

## **Nobody Likes a Tattletale: Snitching and Cyberbullying**

“Nobody likes a tattletale” is a lesson learned early in childhood. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the word “snitch” means “to inform, tattle” (2011). The person who takes this action may be called a “snitch” or “snitcher” and is usually frowned upon by his or her peers. Movements designed to keep informants quiet about criminal activity happening around them are often referred to as “Stop Snitching” campaigns. The “Stop Snitching” culture has grown over the past couple of decades to become a pervasive issue that many communities struggle with today. So what does snitching have to do with cyberbullying? It means kids are told never to divulge the perpetrators’ identities or report incidents to authority figures. By leaving incidents unreported, the cycle of abuse and harassment can continue uninterrupted for as long as the bully desires. In order to stop cyberbullying, we need to provide a way for victims and bullies to be identified. This can only be done if reporters feel safe, which can’t happen as long as “Stop Snitching” is a common street code.

So how do we stop the “Stop Snitching” campaigns? The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) released a report in 2009 that offered several suggestions of ways to break the silence. While these strategies may not work in all environments, some are appropriate for youth in schools. One such strategy is meeting with neighborhood associations to initiate a counteractive campaign (COPS, 2009). A counteractive campaign on this topic would be referred to a “Start Snitching” campaign, which encourages community members to cooperate with law enforcement officers to share information on criminal activity. This strategy could be implemented in schools by speaking about reporting with students during extracurricular groups. Administrators and teachers could meet with students or community activists, clergy members, and community leaders to work with the students (COPS 2009). Outside guests and “experts” may assist students in changing their views from seeing “snitching” and “tattling” as the same action as “reporting,” as well as sparking a desire among students to help with this serious problem.

Another strategy is to increase police presence in high-crime areas (COPS, 2009). In this case, we’re talking about the school campus and locations where bullying and physical altercations frequently occur. The increased visibility of school resource officers could help students feel supported within the school and perhaps instill more trust in the administration system. Finally, to support students who want to assist in bully identification but fear retaliation, COPS suggests providing a way to submit anonymous tips (2009). Cyberbullying is a problem faced by thousands of people each day, and the “Stop-Snitching” phenomenon makes it that much harder to fight. While many believe they are protecting themselves and others around them by not reporting a cyberbullying incident, the truth is they are only making the situation longer and more painful. Only when people – youth, adults, everyone – feel comfortable and safe enough to disclose information to law enforcement and other officials, will “Stop Snitching” ever lose its power of fear and intimidation.

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