

FOR PARENTS

ON-LINE BULLYING: It's Here and On The Rise

Pushing, shoving and taunts on the schoolyard are the traditional tools for children who bully. Today, the tools of the internet are used to embarrass, upset and threaten children.

Unlike the repeated aggressive behavior that children use to gain power over other children, cyber bullying or social cruelty is less easy to spot. It happens in chat rooms, on message boards and in instant messages. It can happen at any time and in any place from the school library to a friend's home computer.

The internet has become a social network for millions of children. Like adults they visit chat rooms, send each other instant messages, visit web pages and post information on a host of sites. In 2007, more

than 50 percent of pre-teens and teens reported they had had an "unwanted experience" on social networking sites.

In the United States alone, 18 percent of sixth through eighth graders said they had been cyber-bullied and 19 percent of regular internet users between the ages of 10 and 17 reported on-line aggression.

Cyber-bullies send mean, vulgar or threatening images. They can post sensitive, private information about another person. The messages are designed to make the child receiving the messages or being described in chat rooms feel inferior. The message is going beyond a small group and children know that.

Adults are the people who can



help end the cycle of on-line intimidation. Being aware of what children do on line is one step. Another is to open the conversation about the dangers of internet communication.

THE TOOLS OF CYBER BULLYING

Cell phones, personal computers, laptops and wireless devices provide a new opportunity to intimidate other children. Last year, 11 percent of students in grades six through eight said they had cyber-bullied another person.

Bullying is done through e-mails, instant messages, web pages, on blogs, in chat rooms or discussion groups. Cell phones are carriers of text messages and digital images that provide an opportunity to threaten and embarrass someone.

In addition to providing the devices to your child, take the time to review the rules. Limit the time and the place where they can be used and point out that even if it isn't physical, cyber bullying is wrong.

PARENT RESOURCES

- www.adapp.org
- <http://www.greatschools.org/special-education/health/825-what-parents-can-do-about-childhood-bullying.gs?page=1>
- <http://www.fightcrime.org/state/2006/reports/cyberbullying-teen>

CYBER BULLYING: Any Place BUT Often at School

While cyber bullying can happen anywhere there is a cell phone or a computer, it happens most often at school. More than 62 percent of the students who received threats said they came from another student at school. In more than half of those instances, the person sending the messages was a friend.

Girls are twice as likely to be the senders and receivers of internet messages that

embarrass and threaten them with public humiliation.

Instant messages are the most frequently used form of communication in cyber bullying. They arrive on cell phones and over the internet carrying threats and misinformation. Chat rooms and social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook carry rumors. The personal contact through instant messaging has the most impact on the person.

Cyber bullying happens to children from third grade on although it is most present by sixth grade when young people have devices readily available to them.

Children should be given limits and rules about the use of cell phones and computers. Discussing the dangers and effects of cyber bullying should be part of the conversation about whether cell phones are a good idea for your child.



**CYBER BULLYING
IS HARMFUL AND
UNACCEPTABLE**

SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Keeping your home computer in the family room or kitchen where it can be seen easily is an easy step in monitoring where your child goes on-line.

Have regular talks with your child about on-line activities. Let your child know that serious concerns about safety can override respect for privacy. Encourage him/her to tell you immediately if there are cyber-

threats made or there is other troubling on-line behavior.

Explain that cyber bullying is harmful and unacceptable. Be clear about your expectations of behavior on-line and set limits about what can and cannot be done.

While parental control filtering is not foolproof, consider installing it on your home computer. You can't

rely on filters or tracking programs, but they can help limit the sites available to your child and to cyber bullies.

Cell phones pose other challenges. They are useful for safety and communication between children and parents. Consider ones that offer the opportunity to restrict to whom calls can be made and from whom they can be received.

IF IT HAPPENS: Some Things You Can Do

Cyber bullying can range from rude comments to lies and threats. How you respond depends on the severity of the event. Some things you can do:

Encourage your child not to respond to the cyber bullying.

Do not erase messages or offending pictures. They can be evidence. Remember

some cyber-bullying breaks the law.

Try to identify the person doing the cyber bullying. You can get help from your service provider.

Sending inappropriate language and images may violate terms and conditions of providers or web sites. Consider contacting them to lodge a complaint.

Contact your school. Let them know about the events. If their system is being used, they have consequences.

Contact the police if cyber bullying involves: threats of violence, extortion, obscene or harassing phone calls or if text messages show harassment, stalking, hate crimes or child pornography



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