

The Case

Sarah's Secret

At the beginning of the school year, Sara moved into a new school. At first, things were great and Sara was very popular. She immediately fit right in and made many new friends. However, after a couple weeks at her new school, her parents noticed that she seems depressed and anti-social. They observe that she rarely talks to her friends on the phone or goes shopping with them. Instead of going out with her friends, Sara spends most of her time in her room doing homework and using her computer.

Sara's parents are worried about her and suspect that something is not quite right at school. They try to talk to Sara, but she is reluctant to talk. She tells them that she and her friends had an argument and are not getting along. Sara's parents do not realize the problem is more dangerous than a disagreement between friends. Sara's problem started about a month after she moved into her new school.

One day as Sara arrived at school, other students began to giggle and laugh at her as she walked to her first class. Some even made strange remarks about her eating lunch in the lunchroom. Sara was embarrassed and confused so she hurried on to her class. Sara did not mention this to anyone that day and thought that it would just go away. To Sara's satisfaction, things during the day seemed to get better and back to normal as the day progressed.

That day Sara went home feeling a little better and glad to be home. After arriving at her house, Sara realized that she had a research report due the following week and decided to start working on the report. After logging onto her computer and the Internet, Sara decided to check her email. She had one email from a person that she did not recognize, but she opened the email anyway. Inside the email, was an embarrassing picture of Sara in the lunchroom eating. Immediately, Sara realized that this picture was the reason that all the students had been laughing at her when she arrived at school that day. Another student must have taken this picture in the lunchroom at school and sent it to everyone in her class. Sara was alarmed and began to cry. She thought that everyone in school really liked her, and she did not know of anyone who would do this to her. Sara immediately deleted the email and did not tell anyone about the email.

As the weeks passed, the incidents escalated. Sara received more and more embarrassing and sometimes even threatening emails from the person. As Sara did the first time, she deleted each and every one. One day Sara even received an email that contained a link to a website. To Sara's horror, the website was about her and contained many upsetting pictures of her as well as threats and derogatory comments aimed at her. Sara was too humiliated to tell her parents even though her parents encouraged her to talk about her problems. Sara's teachers even noticed that she had begun to fall behind in school and seemed to be very depressed. Like her parents, Sara's teachers do not have clue to what is really going on.

Questions for Discussion

1. Pretend that you are Sara, what would you have done differently if you were in her place? If you were one of Sara's parents, would you have done anything differently? If so, describe how you would have reacted differently.
2. Sara demonstrates many of the warning signs associated with being a victim of cyber-bullying. Discuss these warning signs. Research online articles and journals to find other warning signs.
3. Once Sara's parents and teachers identify the problem, what policies and procedures can the school put in place to prevent future incidents from occurring?
4. What should happen to the student(s) responsible for the incidents of cyber-bullying?