

Tips From Your School Psychologist

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a serious problem that has grown with increased use of the Internet and electronic communications. In 2006, national law enforcement leaders estimated that more than 13 million children and adolescents aged 6 to 17 were victims of cyberbullying. Like all bullying and harassment, cyberbullying can cause painful psychological and emotional problems that can affect children's behavior, school success, and well-being. Many schools have instituted cyberbullying prevention and intervention policies but most cyberbullying takes place outside of school. Parents must play the most important role in keeping their children safe on the Internet. The following information can help in that process.

What is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying involves sending or posting harmful messages and/or images via the Internet (social networking sites, chat rooms, e-mail, etc.) or cell phones. It can have particularly rapid and far reaching consequences because of the speed with which content travels in cyberspace. Cyberbullying can also be done anonymously, making it harder to identify and stop the bully. The most common types of cyberbullying include:

- *Flaming*: online fights using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language
- *Harassment, threats, and stalking*: repeatedly sending cruel, vicious, and/or threatening messages (including sexual harassment)
- *Denigration*: sending or posting gossip or rumors about a person to damage his/her reputation or friendships
- *Impersonation*: using someone's e-mail account to send harmful material to others or leading a victim into a hurtful or embarrassing situation by pretending to be someone else
- *Outing and trickery*: engaging someone in instant messaging (IM), tricking him/her into revealing sensitive information, and forwarding that information to others
- *Exclusion*: intentionally excluding someone from an online group

What Can Parents Do to Help?

- Keep computer(s) in easily viewable places, such as the family room or kitchen.
- Talk regularly with your children about the online activities in which they are involved and Internet etiquette in general. Be specific about the risks of cyberbullying and their need to tell you if something that bothers them occurs.
- Respect for adolescents' privacy is important but tell your children that you may review their online communications if you have reason for concern.
- Set clear expectations for responsible online behavior and phone use and consequences for violating those expectations.
- Consider establishing a parent-child Internet use contract. See http://www.nasponline.org/publications/cq/cq342internetsafety_ho.aspx
- Consider installing parental control filtering software and/or tracking programs but do not they should not rely solely on these tools.
- Be aware of warning signs that might indicate your son or daughter is being bullied, such as reluctance to use the computer, a change in the child's behavior and mood, and/or reluctance to go to school.
- Document the bullying.

- Be equally alert to the possibility that your child is bullying others online, even if unintentionally.
- Understand current local laws and your school policies. Work with your school to develop policies if they exist.
- Contact the school to enlist the help of the school psychologist, school counselor, principal, or resource officer.
- File a complaint with the website, ISP, or cell phone company.
- Contact the police if the cyberbullying includes threats.

Web Resources

Center for Safe, Responsible Internet Use, www.cyberbully.org

Stop Cyberbullying.org, www.stopcyberbullying.org

Cyberbullying.us, www.cyberbullying.us

StopBullyingNow.org <http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/adult/indexAdult.asp?Area=cyberbullying>

Adapted from: "Cyberbullying" Ted Feinberg, EdD, NCSP, National Association of School Psychologists and Nicole Dukes, MA, Cumberland County Schools, NC, in Principal Leadership (2008, National Association of Secondary School Principals). The full article is available online at <http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/Cyberbullying%20NASSP%209-08.pdf>