



CYBERSAFETY

The passing of Child Safety Week, held from 3rd to 10th September, provided all with the opportunity to reflect on personal safety in general. During Child Protection Week, we were reminded that *We all have the right to feel safe all of the time* and *Nothing is so awful that we cannot talk about it with someone*. One area requiring particular vigilance from parents lies in the area of safety online – otherwise known as cyber-safety. There is an ever increasing need for parents and children to work together in approaching online safety. This is likely to be even more important with the school holidays approaching. In this week's newsletter, two particular aspects of online safety will be discussed: Firstly, general safety tips for internet use and secondly, cyber-bullying and ways to combat this effectively at the home and school level.

GENERAL SAFETY TIPS FOR INTERNET USE

Girls beat boys at Internet safety - Media Release by NetAlert 29 March 2007

Two independent surveys recently conducted by ninemsn and NetAlert have found that girls are more responsible online than boys. The results of the online surveys, undertaken by parents and children separately, also show that while parents say they know what their children are up to when online; the kids are telling a different story. Although 80% of parents said they have some form of checking their children's Internet activity, only 46% of the children surveyed believed their parents set rules when it came to the Internet.

Ninemsn and NetAlert found that girls take more precautions than boys when it comes to posting personal information online. While boys were found to be more trusting of their online friends, girls put more trust in friends they see in person. Other key findings included:

- 87% of children have a computer at home (47% said the location of the computer was in the living/dining room and 27% had a computer in their own bedroom)
- The top three most popular online activities for children are Instant Messaging, Internet surfing and email.
- Over half of the children surveyed said they are members of online communities
- Younger children (aged 5-12) prefer to play games online, while older children (12+) prefer to blog, use community sites and email.
- 70% of parents say they regularly go online with their kids

According to Jane O'Connell, Director of ninemsn Content and Services, "ninemsn has an ongoing commitment to online child safety with this being the third annual survey we have undertaken in partnership with NetAlert. Studies such as this help us to understand how children approach the Internet and enable us to then educate parents and children alike to be safe and happy online."

Online Safety: Guidelines for Kids

Parents: Print the following guidelines and share with your daughters. Consider using these points as the basis for a Family Internet Use Contract- visit www.safekids.com/contract.htm.

- Always use the Internet with your parent's permission.
- Never, never, give out information online such as your name, address, phone number, school or parent's name(s).
- Ask your parents before typing personal information onto a Web site – even if it is to play a game or enter a contest.
- Never open or answer e-mails or instant messages from people you don't know.
- Never tell anyone your password, including friends or someone who seems official (except your parents at home or teachers at school).
- Never make plans to meet Internet "friends" in real life. If someone asks, tell your mum, dad or another trusted adult.
- If somebody says something or sends you something that makes you uncomfortable or afraid, tell your parents or another trusted adult. They'll know what to do.
- Always follow your family's Internet rules – they're there to make sure you have fun and stay safe online.

Websites and Resources

www.netalert.net.au

www.cybersmartkids.com.au

www.chatdanger.com

www.iSafe.org

www.microsoft.com/security/protect

www.netsmartz.org

Ms Kylie Cann, School Counsellor



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Online Safety: Twelve tips for parents to provide safe Internet use

1. Spend some time with your daughter enjoying the exciting things on the Internet and discuss the ways she can use the internet for education as well as leisure.
2. Information on the Internet comes from many sources. Not all is reliable. Encourage a careful approach to 'information' found on the Internet.
3. Be aware of what your daughter is doing on-line. Have the computer in a public area in the home, not in a bedroom or secluded study area.
4. Encourage your daughter to tell you about anything that worries them and have regular family discussion about the dangers of the Internet.
5. The Internet is a tool, but it is also full of strangers and potential predators. Your daughter should never give out personal information such as names, addresses and phone numbers.
6. Many Internet sites have questionnaires and competitions. Ask your daughter to talk to you before filling in any forms.
7. The Internet is a great place to make friends. However, not everyone is who they seem to be. Children and young people should check with their parents or a trusted adult before arranging any face to face meetings, and ensure that such meetings are in a public place, with an adult or group of close friends present.
8. Encourage your daughter to send e-mails only to friends, so they will have no need to correspond with strangers.
9. Some information on chat lines is not appropriate for young people. Teach them to say 'No' to messages, or to leave a site that makes them feel uncomfortable.
10. If your daughter does bring something inappropriate to your attention, tell them you are pleased they did and discuss it calmly.
11. Too much time sitting at a computer can be unhealthy. Extensive use can result in repetitive stress injuries, eyestrain, obesity, and social isolation. Set a limit (an hour at most) and encourage your child to get out and explore the real world too.

