



CYBERBULLIES

By **DAVID ANDREATTA** and **DAN KADISON**

October 7, 2005 -- Almost half of teenage students know at least one victim of cyberbullying, a new study has found.

"Cyberbullying is just as wrong as punching someone or threatening to take their lunch," said Jean O'Neil from the National Crime Prevention Council, which released its survey results yesterday. "It's not innocent gossip, it's not a prank. It's wrong."

In a disturbing trend, 44 percent of students aged 13 to 18 now say they know someone who has been threatened or intimidated over the Internet in the past year.

And one in three students aged 8 to 18 knows at least one person who has been cyberbullied.

Girls in their teens are the most likely group to have known someone who was a cyberbullying victim and to have known multiple victims of this emerging form of harassment.

In other findings, more than half of students aged 8 to 18 witness bullying at least once a week, and nearly six out of 10 kids know another student who could hurt someone.

"There's hopeful news, somewhat concerning news and some alarming things coming up here," O'Neil said.

While still worrying, there is an improvement in some categories on previous surveys. In 2001, 64 percent of children reported they witnessed bullying once a week or more — but this year only 52 percent reported they witness the same behavior.

Students are "taking advantage and schools are taking advantage of programs aimed at reducing bullying," O'Neil said. "It seems to be heading in the right direction but it's nowhere near what we want to see for kids."

Disturbingly, 59 percent of students know another child who they believe could hurt a fellow student, O'Neil said.

A victim of bullying, who wishes to remain anonymous, told The Post yesterday that middle school last year was especially painful for her.

The Manhattan girl was kicked and punched by several bullies, harassed repeatedly in hallways and tormented when they threw gum in her hair.

"Sometimes, I would beg my mom not to go to school," the child said. "I felt really mad, I felt really sad."

The girl has since moved to another school, but still needed to apologize for a pause during a Post interview because the memories were painful.

In 2003, 800,000 children were found to have missed school each week out of fear of being bullied, according to a report from the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics.

That same year, New York City's Department of Education approved 2,540 students to be transferred to other public schools because they were beaten, bullied and threatened by classmates.