

Social media offers ‘no escape’ for bullying victims

Behavior hard to combat because of silent, around-the-clock nature

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By Alexi Cohan



The ever-changing world of social media has emerged as a prime bullying zone that offers “no escape,” child psychologists say.

Nearly 14 percent of students in the state reported being bullied online in 2017, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey, and child psychologists say it’s hard for parents and teachers to keep up.

William Sharp, an assistant psychology professor at Northeastern, pointed to Snapchat, an app on which he said many kids are being bullied. The app automatically deletes photos, videos and texts, leaving no evidence should a student choose to report cyberbullying.

“Cyberbullying is so difficult to intervene because it’s so silent and it’s 24/7,” said Sharp, adding that parents should set restrictions on-screen time for their children.

Sharp said his young patients have increasing access to texting and social media.

“There’s no escape,” said Sharp. He said encouraging kids to step away from technology is crucial in preventing cyberbullying.

Robyn Bratica, an assistant psychology professor at William James College in Boston, said schools are grappling to keep up with quickly developing technology.

She said parents should be collaborating with schools to monitor online behavior at home.

“At school we can mention the dangers of these things but really anything that’s happening at home, the more we can work with parents ... the more that can help with kids,” said Bratica.

Bratica said cyberbullying can leave the same lasting mental health effects on a child that in-school bullying leaves.

“After students have been bullied there’s different consequences — they might be likely to have lower self-esteem, they’re at a greater risk of depression or dropping out of school,” said Bratica.