Keeping Kids Safe on the Internet: Parent Power! *By Natalie Walker Whitlock and Marilyn Martinez*

Now for the good news: Parents have more choices and tools than ever before to help keep their families safe online. They can stock a technology toolbox, full of filtering, blocking, monitoring and tracking software. They can use the parental controls included with their ISP or online service and can use only kid-friendly search engines and portals to limit children's exposure to inappropriate sites.

"I'm all in favour of a kid's invasion of privacy because of the danger potential here," says child development professor Polland. "You cannot take the chance. Because kids feel so safe and so bright and so confident about how to beat the system, they are in danger."

Some parents share an online account and password with their child to keep tabs on their children's e-mails with online friends. Parents can even track chats and instant messages in real time, even when they are away from home. There are also non-tech options such as creating a Family Internet Use Contract. Which options you use depends on your child and your own parenting style. Safekids.com recommends completing a contract with your daughter and highlight that the most important rule is for parents and their kids agree to a set criteria. They recommend that parents and their children take a pledge by signing to an agreed set of principles surrounding internet useage and placing these in an area close to the computer. Examples of Parent and Kids pledges can be downloaded free of charge from <http://www.safekids.com/contract.htm>. Adapt these for use within your own family context and vary each year based on the age of your daughter.

But while technology has provided parents with numerous options, high-tech safety tools should be only a piece of the solution – not the whole pie. Indeed, experts repeatedly caution against relying solely on high-tech babysitters to keep kids safe online. "Technology is not a replacement for good parenting," says America Online chairman Steve Case.

The key to keeping kids safe on the Internet today is parents who recognise the possible dangers, understand the technology, and take the time to be involved in their child's online activities.



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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 for parents 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 telephone conversations, online interactions often mean there is reduced opportunity for feedback.

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”. Cyberbullying might be via email, MSN, text messaging, online dairies, websites, web pages, chat rooms, web forums, MySpace and YouTube. Bullying can include teasing, name calling, threats, taunts, harassment, rumours 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, increased stress as well as isolation and withdrawal. In more extreme cases, cyber-bullying can result in depression and anxiety and has even led to suicide.

How Prevalent is Cyber-Bullying?

Cyberbullying is a fairly recent concept, and 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. Australian research conducted by Wallis Consulting Group in July this year 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 specializing in children and Internet issues. “Kids need appropriate monitoring by parents at home to prevent inappropriate behavior 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.
- **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. Investigate what she does online.
- **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

The work of Erica Frydenberg teaches us that conflict is an important and pervasive aspect of life. If there are coping strategies that enable an individual to deal effectively with conflict, there is a likelihood of achieving a productive outcome. Difficult situations are treated as challenges rather than threats. Effective coping strategies can transform a conflict into a problem that can be solved mutually. Coping is considered fundamental to adolescent adjustment and well-being. 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

Strategies considered helpful in coping with bullying include

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

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

Use tension-reduction techniques – relaxation, 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

Non-Productive Coping Strategies

Worry excessively about what will happen

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

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

Engaging 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 that you may want to share with your daughter, if you decide this is the best course.

- 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 organization, "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) 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, report this 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. It is important that she is 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 visit:

<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*



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What to do if your daughter is the Cyber Bully

Cyber Brats: Bullies Who Taunt Their Peers with the Click of a Mouse

Electronic threats, menacing messages. It's bullying taken to a new level and kids as young as 10 are using the Internet to make life miserable for their schoolmates.

