# Cyberbullying Statistics 2026: New Trends, Emerging Risks, and Data-Driven Solutions

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The internet doesn't clock out when school does. For millions of young people, online harassment follows them from the classroom to the dinner table, into their bedrooms, and onto every device they pick up. Cyberbullying has shifted from an occasional problem to a persistent public health concern — one that produces measurable consequences for mental health, academic performance, and long-term wellbeing. This guide presents what the data actually shows, what new forms of harassment are emerging, who is most at risk, and what parents, teens, and educators can do about it right now.

# Cyberbullying in 2026: Quick Answer

Cyberbullying is a persistent and growing problem among U.S. adolescents. According to the Cyberbullying Research Center's 2023 national survey, the percentage of U.S. teens who have experienced cyberbullying in their lifetime has more than doubled — from 18.8% in 2007 to 54.6% by 2023, with 26.5% reporting victimization in just the previous 30 days. The most effective first responses are documenting the harassment, blocking and reporting through the platform, and opening a direct conversation with a trusted adult. Awareness of how cyberbullying works — and why victims often stay silent — is the foundation of any effective prevention strategy.

## Key Takeaways: The Current Cyberbullying Landscape

1. **Rates have risen significantly over the past decade.** The Cyberbullying Research Center found that lifetime victimization among U.S. teens has more than doubled since 2007. In their 2023 survey, 26.5% of students reported being cyberbullied in the previous 30 days — up from 16.7% in 2016.
2. **Teens widely recognize it as a serious problem.** Pew Research Center (2022) found that 53% of U.S. teens ages 13–17 consider cyberbullying a major problem for their age group.
3. **Gender patterns are shifting.** Recent data from the Cyberbullying Research Center's 2025 survey found that adolescent boys are now more likely than girls to report experiencing cyberbullying (36.6% vs. 28.6%), a notable change from prior years when rates were roughly equal. Girls, however, remain more likely to face specific forms of harassment including rumor spreading and image-based abuse.
4. **Most victims don't tell an adult.** Research consistently finds that the majority of cyberbullying victims do not report the harassment to a parent, teacher, or school administrator — often due to fear of losing device access, concerns that adults won't understand, or worry that reporting will make the situation worse.
5. **New technologies are creating new forms of abuse.** AI-generated deepfakes, account takeovers, and digital doxxing represent an emerging layer of harm that traditional anti-bullying frameworks weren't designed to address with these new technologies.

# What Is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is the deliberate and repeated use of digital communication tools to harass, threaten, humiliate, or harm another person. Unlike traditional bullying, it can happen 24 hours a day, reach a wide audience instantly, and be carried out anonymously — making it harder to escape and harder to document.

Common forms include:

1. **Name-calling and offensive comments:** The most prevalent form, according to Pew Research Center (2022) — 32% of U.S. teens report being called offensive names online.
2. **Rumor spreading:** False information spread to damage a person's reputation — reported by 22% of teens in the same Pew survey.
3. **Exclusion:** Deliberately leaving someone out of group chats, online games, or social circles to isolate them.
4. **Fraping:** Accessing another person's social media account without permission to post inappropriate or damaging content while impersonating them.
5. **Outing:** Sharing someone's private information, images, or personal details without their consent.
6. **Trolling:** Deliberately provoking someone online to generate an emotional reaction, often in public forums or comment sections.
7. **Deepfake harassment:** Using AI tools to create realistic but fabricated images or videos of a person — often in humiliating or sexual contexts — without their knowledge or consent. This is a form of deepfake harassment.
8. **Doxxing:** Publishing a person's private information — home address, phone number, workplace — in public online spaces, often to encourage others to harass or threaten them in person. Doxxing is a serious concern.

# Who Is Most Vulnerable to Online Harassment?

Cyberbullying does not affect all young people equally. Research consistently identifies specific groups that face higher rates of victimization.

**By Age**

Early adolescence represents the period of highest risk. Pew Research Center (2022) found that older teens ages 15–17 are more likely to experience cyberbullying than younger teens ages 13–14 (49% vs. 42%). Research has shown that cyberbullying tends to peak around age 13 for both boys and girls in many countries, making early adolescence a critical window for prevention.

**By Gender**

The gender picture is more nuanced than often reported. The Cyberbullying Research Center's 2025 survey found that boys are now more likely than girls to report being targeted overall (36.6% vs. 28.6%), though the types of harassment differ. Girls are more likely to face rumor spreading and image-based abuse, while boys are more likely to experience physical threats online. Older teen girls (15–17) are disproportionately likely to face multiple types of harassment simultaneously — Pew Research (2022) found that 38% of girls ages 15–17 had experienced two or more types of online harassment.

