



CYBERSAFETY – CYBER-BULLYING

In the last newsletter edition for Term 3, the topic of cyber-safety was covered. Parents were strongly encouraged to actively engage in family internet contracts with their daughters in order to provide the capacity to monitor their daughter's internet use and help to ensure their safety and well-being during their online interactions. Parents were also encouraged to talk about internet use with their daughters on a regular basis, with students encouraged to let their parents or another adult know if they encounter difficulties or threats to their safety while working online. This newsletter edition covers the related issue of cyber-bullying. Parents also form a vital role in reducing and responding to this serious issue.

The impact of Technology on Friendships

Now more than ever, adolescents have access to their peers with an ever-growing range of technological mediums including mobile phones, SMS and the internet. For better or worse, the increasing accessibility and societal acceptance of this technology among adolescents today means that young people potentially have access to each other – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Furthermore, access to this technology now means that much of the socialising your daughter does is in private – without the supervision parents were once able to provide. Whereas once parents were privy to overhearing conversations and monitoring the tone and content of face to face or telephone conversations, online interactions often mean there is reduced opportunity for this feedback and therefore less opportunity for guidance.

What is Cyber Bullying?

Marie Wolfe from Parenthood.com describes Cyber Bullies as “Cyber Brats: Bullies Who Taunt Their Peers with the Click of a Mouse”. Cyber-bullying might be via email, text messaging, online dairies, websites, web pages, web logs (blogs) chat rooms, online personal polling sites, web forums and discussion boards, MySpace or YouTube. Bullying can include teasing, name calling, threats, taunts, harassment, rumours, gossip, excluding and intimidation. Photographs or images sometimes accompany the verbal message.

The Impact of Cyber-Bullying?

Young people who are bullied in any way often experience real suffering that can interfere with their social and emotional development as well as their school performance. Cyber-bullying can result in responses such as reduced self esteem and confidence, embarrassment, humiliation, mistrust, increased stress as well as isolation and withdrawal. In more extreme cases, cyber-bullying can result in depression or related anxiety and has even led to suicide.

How Prevalent is Cyber-Bullying?

Cyber-bullying is a fairly recent concept and, as such, the research exploring it is still in its initial phases. One of the first studies on the prevalence of cyber-bullying in Australia was conducted by Marilyn Campbell at QUT. From a sample of Year 8 students surveyed, she found that 11% said they partook in cyber-bullying as a bully, while about 14% said they were victims and 25% said they knew somebody who had been bullied. Other Australian research conducted by Wallis Consulting Group (July 2007) indicated that 1 in 5 young people aged 13-17 said they had seen or heard people bullying or abusing other people online.

STRATEGIES FOR RESPONDING TO CYBERBULLYING

How do I Protect my daughter from Cyber Bullies?

Recent, independent surveys conducted by Ninemsn and NetAlert indicated that, of those children who had experienced bullying online, boys were more likely to ignore it, while girls prefer to seek help by talking to a parent, teacher or friend. “Parents who understand the Internet and monitor the time that a child spends online offer the best protection,” says Richard Sherman, Ph.D, a psychologist specialising in children and Internet issues. “Kids need appropriate monitoring by parents at home to prevent inappropriate behaviour online.” Each family should form a unique strategy with their children on how to deal with bullies, both on and offline.

Example Strategies

- **Clear Communication:** Discuss cyber-bullying with your daughter, including any problems she may have. Be aware of what she is doing online and discuss rights and privileges regularly.
- **Research:** Read as much as you can about combating cyber-bullying
- **Investigate:** Know what your daughter is talking about if she comes to you for help.
- **Observe:** Watch out for any behaviour changes especially related to online activity.
- **Contacts:** Know who to contact if your daughter is being cyber bullied and what the procedure is for removing distressing information off the Internet.



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Coping Strategies

Coping is considered fundamental to adolescent adjustment and well-being. The work of Erica Frydenberg teaches us that conflict is an important and pervasive aspect of life. If coping strategies can be utilised to enable an individual to deal effectively with conflict, there is a likelihood of achieving a productive outcome. Effective coping strategies can transform a conflict into a problem that can be solved mutually and means difficult situations are treated as challenges rather than threats. It is vital that parents discuss strategies for coping with any bullying situation with their daughters. Parent responses also help to determine student responses so it is essential that parents are modelling helpful rather than unhelpful coping strategies.

Helpful Coping Strategies for you to Model to your Daughter

Problem Solve - "I can work at solving this problem to the best of my ability"

Access social support – friends, parents, extended family, teachers, school counsellor

Use tension-reduction techniques – relaxation, breathing, meditation, physical activity, prayer

Engage in social action – join the school's Friendship and Justice Committee to assist change

Maintain a positive focus – Concentrate on what is positive about you, family and friends you do have and what things are going right in your life at present. Aim to make positive changes where they are needed

Unhelpful, Non-Productive Coping Strategies to help your Daughter Avoid

Worry excessively about what will happen

Blame yourself for what has happened – "If only I hadn't..", "If I could just..." "Why.."

Put up with inappropriate behaviour in order to 'fit in' with others

Engage in wishful thinking – "If I keep being nice to those girls, they'll let me join their group"

Ignore the problem entirely - "If I just pretend this didn't happen, it will go away"

Keep to yourself – withdrawing from friends and family

Confronting the Cyber Bully

Parenthood.com provides the following practical tips and advice for dealing with an online bully.

- If it occurs once, ignore it
- Tell the bully in simple terms to leave you alone. Tell them not to contact you again. Log off immediately and stay offline for at least 24 hours
- Do not reply to any future mail from the bully. Do not reply to taunts, e-mails or gossip written about you. According to CyberAngels, an Internet safety organisation, "If you take that power away from the harasser and refuse to 'play their game,' then you have become empowered instead. You are now in charge."
- Check the Terms of Use policies on websites – in many cases, reporting bullying or threatening behaviour can result in a perpetrator's account being deleted
- Contact your phone or internet service provider and report what is happening as they can help block messages or calls from certain senders
- Stay out of questionable chat rooms
- Keep a record of any worrying emails or online messages (including time and date) in order to help you (or the police in extreme situations) find out who is sending the messages
- If you feel you are in physical danger or if the bully has made serious or physical threats against you, discuss this with a parent or other adult in order that this can be reported to your local police

What if my daughter is the cyber-bully?

It is very important that you talk with your daughter about her behaviour online. All students need to be made aware of the seriousness of cyber-bullying – hurtful comments and nasty rumours spread through text message and chat programs are just as damaging as those made in real life. In addition, defamation of character, threats of harm, harassment, assault (as a tort), intentional infliction of psychological harm, cyber-stalking and invasion of privacy are all criminal offences taken very seriously by Police.

For more information about Cyber-bullying and coping strategies, visit and read:

<http://www.netalert.net.au/01571-What-can-I-do-about-Cyber-Bullying.asp>; www.cyberbully.org;
www.stoptextbully.com; www.chatdanger.com; www.cyberbully.org ; GetNetWise.org;
www.cyberangels.org; www.cybersafekids.com.au ; www.wiredsafety.org ; ; www.iSafe.org ;
www.netsafe.org.nz ; www.netsmartz.org

Michael Carr-Gregg *Real Wired Child: What parents need to know about kids online*

Erica Frydenberg *Adolescent Coping*