Topic: Bullying, the Internet and On-Line Safety

Today's generation of youth are spending much of their time communicating on-line. As a result, the need to monitor our children's activities while educating ourselves on chat-room activities is paramount. As our youth are now living in a wirelessly connected society, the 'Bullying' activities once seen in the classroom are spreading through telephone text messages and on-line chat rooms. Do you know the risks your children and students are encountering?

The gap in knowledge between adult internet users and adolescents can be enormous. The primary reason that parents use the internet is for gathering information whereas your child views it as a lifeline. They are living in an ALWAYS ON generation.

Cyber-space has generated a world of anonymity that did not exist before for traditional bullying. The reluctance kids and students have in disconnecting from these venues creates greater opportunity for a bully to enter your home on a daily basis.   They can set up bogus web sites or blogs which demean and threaten; express anger and distaste through hidden email accounts or chat rooms where they have a greater audience; and even text message your child on a regular basis, diminishing the self esteem of the recipients.

Impact of Cyber-Bullying:

It is possible that the harm generated by cyber-bullying may be worse than traditional bullying:

- Online Communications can be quite vicious
- There is often no escape for the target as cyber-bullying has the capacity to inflict harm 24/7.
- The information that a bully sends out can grow worldwide without a means for retrieving harmful materials
- These bullies can be anonymous and can involve unknown friends so that the target does not know who to trust
- Teens may be reluctant to tell for fear of increased retribution or feelings of guilt or fear that their online activities will be severely restricted by parents and educators.
- Cyber Bullying has led to suicides, school violence and academic failures.

What Can We Do?

Some of the most effective techniques to fight cyber-bullying are the same ones that fight bullying of any kind:

1. Teach kids to report incidents.   We need to have strong communication with our children and our students so they know if they are being cyber-bullied that they can come forward.
2. Don't engage the bully.
3. Talk about the issues surrounding bullying at school and at home.

Cyber-Bullying

4. Teach students social skills which include predictive ability and conflict resolution training
5. Consistently monitor your child's activities while using the internet – keep the computer in a common area of the home or classroom.

Text messages

Now that every teen is carrying a personal cell phone, we are seeing an increase in bullying through text messaging by mobile phones. Practical steps you can take include:

- Encourage your son/daughter to tell you or another responsible adult if they receive unwelcome text messages.
- Get your child to change their number or even get a new phone.
- Advise your child to be careful about giving out their mobile number.
- Send a text message yourself warning the bully that it is an offence to use the mobile phone in this way.
- Trace the number and report the offender to the police or the phone company.

General Advice

Remember the Golden Rules.

- Do not give out personal information too freely.
- Always encourage your child to tell you of anything that upsets them.
- Keep a record of all bullying incidences either by saving or printing emails.
- If an email or text message is particularly disturbing or breaks the law, contact the police.
- Check on your school's anti-bullying policy and whether it addresses bullying using computers and mobile phones. If not, encourage them to look at this issue.

Some Great Sites to visit if you want to learn more about Cyber-Bullying:

www.cyberbully.org

www.cyberbullying.ca

www.stopcyberbullying.org

Inspiring Minds Consulting Ltd.   www.imind.ca