**By Identity**

LGBTQ+ youth face substantially higher rates of cyberbullying than their peers. According to the CDC's 2024 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, LGBTQ+ high school students were nearly twice as likely as non-LGBTQ+ students to be electronically bullied (25% vs. 13%). Research from PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center reports that LGBTQ+ students who face bias-based bullying experience emotional distress at rates 20–60% higher than peers who face bullying without an identity-based component.

Racial and ethnic minorities also face elevated risks, though the patterns vary by type of harassment. Pew Research (2022) found that Black teens are significantly more likely (21%) than White (4%) or Hispanic (11%) teens to report being bullied specifically because of their race or ethnicity.

**By Online Behavior**

Teens who are online almost constantly face meaningfully higher rates of online harassment. Pew Research (2022) found that teens who are online almost constantly are more likely to have ever been harassed (53%) compared to those who go online less frequently (40%), and more likely to have faced multiple forms of abuse (37% vs. 21%).

# How Common Is Online Bullying?

The numbers vary by source and methodology — a reflection of the genuine difficulty of measuring self-reported behavior — but the direction is consistent across major research bodies: rates have increased significantly over the past decade and remain high.

| Metric | Earlier Data | More Recent Data | Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lifetime cyberbullying victimization (teens) | 18.8% (2007) | 54.6% (2023) | Cyberbully Center |
| 30-day cyberbullying victimization | 16.7% (2016) | 26.5% (2023) | Cyberbully Center |
| Teens who have experienced at least one form of cyberbullying | — | 46% (2022) | Pew Rese |
| Teens who consider cyberbullying a major problem | — | 53% (2022) | Pew Rese |
| LGBTQ+ teens electronically bullied | — | 25% (2024) | CDC |
| Non-LGBTQ+ teens electronically bullied | — | 13% (2024) | CDC |

It's worth noting that different studies use different definitions and reporting windows, which is part of why figures vary. The Cyberbullying Research Center's figures tend to be higher than Pew's because they use different survey methodologies and definitions. What the research consistently shows is that cyberbullying affects a substantial and growing share of U.S. adolescents.

# What Are the Newest Forms of Cyberbullying to Watch For?

## AI deepfakes and non-consensual image generation

AI tools that can generate realistic images and videos of real people are now accessible to teenagers with little to no technical expertise. These tools have been used to create non-consensual explicit images of peers — often of girls — which are then shared through school networks. This form of abuse is distinct from traditional cyberbullying because it creates entirely

fabricated content, and victims have no way to prevent the source material since the images don't come from real photographs.
The NCMEC and Thorn both document this as a rapidly growing harm. Federal legislation — including the TAKE IT DOWN Act — has moved to address non-consensual AI-generated intimate imagery specifically.

## Account takeovers and identity-based harassment

Rather than posting mean comments, some harassers now target their victims by attempting to take over their social accounts — using stolen passwords or phishing techniques — to post damaging content while impersonating the victim. This creates a compound harm: the immediate damage of the content posted, and the longer-term damage of having a victim's online identity used against them.

## Digital doxxing

Doxxing involves gathering and publicly posting someone's private identifying information — home address, phone number, school location, or family members' contact details — specifically to expose the victim to threats and harassment from others. It's particularly dangerous because it bridges the gap between online harassment and physical safety risk. Teens have been targeted with doxxing campaigns following conflicts in gaming communities and on social platforms.

## Sextortion

Sextortion involves threatening to release or distribute private images — real or AI-generated — unless the victim provides money, more images, or other compliance. The FBI has identified sextortion as a significant and growing threat targeting minors, with cases increasing substantially in recent years. Victims are often contacted through gaming platforms or social media before being manipulated into sharing images.

## Where Is Online Bullying Happening Most Often?

Harassment has migrated across platforms as teen behavior has shifted — following users from public social feeds to private messaging and short-form video.

## Social media platforms

Pew Research (2022) found that the most common forms of cyberbullying teens experience are offensive name-calling (32%), rumor spreading (22%), and receiving unwanted explicit images (17%). Instagram and TikTok are the dominant social media platforms where social and visual harassment occurs — including derogatory comments on posts, coordinated mass-reporting of accounts, and hate stitching, where users use TikTok's stitch or duet feature to add mocking or harassing commentary to another person's video.

## Gaming environments

Online gaming communities have become a significant site of identity-based harassment. Platforms like Roblox, Discord, and multiplayer games expose young users to voice chat abuse, team sabotage, coordinated account-reporting campaigns designed to get a player banned, and doxxing of gamertags. The real-time, often anonymous nature of gaming environments makes incidents difficult to document.

