major sources of cyber bullying. In this school specially for Key Stage 3 & 4 mobile phones are not allowed in the classrooms, which means that the students need to hand in the mobiles to the receptionist before they go to the classroom and then collect it back at the end of the day and this way the school tries to reduce bullying through mobile at least when the students are in the school campus.

Most of the schools in U.K have acceptable use policies. These policies are used to cover:

- Appropriate use of e-mail
- Appropriate use of the Internet
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- A statement regarding bullying by e-mail
- Actions for reporting misuse, including receipt of mail from unknown senders
- Sanctions for misuse of e-mail.\textsuperscript{15}

Because of this policy, if any school finds inappropriate behaviour on the part of the students, then they can take the necessary action to stop the behaviour. If there are any offensive remarks made by a student to another student on the internet, then the school authority has the right to stop the student from using the internet in an inappropriate way and can also "contact the host (e.g. the social networking site) to make a report to get the content taken down" \textsuperscript{16}. In case of illegal contents, the school can contact the police, "who can determine what needs to be kept for evidential purposes". \textsuperscript{17} In some extreme cases cyber bullying can be recorded as a criminal offense. "under a range of different laws, including: Protection from Harassment Act 1997, which has both criminal and civil provision, Malicious Communications Act 1988, section 127 of the Communications Act 2003, Public Order Act 1988\textsuperscript{18} which means that in certain cases a person can be arrested even for cyber bullying.

Also the school should regularly review its policies and measures on cyber bullying and by doing this they would be aware of any changes to be made in order to further reduce cases of cyber bullying. They can also conduct surveys in the school in relation to cyber bullying, this will help them to further improve their policies. These policies and measures should be publicised to the parents as well as the students. Also the school needs to publicise different ways of reporting cyber bullying in schools.

School authority should also advise pupils and staff to try and keep a record of the bullying as evidence. This evidence can be shown if necessary in the future to the parents and police.

School can also make the students and their parents aware of pupils' responsibilities with regards to the use of ICT, and what the sanctions are for misusing the internet. Students should also be made aware of the support they can get if cyber bullying takes place in or out of school such as by contacting school counsellors, teachers or by visiting certain websites such as www.stoptextbully.com www.cyberbullying.ca,

\textsuperscript{15}www.croydon.nasuwt.org.uk/CyberBully.doc visited on 21101112
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid
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www.becta.org.uk, www.kidscape.org.uk/childrenteens/cyberbullying.shtml etc. or they can also contact Child line , NSPCC , Samaritans etc.

Not only the school but also the parents are responsible to prevent their own child from getting involved in cyber bullying. However a study has shown that there is a big gap between what the parents think their teenage son or daughter is doing and the actual online activities of their son/daughter. This means that parents need to be made aware about how their children are using the internet. Also parents should be monitoring the online activities of their children and should also emphasise the positive uses of internet.

At the moment schools can control cyber bullying which occurs inside the school but according to Gillis (2006) if schools have online protocols that are followed not only at school but also at home then the teachers and parents can work together to monitor the online behaviour of their children.

**Conclusion:**

Bullying is one of the weapons used by teenagers to harm other teenagers. There are many types of bullying such as physical bullying, emotional bullying, verbal bullying etc. In this essay I have mainly discussed about cyber bullying.

Cyber bullying can be done in many ways to hurt the victim such as through emails, chat rooms, text messaging etc.

There are many effects of cyber bullying on the victim such as the victim can go into depression, have low self-esteem and even think about committing suicide.

One of the main reasons why teenagers cyber bully is because they can remain anonymous unlike face-face bullying and can attack the victim without feeling guilty about it.

Some ways in which the kids can stop bullying is by ignoring the bully, reporting the incident to a parent or teacher, standing up for themselves etc. Also the school and the parents of the victim can work together to stop bullying.

Cyber bullying incidents are on the increase and unless something is done about it by the school, parents or the victim, there cannot be reduction in such incidents. We need to work together to remove this kind of behaviour from the society.

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19 http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/articles/brownjackson_cassidy.html visited on 22/01/12
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7. www.croydon.nasuwt.org.uk/CyberBully.doc

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Appendix 1

(Questionnaire with Year 7a1 students)