

## **Anti Cyber Bullying**

Technology gives today's children more ways to connect, socialize and communicate than ever before, that is the good news. The bad news is that some children are abusing the technology. One way they abuse it is by cyber bullying.

There are two big differences between schoolyard bullying and cyber bullying. The cyber bully can use technology to spread his or her offensive messages to many more people very quickly. For instance, an embarrassing photo taken with a cell phone can be sent to dozens of classmates in minutes. Also, cell phones, PCs and the Internet, tend to give the cyber bully a sense of anonymity, which emboldens him or her to make their offensive behavior more vicious.

Cyber bullying is everyone's business and the best response is a pro-active or preventative one.

### **What parents can do**

- Get involved and be aware:
  - Learn everything you can about the Internet and what your children are doing online.
  - Talk to them about the places they go online and the activities that they are involved in.
  - Be aware of what your children are posting on Web sites, including their own personal home pages.
  - Encourage your children to come to you if anybody says or does something online that makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened.
  - Stay calm and keep the lines of communication and trust open. If you "freak out" your children won't turn to you for help when they need it.
- Encourage children to develop their own moral code so they will choose to behave ethically online:
  - Talk to your children about responsible Internet use.
  - Teach them to never post or say anything on the Internet that they wouldn't want the whole world - including you - to read.
  - Create an online agreement or contract for computer use, with your children's input. Make sure your agreement contains clear rules about ethical online behavior.
- Take action if your child is being bullied online:
  - Watch out for signs that your child is being bullied online - a reluctance to use the computer or go to school may be an indication.
  - If the bully is a student at your child's school, meet with school officials and ask for help in resolving the situation.
  - Report any incident of online harassment and physical threats to your local police and your Internet Service Provider (ISP).
  - If your child is bullied through a cell phone, report the problem to your phone service provider. If it's a persistent problem, you can change the phone number.
  - Save and print any evidence of cyber bullying.

## What schools can do

- Integrate curriculum-based anti-bullying programs into classrooms.
- Educate teachers, students and parents about the seriousness of cyber bullying.
- Change the school or board's bullying policy to include harassment perpetrated with mobile and Internet technology.
- Update the school or board's computer Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) to specifically prohibit using the Internet for bullying.

## What students can do

Guidelines for children and teens:

- Guard your contact information. Don't give people you don't know your cell phone number, instant messaging name or e-mail address.
- If you are being harassed online, take the following actions immediately:
  - Tell an adult you trust - a teacher, parent, older sibling or grandparent.
  - If you are being harassed, leave the area or stop the activity (i.e. chat room, news group, online gaming area, instant messaging, etc.).
  - If you are being bullied through e-mail or instant messaging, block the sender's messages. Never reply to harassing messages.
  - Save any harassing messages and forward them to your Internet Service Provider (i.e. Hotmail or Yahoo). Most service providers have appropriate use policies that restrict users from harassing others over the Internet - and that includes kids!
  - If the bullying includes physical threats, tell the police as well.
- Take a stand against cyber bullying with your peers. Speak out whenever you see someone being mean to another person online. Most children respond better to criticism from their peers than to disapproval from adults.

## Is your child a cyber bully?

The best way to ensure that your children are not cyber bully is to make sure they understand that the rules of good behavior apply to their use of their cell phone and the Internet, and to proactively monitor how they use both.

- Ask your child to see the Web sites he or she visits and the social networking sites they join. You can also do a search on your child's name to find their Web sites.
- Take a look at the cell phone call logs, and the pictures and text messages stored on their cell phones.
- Older teens may feel these measures are an invasion of privacy, but remind them that it is your responsibility as a parent to look out for their welfare.
- If problems persist, consider curtailing or suspending of your child's cell phone or PC privileges.
- Monitor the Internet traffic using firewall software on your child's computer or even better on the router that manages the access to the Internet.