## Private and ephemeral messaging

Apps like Snapchat and Telegram present a specific challenge: content disappears after being viewed, making it harder for victims to document and report harassment. Threats, humiliating images, and coordinated exclusion campaigns in group chats can occur and vanish with minimal trace — unless victims know how to capture them before they disappear. Screen recording before content is deleted is one of the most practical protective steps available for private and ephemeral messaging.

## Workplace and adult contexts

Cyberbullying is not limited to adolescents. Online harassment among adults — in professional Slack channels, on LinkedIn, through direct

messages, and in public comment sections — is a documented and growing concern, particularly in remote and hybrid work environments where digital communication has replaced in-person interaction. Adults who experience workplace cyberbullying often face the same silencing pressures as younger victims: fear of retaliation, concern about professional reputation, and uncertainty about where to report.

# What Is the Real Impact of Cyberbullying on Mental Health?

The research on cyberbullying's mental health consequences is extensive and consistent in direction, even where specific figures vary across studies.

## Mental health outcomes

A 2024 systematic review published in PLOS Mental Health analyzing 32 studies covering nearly 30,000 students found that depression was significantly associated with cybervictimization in 16 of 20 studies reviewed, anxiety in 12 of 15 studies, and suicidal behavior in 4 of 9 studies. According to Avast's analysis of cyberbullying research, cyberbullying increases suicidal thinking among victims by nearly 15% and suicide attempts by nearly 9%. Nearly all victims (93%) report some negative mental health outcomes.

## Academic consequences

Research reviewed by PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center finds that repeated peer aggression — including cyberbullying — significantly hampers academic achievement, particularly in mathematics, and negatively affects students' ability to engage in cooperative classroom activities. Students who experience cyberbullying show higher rates of school avoidance and absenteeism. Research published in peer-reviewed journals documents that cybervictimized students experience reduced concentration and academic productivity. These are serious academic consequences.

## Physical health

Victims of cyberbullying show elevated rates of sleep disruption, chronic stress, and somatic symptoms — physical complaints that reflect psychological distress. A 2023 study cited in Frontiers in Psychology found that cyberbullying is a significant contributor to appearance anxiety in adolescents, which compounds social anxiety over time.

## Long-term outcomes

Longitudinal research indicates that adolescent cyberbullying victimization has consequences that extend into adulthood — including elevated rates of depression, anxiety, social trust difficulties, and in some studies, impacts on educational attainment and career development. The Lancet Regional Health (2025) published research finding significant prospective associations between cyberbullying victimization and adverse mental health outcomes including suicidal behavior and substance use in early adolescents.

# Legal Consequences: Is Cyberbullying a Crime in 2026?

All 50 U.S. states have laws addressing bullying, and most include provisions that specifically cover cyberbullying or electronic harassment. The legal landscape varies significantly by state in terms of definitions, penalties, and school authority to discipline off-campus behavior.

## State-level laws

States like California (AB 2454) and Virginia have enacted laws that authorize schools to discipline students for off-campus digital behavior that disrupts the school environment or targets another student. These laws create a legal basis for school intervention even when the harassment originates outside school grounds.

## Criminal charges

Depending on the severity and nature of the conduct, cyberbullying can cross into criminal territory — prosecutable as cyberstalking, criminal harassment, threats, or extortion under existing law. Sextortion involving

minors carries particularly severe federal criminal exposure under child exploitation statutes.

## AI and deepfake legislation

The TAKE IT DOWN Act, which addresses non-consensual intimate imagery including AI-generated deepfakes, was signed into federal law in 2025. This legislation creates a legal mechanism for victims to have this content removed and establishes criminal liability for its creation and distribution. Multiple states have also enacted their own non-consensual deepfake image laws in parallel.

# What Parents and Teens Can Do Right Now

Prevention requires practical steps, not just awareness. These are the most actionable protections available in 2026.

### 1. Know the platforms your child is using

Different platforms have different reporting tools, privacy settings, and moderation capabilities. Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat all have in-app reporting systems for harassment. Meta's proactive detection rate for bullying on Instagram reached 96.9% in 2024, up from 35% in 2019 — though platform detection is not a substitute for direct reporting. It is important to know the platforms your child is using.

### 2. Document before you act

Before blocking or deleting anything, take screenshots or use screen recording to capture the evidence. On platforms with disappearing content like Snapchat, this is especially critical — once content vanishes, it may be unrecoverable for reporting or legal purposes. Save screenshots with timestamps.

