

Case #7. Facebook's Policy on Cyber Bullying

(This is a student-written case. It is presented for informational purposes only, not for analysis.)

Facebook, the online social networking service founded in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, allows anyone who claims to be at least 13 years old to become a registered user of the website. In 2013 Facebook reported 1.11 billion monthly active users globally. In the Czech Republic Facebook has about 4 million users.

Unfortunately, after Facebook's expansion a serious problem appeared—"cyber bullying." "Cyber bullying" is defined as a young person tormenting, threatening, harassing, or embarrassing another young person using the Internet or other technologies, like cell phones.

Surveys indicate that nearly 43 % of kids have been bullied online. 70 % of students report seeing frequent bullying online. Some 87 % of teenagers who reported cyber abuse said they were targeted on Facebook. Only 37 per cent of those who had experienced trolling ever reported it to the social network where it took place, a UK report found. In the Czech Republic studies show that about 35 % of children have experience with cyber bullying, mostly on Facebook. Emma-Jane Cross, CEO and founder of the NGO **BeatBullying**, notes that many young people suffer in silence when subjected to cyber bullying. **Media psychologist Arthur Cassidy** said online bullying could have a 'massive impact' on older male teenagers. Suicide rates are particularly high amongst this demographic, so it's worrying to hear that teenagers on the whole are choosing to deal with internet abuse themselves, rather than speaking to parents or teachers for help, he said.

Czech legislation includes several laws affecting bullying, including Act. NO 140/1961 Coll., Criminal law: § 231 offense restriction of personal freedom, § 235 offense extortion or § 237 offense oppression. Despite these laws, Facebook bullying hardly gets to the police. One problem is the undefined border between bullying and pranks.

Facebook does not tolerate bullying and says it will remove bullying content when it becomes aware of it and may disable the account of anyone who bullies or attacks another, according to company spokesman Matt Steinfeld.

Facebook has created an online resource centre with suggestions for teens, parents and educators on how to address bullying — both online and off — and take action on Facebook. The site is also beginning to roll out more options for teens to report when posts are making them uncomfortable. The idea is to build on Facebook's existing tools, says Matt Steinfeld. For example, the site unveiled social reporting in 2011, which encouraged users to send a message to a friend asking for help or ask another user to take down a photo. The latter was particularly successful, Steinfeld says: 83 percent of the time, if you reach out to a user who has a photo you don't want to be in, that user will take it off. And Facebook hopes this will be true of bullying as well. The hub gives suggested conversation starters for victims ("Hey, NAME — that comment wasn't funny. I don't like it, please take it down"), as well as for people who are accused of bullying and people who witness it. Facebook also has added a number of other advisories on its websites:

- If you're not happy with a post you're tagged in, you can remove the tag.
- If you need to escalate the issue, you can *unfriend* or block the person.
- If the post is abusive, please report it to us.
- If you want help, reach out to someone you trust, like a parent or teacher.
- If you see a friend being targeted or bullied on Facebook, please report this to us. If you think your friend needs help right away, let someone you trust know, like a parent or teacher.

Besides the information for children and teens users, Facebook also offers advice for their parents. The most important question for parents is: "How can I help my teen use Facebook wisely?"

Facebook has written: "Depending on your teen's age, you might go through their privacy shortcuts and account settings together and make selections you're both comfortable with. No matter how old your child is, we recommend that you make using Facebook responsibly part of an ongoing conversation about the internet and technology. Talk about your expectations about how they'll behave and help them understand what's safe and what they need to be aware. Be sure your teen understands these basics of internet safety:"

- Never share your password
- Think before you post
- Only accept friend requests from people you know personally
- Report anything that looks suspicious (learn how)

Facebook staff say the company is serious about this issue. "Bullying prevention has been something we've worked on for a long time," Facebook has declared. "We are the first Internet company that's putting bullying prevention resources in the heart of the product itself." On the other hand, bullying on Facebook continues to be a major problem, raising questions as to whether Facebook's measures are improving safety on the world's largest social websites.

Questions:

- 1. What should Facebook's policy be regarding protection against the use of Facebook as a vehicle/channel for bullying?**
- 2. What issues, organizations, internet sites and media should Facebook be monitoring to make sure it stays ahead of this issue and the issue does not present major problems for the company.**

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