CyberbullyNOT: Stop Online Social Cruelty

Cyberbullying is being cruel to others by sending or posting harmful material using the Internet or a cell phone.

Types of Cyberbullying

º Flaming – angry, rude arguments.

º Harassment – repeatedly sending offensive messages.

º Denigration – "dissing" someone online by spreading rumors or posting false information

º Outing and trickery - disseminating intimate private information or tricking someone into disclosing private information, which is then disseminated.

º Impersonation – pretending to be someone else and posting material to damage that person's reputation.

º Exclusion – intentional exclusion from an online group.

º Cyberstalking – creating fear by sending offensive messages and other harmful online activities.

How, Who, and Why

º Cyberbullying may occur via personal web sites, blogs, email, discussion groups, message boards, chat, instant messaging, or text/image cell phones.

º A cyberbully may be a person whom the target knows or an online stranger. A cyberbully may be anonymous and may enlist the aid of others, including online "friends."

º Cyberbullying may be a continuation of, or in retaliation for, in-school bullying. It may be related to fights about relationships or be based on hate or bias. Some teens think cyberbullying is entertaining – a fun game.

º Teens may not be concerned about the consequences of harmful online behavior because: They think they are invisible or can take steps to become invisible, so they think they can't be punished. There is no tangible feedback about the harm they cause, so it seems like a game to them. Harmful online social norms support cyberbullying: "I have a free speech right to post whatever I want, regardless of the harm I cause.

The Harm

Cyberbullying can cause great emotional harm to the target. Online communications can be very cruel and vicious. Cyberbullying can be happening 24/7. Damaging text and images can be widely disseminated and impossible to fully remove. Teens are reluctant to tell adults – for fear of overreaction, restriction from online activities, and possible retaliation by the cyberbully. There are emerging reports of youth suicide and violence related to cyberbullying.

Responsible Management of Children's Internet Use

Parents have a moral and legal obligation to ensure their children engage in safe and responsible behavior online!

º Keep the computer in a public place and supervise its use.

º Find out what public online sites/communities your child uses and periodically review what your child is posting. Emphasize that these sites/communities are public and that your child should never post personal contact information, intimate personal information, or provocative sexually oriented material. (Your child may argue that you are invading his/her privacy. These are PUBLIC places!)

º Tell your child that you will investigate his/her private online communications if you have reason to believe that he/she has engaged in unsafe or irresponsible behavior. You can install monitoring software to do this.

º Make joint Internet use management agreements with the parents of your child's friends – addressing the time they can spend online, approved activities, and a mutual parental agreement to monitor and report.

Prevent Your Child from Being a Cyberbully

º Make it clear that all Internet use must be in accord with family values of kindness and respect for others and any violation of this expectation will result in monitoring of all online activities using Internet use monitoring software.

º If your child is being bullied at school, work with the school to stop the bullying and make sure your child knows that he/she should not to retaliate online.

Preventing Your Child from Becoming a Target of Cyberbullying

º Frequently discuss the concerns of public disclosure of intimate personal information and the value of modesty.

º Visit and discuss the values demonstrated by others in your child's favorite online communities.

º Insist that the school intervene effectively to address any in-school bullying.

º Seek to "bully-proof" your child by reinforcing your child's unique individual strengths and fostering healthy friendships with teens you can trust to be kind.

Warning Signs that Your Child Might be the Target

º Expression of sadness or anger during or after Internet use.

º Withdrawal from friends and activities, school avoidance, and decline of grades, signs of depression and sadness.

º Pay close attention if your child is being bullied at school or having any other difficulties with peers. These are the teens that are most often targeted by cyberbullies.

Action Steps and Options to Respond to Cyberbullying

» Save the evidence.

» Identify the cyberbully(s). Ask your ISP for help.

» Clearly tell the cyberbully to stop.

» Ignore the cyberbully by leaving the online environment and/or blocking communications.

» File a complaint with the Internet or cell phone company.

» Seek assistance from the school, if the cyberbully also attends the same school. (But because of free speech protections, if the cyberbullying is occurring totally off-campus, your school may only be able to provide informal assistance, not formal discipline.)

» Send the cyberbully's parents a certified letter that includes the evidence of cyberbullying. Demand that the actions stop and harmful material be removed.

» Contact an attorney to send a letter or file a lawsuit against the parents based on defamation, invasion of privacy, or intentional infliction of emotional distress.

» Call the police, if the cyberbullying involves threats of violence, coercion, intimidation based on hate or bias, and any form of sexual exploitation.

» Reporting other concerns …

  • If you have suspicions your child is involved with an online sexual predator, call the police. Do not talk to your child, he/she could warn the predator.

  • If you see any online threats of school-related violence, call both the school and the police.

  • f you see any material that raises concerns a child is emotionally distressed and may be contemplating suicide, self-harm, or other violence, contact the counselor of the school the child attends.

New from the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use …

Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats

Responding to the Challenge of Online Social Cruelty, Threats, and Distress
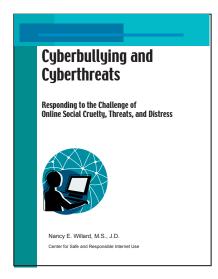
By Nancy E. Willard, M.S., J.D.

Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Online Social Cruelty, Threats, and Distress provides in-depth insight and practical strategies for school administrators, counselors/psychologists, resource officers, education technology directors, teachers, and others to prevent and respond to cyberbullying and cyberthreats.

- Cyberbullying is being cruel to others by sending or posting harmful material or engaging in other forms of social cruelty using the Internet or other digital technologies.

- Cyberthreats are either direct threats or distressing material that raises concerns that a young person may be considering committing an act of violence against others or self.

As young people embrace the Internet and other digital communication technologies, cyberbullying and cyberthreats are emerging as challenging issues for schools to address. The impact of cyberbullying on the well-being of students and the school climate can be significant.

Nancy E. Willard, M.S., J.D., has a background in working with "at risk" children, law, and technology in schools. She has spent over a decade focusing on issues of the safe and responsible use of technology by young people.

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Overview of Cyberbullying & Cyberthreats
The various forms of cyberbullying and cyberthreats.

Cybertechnologies & Activities
Internet and digital technologies and activities.

Insight & Implications
Research insight into traditional bullying and threats of violence or suicide and how this might relate to cyberbullying or cyberthreats.

Related Youth High Risk Online Behavior
Overview of the additional concerns related to youth high-risk online behavior.

You Can't See Me ~ I Can't See You
How young people learn to engage in responsible behavior and how technologies may affect their decision-making regarding responsible choices.

The Limits: Values, Rules, Agreements, & Laws
Limits on online speech, including family values, school rules, user agreements, civil laws, and criminal laws.

Legal Considerations for Schools
Legal considerations for schools related to cyberbullying and cyberthreats – when can and when should an administrator respond.

Cyberbully or Cyberthreat Situation Review
Systematic method of reviewing cyberbullying or cyberthreats situations.

Response Actions and Options
Action options available to the school, as well as parents and students.

ISBN–0-9724236-0-5, Paper Cover,132 pages, $34.95.

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