### 3. Enable privacy settings proactively

Walk through privacy settings on every platform your child uses. Enable privacy settings by turning off location sharing, and disable the ability for strangers to send direct messages. Most platforms now offer a restricted

mode or close-friends-only option that dramatically reduces exposure to unknown users. You can also set accounts to private.

### 4. Use family safety tools

Verified, available tools for monitoring and protection include:

| Tool | What It Does | Platform |
|---|---|---|
| Bark | Monitors texts, email, and social media for warning signs; alerts parents without full surveillance | iOS, Android |
| Google Family Link | Screen time controls, location sharing, app approvals | Android, iOS |
| Qustodio | Web filtering, screen time management, social media monitoring | Cross-platform |
| Common Sense Media | Platform reviews, age-appropriateness ratings, digital literacy resources | Web |

It's a good idea to use family safety tools.

### 5. Create a reporting culture, not a punishment culture

The most significant barrier to victims reporting cyberbullying is fear that telling an adult will result in losing their phone or internet access. If the automatic consequence of reporting harassment is device confiscation, many teens will choose silence over help. Make clear that coming forward will result in support and action — not punishment. The goal is to remove the stigma from seeking help.

### 6. Report to the platform and document the report

Every major platform has a reporting mechanism. Report to the platform the harassing account or content directly, save the confirmation of your report, and follow up if the content is not removed within 48 hours. For severe cases involving threats, sexual exploitation, or doxxing, report to local law enforcement and to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's CyberTipline if minors are involved.

## Building a Safer Internet Together

As we navigate the complexities of 2026, it is clear that awareness is the first step toward prevention. The cyberbullying statistics we see today highlight a shift from simple name-calling to sophisticated, AI-driven digital abuse. However, data also proves that informed users — those who understand digital citizenship and utilize the latest safety tools — are significantly better equipped to handle these challenges.

Building a safer web isn't just the responsibility of the platforms; it's a collective effort between parents, educators, and the tech community. By staying updated on digital safety laws and fostering an environment where teens feel empowered to speak up, we can reduce the prevalence of online harassment.

If you or your child needs help right now, StopBullying.gov provides a comprehensive guide to reporting cyberbullying across every major platform and through school and law enforcement channels.

# FAQ

## Which Apps Are the Safest for Kids?

No app is completely safe — the question is which platforms have the most robust moderation tools, the clearest reporting mechanisms, and the most age-appropriate design. Platforms that comply with COPPA (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act) are legally required to obtain parental consent for users under 13 and restrict data collection. Messenger Kids, designed specifically for children with parental controls built in, and platforms reviewed by Common Sense Media for age-appropriateness are generally safer starting points than general-audience social platforms. The practical reality is that many teens use platforms regardless of age restrictions — which makes proactive privacy setup and ongoing family conversations more effective than platform selection alone.

## Can Cyberbullying Follow a Child From School to School?

Yes — and this is one of the key ways cyberbullying differs from traditional bullying. A student who transfers schools to escape harassment may find that their bully, or the bully's network, contacts them through social media

or through mutual connections in the new school. Digital content — screenshots, posts, images — can be shared indefinitely regardless of where participants are physically located. Changing usernames, setting accounts to private, and in some cases starting fresh with new accounts on certain platforms can reduce this persistence, but it doesn't eliminate it. Schools can help by establishing contact protocols between institutions when bullying is documented and a student transfers.

## How Can I Document Vanishing Content on Snapchat or Telegram?

Use your phone's built-in screen recording feature to capture disappearing content before it vanishes. On iOS, swipe down from the upper right corner to access Control Center and tap the record button before opening the message. On Android, the process varies by manufacturer but is typically available in the quick settings panel. You can also take a screenshot — be aware that some platforms notify the sender when a screenshot is taken, which may escalate the situation. Note the time and date of the content as you capture it, as this information matters if you report to law enforcement or school administration.

## What Should I Do If My Child's Image Has Been Used in an AI Deepfake?

This is a serious and legally actionable situation. First, document the content immediately — screenshot or record it with timestamps before reporting so you have evidence. Report the content directly to the platform through its harmful content or non-consensual intimate image reporting pathway — most major platforms now have specific pathways for deepfake image reports and are legally required to act quickly under newer federal and state laws. Contact local law enforcement to file a report — the TAKE IT DOWN Act (2025) establishes federal criminal liability for creating and distributing non-consensual AI-generated intimate images of minors. You should report to law enforcement if this happens. Reach out to the NCMEC CyberTipline if your child is a minor — they can assist with escalating reports to platforms and law enforcement. Provide your child with immediate emotional support and connect them with a counselor or therapist, as this type of violation causes significant psychological harm.