Cyberbullying

The "Online Playground" Threat

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What is "Cyberbullying"

"Cyberbullying is any cyber-communication or publication posted or sent by a minor online, by instant messenger, e-mail, website, diary site, online profile, interactive game, handheld device, cell phone or other interactive device that is intended to frighten, embarrass, harass or otherwise target another minor." [1]

~Parry Aftab, Esq.

Nancy Willard's 8 Forms of Cyberbullying

- **Flaming**: Using inflammatory or vulgar words to provoke an online fight

- **Harassment**: Continually sending vicious, mean, or disturbing e-mails to an individual

- **Denigration**: Spreading rumors, lies or gossip to hurt a person's reputation

- **Impersonation**: Posting offensive or aggressive messages under another person's name [2]

8 Forms of Cyberbullying, cont.

- **Outing**: Posting or sharing confidential or compromising information or images
- **Trickery**: Fooling someone into sharing personal information which you then post online
- **Exclusion**: Purposefully excluding someone from an online group
- **Cyberstalking**: Ongoing harassment and denigration that causes a person considerable fear for his/her safety [2]

Legal Implications of Cyberbullying

- Cyberbullying can cross legal lines:
  - Civil Law standards
    - Libel
    - Invasion of privacy
    - Purposeful infliction of emotional distress
  - Criminal Law
    - Violent threats
    - Harassment and/or stalking
    - Hate/bias crimes
    - Harmful material for minors (sexual exploitation, pornography) [2]

Recognizing the Signs

- Child becomes more withdrawn and begins to isolate him/herself from peers
- Child becomes nervous/upset/unwilling to go to school
- Child does not spend the same amount of time as usual on the computer
- Child is angry/upset/withdrawn after spending time on the computer

Guidelines for Educators

- Make sure your school has an AUP that outlines what is and is not the permitted use of the school's technology and computer systems
  - Have both parents and students sign this AUP
  - Why? Stipulations in the AUP that deal with the safety of students from dangerous or abusive actions of other students, give the school more legal authority to take the appropriate measures in cyberbullying cases, even if the incident occurs outside of school [3]

Guidelines for Educators

- Let students know that their school Internet use records and files can be searched

  - ☐ If there is legitimate suspicion that a school or district policy has been broken by a student, schools have the right to search these records and files.

  - ☐ Why? By letting students know that searches can take place, they are more likely to think twice before breaking the rules. [2]

Guidelines for Educators

- Provide a way for students to privately report cyberbullying
    - Setting this precaution in place lets students know that there is a safe place to share cybersafety violations.
    - Would-be cyberbullies might be deterred if they know that there is a general awareness of this problem in his/her school, and if they realize there is a greater chance of being caught. [2]

Guidelines for Educators

- Create a "Safe Schools" Committee
  - Put together a group of educators (usually administrators, counselors, school resource officers) that deal with issues of cybersecurity, such as cyberbullying. [2]
- Provide Proper Student Education on Cybersafety
  - Integrate cybersafety into your curriculum so that students become aware of these issues. Encourage them to mentor and pass along this information to their peers.
  - Pass along information on sites such as iSAFE and Teenangels [5 & 6]

Guidelines for Parents

- Situate your computer in a public place in your home.

- Check out your child's online postings and profiles where he/she frequents.

- Don't put full faith in your filtering software. This does not prevent cyberbullying.

- When approaching your child at the computer, notice any odd or secretive behavior that could indicate he/she is hiding something from you. [4]
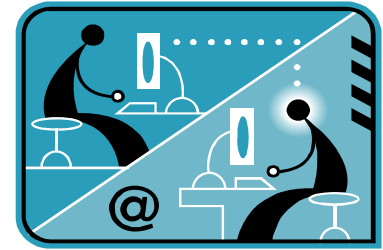
Guidelines for Parents

- Let children know what information should not be given out online.

- Talk with your child about what he/she does online and who his/her cyber friends are.

- Discuss cyberbullying with your child and let them know the importance of sharing disturbing information (such as threats) with you. [4]

How to React to Cyberbullying

- Tell the cyberbully to stop their actions
- Block your child's contact with the cyberbully
- Tell your child to not go to the site where he/she is being bullied
- Complain to the ISP or web site that the attack is taking place on (refer to their AUP)
- Contact your child's school if the cyberbully is a fellow student
- Contact the police if the cyberbullying crosses the line into a criminal act (such as stalking, threats, harassment,etc.) [4]

Conclusion

- Cyberbullying is harmful to children, and it happens more often than we know.

- Educators and parents must teach children Cybersafety from an early age so that they can safely interact with others online

- Communications with your child/student is important in deterring and detecting cyberbullying. Make sure to let them know you are there to listen.

Sources

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