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Survey reveals young teens hardest hit by cyber-bullies

A new Kids Helpline survey has revealed 13-14 year olds are the hardest hit by cyber-bullying, making up 70 per cent of those who have participated to date.

Kids Helpline General Manager Wendy Protheroe said the online survey is providing unique information about kids and cyber-bullies.

"We are gaining a greater insight into their plight, including information about who is being bullied, how it's happening and what did or did not work to combat attacks," Ms Protheroe said.

"Responses to date show chat rooms are the preferred choice for cyber-bullies, followed by social networking sites, email and mobile phones.

"Bullying includes a range of tactics such as name calling (80%), abusive comments (67%) and rumours (60%)."

According to Ms Protheroe the most alarming finding is not the level of bullying that occurs but that only one in three young people tell adults they are being bullied.

"Only 24 per cent told a parent while 41 per cent elected to tell a friend," she said.

"Ironically two thirds of those who did tell an adult said it provided a helpful solution."

Ms Protheroe said the recent Four Corners program on bullying shows how tragic the decision not to tell can be.

"It's frightening to think that a young person may choose to end their life before sharing their problems with their mum or dad," she said.

"It is important to understand that some feel too humiliated or embarrassed to tell or believe their parents or teachers will blame them for not being able to stop the bullying.

"Kids need to know bullying isn't their fault and feel that adults will not just offer 'lip service' but help them find practical solutions to being bullied."

Kids Helpline's telephone and online counselling mediums provide privacy to the child and can overcome their reluctance to disclose bullying.

"Our counsellors offer young people a non-judgemental source of help," Ms Protheroe said.

More than two thirds of the young people surveyed knew their cyber-bully and half were also bullied face-to-face.

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Cyber-bullying cont...

“Our findings suggest that a lot of bullying is a group phenomenon predominantly involving a child or young person’s peer network,” Ms Protheroe said.

“This means we must create ways of empowering peer groups to find their own solutions by positively influencing the quality of their relationships and improving their ability to provide peer support.”

Ms Protheroe said there are numerous peer helper programs across Australia but to be effective they need to:

- Teach positive social values
- Provide empathy training so that bystanders speak out against bullies instead of silently condoning the behaviour
- Assist young people to enhance their helping skills so they can better support their friends at school
- Teach people the dynamics of bullying and brainstorm how students can end bullying in their school
- Offer peer mediation skills training, and
- Teach web etiquette, known as ‘netiquette’, to reduce cyber-bullying.

“If Australian schools and youth groups looked at implementing peer helper programs like this, it would go a long way to helping combat the physical and mental anguish experienced by bullied children,” she said.

“It sounds like a cliché but the truth is we are all responsible for ensuring we treat each other with respect and kindness, and say ‘no to bullying’.”

The Kids Helpline Cyber-bullying Survey is still active. Any young person is welcome to contribute by visiting www.kidshelp.com.au and selecting the cyber-bullying survey icon.

Kids Helpline, Australia’s only national children’s counselling service, provides 24 hour counselling services to young people aged 5 to 25 years – free call 1800 55 1800 or online at www.kidshelp.com.au.

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Media Contact: Regan Flor – 07 3867 1390 or 0423 843 786
Jessica Tatzenko – 07 3867 1248 or 0434 077 478