



Jericho High School's Psychology Corner

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Keeping Our Youth Safe in the New Age of Technology: A Parent's Guide to Cyberbullying

For decades there have been a plethora of books, television episodes, and movies that depict the typical schoolyard bully who taunts and embarrasses the targeted individual face-to-face with an audience of bystanders. Dissimilar from the traditional bully, we have turned to a new kind of bullying called cyberbullying, in which the individual (cyberbully) antagonizes another person (target) through electronic devices (i.e., cell phone, computer). In most situations, the cyberbully can remain completely anonymous. According to Feinberg and Robey (2008), "because people feel shielded from the consequences of their actions and often do or say things online that they would not in person," cyberbullying may even be worse than traditional bullying. For most of our teens, the aftermath of being cyberbullied is extremely painful. In this series about keeping our youth safe in the age of technology, parents will be provided with a basic guide to help prevent cyberbullying and to create a Family Internet/Cell Phone safety plan.

Recently, cyberbullying has been a controversial topic debated about in the local newspapers and television news programs. In order to better understand what cyberbullying is, Hinduja and Patchin (2009a) provide a descriptive definition of the term as a "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices." The authors break down cyberbullying into the following four comprehensive elements:

WILLFUL-The behavior is deliberate and not accidental

REPEATED- The bullying reflects a pattern of behavior, not just an isolated incident

HARM- The target must perceive that harm was inflicted

USE OF TECHNOLOGY (i.e., texting, online chatting, social networking, etc.)– use of electronic means is what distinguishes cyberbullying from traditional bullying

Willard and Steiner's (2007) book *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Online Social Aggression, Threats, and Distress* states the following examples of the types of cyberbullying individuals may encounter:

FLAMING: Online fights using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language

HARASSMENT: Repeatedly sending nasty, mean, and insulting messages

DENIGRATION: Sending or posting gossip or rumors to damage reputations and/or friendships

IMPERSONATION: Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material to get that person in trouble or danger or to damage reputations and/or friendships

OUTING: Sharing someone's secrets or embarrassing information or images online

TRICKERY: Tricking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information, then sharing it online

EXCLUSION: Intentionally and cruelly excluding someone from an online group

CYBERSTAKING: Repeated intense harassment and denigration that includes threats or creates significant fear

The following guidelines can be used to prevent your child from becoming a Cyberbully:

1. Discuss with your child the importance of treating people with kindness and that you expect them to act the same way when they use electronic devices.
2. Set clear guidelines about irresponsible online behavior. Discuss the implications of cyberbullying could lead to criminal arrest or civil litigation.
3. Help your child develop self-awareness, empathy, and effective decision-making by asking these questions:
 - o How would I feel if someone did the same thing to me, my sister, my brother, or my best friend?
 - o How do I feel inside?
 - o How would I feel if others could see me?
 - o How does this action reflect on me?

According to Willard & Steiner (2007), if cyberbullying is not resolved, it can negatively impact an individual's self esteem, emotional stability, academics, relationships, and in severe cases, can potentially lead to school violence or suicide. Therefore, it is essential for parents know what their children are doing online. Parents can help to prevent cyberbullying by proactively addressing the following:

- ➔ Keep the computer in public area
- ➔ Monitor online activities (ex. periodically check files; install keystroke monitoring software; buddy lists; browser history files)
- ➔ Engage in open communication with your children about Internet safety and responsible technology use
- ➔ Find out who your child communicates with online
- ➔ Know your child's online usernames
- ➔ Provide written rules for utilizing electronic devices and explain consequences for violating those expectations
- ➔ Create a cell phone and Internet contract

Help your child understand the difference between these 3 types of personal information:

1. *Personal contact information* - Should never be revealed to anyone on the Internet or electronic devices (i.e., name, address, phone number).
2. *Intimate personal information* This kind of information should only be discussed with a relative, close friend, or professional.
3. *Personal interest information* - Non-intimate information about interests and activities can generally be shared on the Internet.

It is important to warn your child about online retaliations. Since many children view online communication with a false sense of bravado, they can seek vengeance against an individual who has bullied them. In the next edition of *Keeping our Youth Safe in the Age of Technology*, we will provide a parent guide to internet safety. In addition, please remind your children that if they need to speak with someone about being bullied they can always go to their teacher(s), administrator(s), guidance counselor, psychologist, and social worker. No individual should ever feel as if they are alone.

References

Feinberg, T. & Robey, N. (2008). *Cyberbullying*. Principal Leadership. Retrieved December 22, 2009, from the National Association for School Psychologist database. www.nasponline.net

Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J.W. (2009a). *Cyberbullying Fact Sheet*. Retrieved December 21, 2009, from the Cyberbullying Research Center database: www.Cyberbullying.us

Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J.W. (2009b). *Cyberbullying Warning Signs*. Retrieved December 21, 2009, from the Cyberbullying Research Center database: www.Cyberbullying.us

Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J.W. (2009c). *Family Cell Phone Contract*. Retrieved December 21, 2009, from the Cyberbullying Research Center database: www.Cyberbullying.us

Willard, N. E. & Steiner, K. (2007). *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Online Social Aggression, Threats, and Distress*. Champagne, IL, Research Press.

Additional Websites

www.cyberbullying.org

www.Cyberbullying.us

www.nasponline.net