“This indispensable book shows us the reality of young people’s digital lives and presents a wide range of specific, practical, and research-based interventions to build online safety, reduce harm, and help youth develop positive digital citizenship. Highly recommended!”

Stan Davis, author of Schools Where Everyone Belongs and Empowering Bystanders in Bullying Prevention

“Accurate information is empowerment. With this book, Kowalski, Limber and Agatston empower all of us to cut through the hype around cyberbullying and address it intelligently and with the sensitivity it requires.”

Anne Collier, Editor for NetFamilyNews.org and Co-Director of ConnectSafely.org

Bullying affects millions of children throughout the world each year. Recent advances in technology have led to greater prevalence of cyberbullying using e-mail, instant messages, social networking sites, and other digital messaging systems. The second edition of Cyberbullying provides the most current information on the nature and prevalence of this quickly-evolving issue that causes unique challenges and concerns for children, parents, and educators.

Examining the latest research and methods for studying this issue, the authors have utilized vital studies involving over 3,500 middle-school students, online research projects on cyberbullying, and data from focus groups of victims, perpetrators, and their parents. This edition includes updated and expanded empirical data; coverage of the newest digital venues where cyberbullying is appearing, including social networking sites; and a look at occurrences of cyberbullying among adults and among children with disabilities. The book also covers sexting and some of the legal issues surrounding it.

The authors – internationally known experts in the field – provide practical tips for parents and educators on how to prevent cyberbullying through family and classroom discussions about proper online behavior. They also offer suggestions for successful intervention techniques in cyberbullying episodes that stem from their own work, research, and experiences.

Robin M. Kowalski, Ph.D., is Professor of Psychology at Clemson University.

Susan P. Limber, Ph.D., is the Dan Olweus Professor at the Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life and Professor of Psychology at Clemson University.

Patricia W. Agatston, Ph.D., is a Licensed Professional Counselor and Prevention Specialist with the Cobb County School District’s Prevention/Intervention Center in Marietta, Georgia.
Praise for Previous Edition

“It provides an excellent overview of bullying research in general, paying proper attention to research from around the world, and a good overview of the cyberbullying research, much of which the authors have been directly involved in conducting.”

Research Papers in Education

“Cyber Bullying provides the most current and essential information on the nature and prevalence of this epidemic, providing educators, parents, psychologists and policy-makers with critical prevention techniques and strategies for effectively addressing electronic bullying.”

The Parent Report

“Champions and critics of the [cyberbullying] laws agree that preventive education is a more powerful deterrent to cyberbullying than discipline. That notion is supported by Patricia Agatston, co-author of Cyber Bullying: Bullying in the Digital Age and a counselor at Cobb County School District’s Prevention-Intervention Center in Georgia.”

Washington Post

“A must-read for anyone who has access to technology, and it is particularly relevant for any parent and educator who works with youth. Cyber Bullying provides eye-opening and helpful suggestions for helping parents and educators monitor and track students’ use of technology. Provides a very useful roadmap for educators and parents about this phenomenon.”

PsycCritiques

“A very helpful guide to the cyber world for parents, teachers, school counselors and parent educators.”

NASAP Family Newsletter

“Much needed addition … Mandatory reading for parents of adolescents and school personnel, administrators and teachers … Now is the time to read this book.”

Metapsychology

“A useful introduction to the growing problem of electronic harassment among children. The chapters providing advice to parents and educators are quite helpful.”

American Journal of Psychology

“This book provides an eloquent mix of research theories and findings, together with actual experiences, in the important area of cyberbullying. It is especially strong in well-developed and comprehensive chapters about what parents and educators can do, to reduce both the likelihood of cyberbullying happening, and its negative consequences.”

Peter K. Smith, Goldsmiths, University of London
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CYBERBULLYING
BULLYING IN THE DIGITAL AGE
SECOND EDITION

ROBIN M. KOWALSKI PH.D.
SUSAN P. LIMBER PH.D.
PATRICIA W. AGATSTON PH.D.

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October 7, 2003, will always be the day that divides my life. Before that day, my son Ryan was alive. A sweet, gentle, and lanky 13-year-old fumbling his way through early adolescence and trying to establish his place in the often confusing and difficult social world of middle school. After that day, my son would be gone forever. A death by suicide. Some would call it bullycide or even cyberbullycide. I just call it a huge hole in my heart that will never heal.

Ryan’s young teen life included swimming, camping, skateboarding, biking, snowboarding, playing computer games and instant messaging. A typical array of “healthy” and “normal” teen activities … or so it seemed. My son loved being online, staying connected with his friends after the school day and throughout the summer. But, during the summer of 2003, significantly more time was spent online, mainly instant messaging. I was concerned and felt compelled to remind him of our internet safety rules.

No IMing/chatting with strangers
No giving any personal information (name/address/phone) to strangers
No sending pictures to strangers
No secret passwords

Our last rule was a safety one. I told my two older children that they had to use the password I gave them for any accounts they signed up. I promised I would not read personal messages or spy on them but, “God forbid you don’t follow the first few rules and you just disappear one day. I will want instant access to all of your activities online.” Never in a million years did I imagine this rule would someday end up becoming the key to unlocking the mystery of why my son took his own life.

A few days after his funeral, I logged on to his AOL IM account because that was the one place he spent most of his time during the last few months.
I logged on to see if there were any clues to his final action. It was in that safe world of being somewhat anonymous that several of his classmates told me of the bullying and cyberbullying that took place during the months leading up to his suicide. One boy had bullied Ryan since 5th grade, and briefly befriended him after Ryan stood up to him in an after school brawl. My son the comedian shared an embarrassing and humorous moment with his new friend. The “friend” twisted this information into a rumor that Ryan had something done to him and, therefore, Ryan must be gay. The rumor and taunting continued beyond that school day … well into the night and throughout the summer of 2003. My son approached a pretty, “popular” girl from his school online and worked on establishing a relationship with her, I’m sure as a surefire way to squash the “gay” rumor.

When the 8th grade school year started up again, Ryan approached his new girlfriend in person. I’m sure he was never prepared to handle what happened next. In front of her friends, she told him he was just a loser and that she did not want anything to do with him. She said she had been only joking online. He found out that she and her friends thought it would be funny to make him think she liked him and to get him to say a lot of personal, embarrassing things. She copied and pasted their private IM exchanges into ones with her friends. They all had a good laugh at Ryan’s expense.

Now certainly my son was not the first boy in history to be bullied and have his heart crushed by a pretty girl’s rejection. But when I discovered a folder filled with IM exchanges and further interviewed his classmates, I realized that technology was being utilized as a weapon far more effective and far reaching than the simple tools we had as kids.

It’s one thing to be bullied and humiliated in front of a few kids. It’s one thing to feel rejection and have your heart crushed by a girl. But it must be a totally different experience, compared to a generation ago, to have these hurts and humiliation witnessed by a far larger, online adolescent audience. I believe my son would have survived these incidents of bullying and humiliation if they had taken place before the advent of computers and the internet. But I believe there are few of us who would have had the resiliency and stamina to sustain such a nuclear level attack on our feelings and reputation as a young teen in the midst of rapid physical and emotional changes and raging hormones. I believe bullying through technology has the effect of accelerating and amplifying the hurt to levels that will probably result in a rise in teen suicide rates. Recent statistics indicate that, indeed, teen suicide is on the rise again after many years of declining rates.
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My son was an early casualty and his death an early warning to our society that we’d better pay close attention to how our children use technology. We need to study this new societal problem with a sense of urgency and great diligence. We must also be swift and deliberate in our law-making and social policy development when it comes to protecting our youth from the misuse of technology against them and amongst them.

This book will prove to be an invaluable resource. It will level set the reader about what bullying is and its harmful effects. Then it will explore the increasing ways technology is utilized to extend bullying behavior well into cyberspace. It brings us up to speed on the latest research findings and maps out very concrete preventative and responsive actions for both parents and educators.

John Halligan, Ryan’s Dad
www.RyanPatrickHalligan.org
We originally decided to write about cyberbullying after working together on various bullying prevention efforts and collaborating on research on cyberbullying. One day we came face to face with an extreme example of cyberbullying that occurred in a suburban school district. Patti Agatston can still remember calling Sue Limber and saying, “You need to look at this Web site targeting a student. The mother has asked me to help her find out who did it and get it removed, and I cannot believe what I am seeing!” From that initial conversation, we began carving out the steps necessary to intervene in an actual severe cyberbullying episode, with much help from the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use’s online documents authored by Nancy Willard. After that trial-by-fire experience, we met and discussed how useful it would be to personally interview students and parents, via focus groups and individual interviews, to better understand their experiences and perspectives. We noted that the paper and pencil surveys were insufficient to capture the emotional impact of this new form of bullying on parents and children. A broader idea emerged: writing a book describing our findings that would include actual interviews from students and parents. The first edition of this book appeared in 2008. In just the few years since that time, the percentage of teens involved with technology has continued to increase, and the venues by which children (and adults) can engage in cyberbullying have also expanded. For example, sexting has become a mode of cyberbullying others that carries with it a host of legal complications for those involved.

One purpose of this book is to educate parents, educators, and community organizations about the growing problem of cyberbullying. But another is to empower the adults in the community to prevent this new form of bullying from becoming a regular experience for youth navigating the internet and other technological tools. Many adults and educators have
found themselves in our position, learning about cyberbullying at the moment when intervention is necessary. We hope that this book will help adults gain the knowledge and tools necessary to be true resources to young people in preventing and addressing cyberbullying episodes, rather than being viewed as hindrances, which unfortunately is frequently a perception of young people, as we will discuss.

Robin Kowalski and Sue Limber, psychologists and faculty members at Clemson University in South Carolina, have been researching cyberbullying through a variety of methods for several years, and some of their innovative research is published in this book, including new research focusing on cyberbullying among children with ADHD and/or Asperger Syndrome. In addition, Patti Agatston, a psychologist and counselor, collaborated with Robin and Sue to develop individual and group questionnaires to use while interviewing parents and students regarding cyberbullying. Patti teamed up with her colleague Michael Carpenter to conduct focus groups during the spring and fall of 2006. Michael Carpenter was one of the first nationally certified trainers for the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and one of the founders of the Prevention/Intervention Center, the Cobb County Georgia School District’s nationally recognized student assistance program, where Patti Agatston also works. Patti conducted the female focus groups on cyberbullying, while Michael led the male focus groups. In addition, Patti conducted a variety of individual interviews with parents and students from various middle and high schools in the district who were willing to be interviewed regarding their experiences with cyberbullying. The reader will have an opportunity to hear first hand from some of the parents and students who were interviewed for this book.

We will share some suggestions and recommendations as a result of the research and interviews that we and others have conducted. We hope that the reader will find it more meaningful to know that these recommendations are being made based on research that has involved parents and youth in actual dialogue, in addition to survey methods. We also realize that new technologies with new potentials for bullying will emerge that require continued dialogue with parents and youth to understand the experiences they are having. The challenge is to incorporate these new technologies in a way that enhances rather than detracts from our daily life.

There are many people who contributed to the writing of this book, and the conducting of the research, to whom we offer our heartfelt gratitude. First, we want to thank a number of principals of the Cobb County School District who made it possible to conduct focus groups and individual
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Finally, we thank our children, Austin, Jack, Mary, Noah, and Jordan, who inspire us to believe that all children have the right to feel safe from bullying, in both the real and the virtual worlds.
What makes cyber bullying so dangerous … is that anyone can practice it without having to confront the victim. You don’t have to be strong or fast, simply equipped with a cell phone or computer and a willingness to terrorize.

(King, 2006)

Bullying creates memories that often last a lifetime. Simply hearing the name of a person who bullied them, even years or decades after the bullying occurred, may be enough to send chills up the backs of many people. When most adults think of bullying, they conjure up the image of a big thug who terrorized kids on the playground at school. Usually a male, he was someone to be feared. As horrible as encounters with this bully may have been, though, the end of the school day often brought a reprieve as the victim left school and went home.

Cyberbullying, however, is a bit different. In spite of recent media attention devoted to the topic, many people are still not familiar with the term. But, for those who are and who have experienced it, the memories, like those of traditional bullying, may also last a lifetime. Cyberbullying, also known as electronic bullying or online social cruelty, is defined as bullying through e-mail, instant messaging (IM), in a chat room, on a Web site, on an online gaming site, or through digital messages or images sent to a cellular phone. Although sharing certain features in common with traditional bullying (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of this), cyberbullying represents a somewhat unique phenomenon that has been receiving