These tech-savvy imps remain elusive by signing on with alias screen names or using computers in public places. They invade chat rooms or instant message their targets with such warnings as "Watch your back."

Some bullies spread rumors that are sexual in nature about kids they don't like. They post them on Web sites designed as virtual "slam books." Adding insult to injury, these sites link to dozens of schools, where thousands of other kids can log on, read the rumors and then add their own remarks about the subject or their own chosen target. [Parents](#) and educators representing nearly 100 middle and high schools in Southern California recently fought to have one such Web site, [Schoolscandals.com](#), shut down. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, parents described the content as "libelous and harmful" and as having a "painful effect on youngsters."

Although bullying face-to-face still seems to be the preferred method of intimidation, experts say that Internet bullying is on the rise everywhere.

Everyone Wants Anonymity

Name calling, threats, hit lists – parents, bullies, victims, educators and law enforcers say, "yes," there have been incidences – but no one wants to name names. School districts don't want the notoriety; social workers need to maintain confidences; former bullies just want to forget they were ever that "stupid" and [kids](#) who have been targeted fear reprisal.

Therefore, some names, dates and locations have been altered or excluded to protect those who contributed to this story.

The Targets

Last month at a local elementary school, as the annual spring concert came to a close, one mom approached another for advice. "My daughter is getting threatening e-mails. She knows who they're from but she's afraid to tell on them." The mother explained that a group of fifth grade girls were sending instant messages to her daughter that read "We're gonna get you" and "Watch your back in the halls." The mother was torn. Should she go to the principal? Should she confront the parents? Or should she go straight to the police? "They're just kids," she reasoned, "but who knows what they're really thinking." Parents who overheard this conversation were shocked. They'd just enjoyed a lovely musical performance by a group of bright-eyed, well-groomed fifth-grade students. Could it be that some of those very kids standing on the stage that night were involved?

"Unfortunately, it's fairly common," says Alane Fagin, the executive director of Child Abuse Prevention Services (CAPS), a New York nonprofit organization that presents Bully Prevention workshops in schools. Bullying in general starts at the elementary level, Fagin explains, and it peaks in the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. Lately, she notes, calls have come in from parents of middle school students who have been harassed online by their peers. "Kids are very creative in

Is your child the target of an online bully?

Get tips and advice in

[Confronting the Cyber Bully](#)



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their bullying. The bully online doesn't have to face his target." Very often, it's the girls who use the Internet to bully other girls, Fagin believes. "It's called relational aggression. It's the way girls bully as opposed to the way boys bully. With girls, it's more insidious. They use relationships as weapons."

Fagin offers this scenario: A group of girls could be sitting around the computer, instant messaging their target. (The target thinks she is only communicating with one person.) At first, they befriend her. They gossip awhile about mutual friends and eventually the bullies ask leading questions, hoping to get their target to say something negative about one of the girls present. Once the target falls for it, the bullies use the gossip against her. "This leads to social isolation," says Fagin. And frustration for the parents who just want to nab the bully. "It's heartbreaking for a parent," Fagin explains, "the problem, though, is that very often you don't know for sure that the person on the other end is, in fact, that person – the actual bully." The most important thing a parent can do is support their child and acknowledge how he feels and, Fagin suggests, if your child's attempts at confronting the bully online fails, it's time to take it to the school principal. "The school can be a catalyst for discussing this with the kids – explaining to them that any one of them can become a victim." Fagin believes that Internet bullying can cause serious emotional problems. "With the flick of a key, you can cause irreparable damage to another."

The Bully

Jay was hesitant to recall the details of the heartache he and his buddies caused when they posted a "Hit List" of kids from their middle school that they "just didn't like."

"A bunch of us were sitting around the computer. We were bored, so we started fooling around, designing our own Web site. We called ourselves TAB – The Angry Boys. At the time, we were all intrigued with the whole mafia thing. We watched a lot of movies – *Goodfellas*, *The Godfather*," says Jay. He explains that he and the other 13-year-old boys were good, clean-cut kids – some played sports, others were involved in student government. They wanted to change their image. "We wanted to be known as the tough guys in school." Jay shakes his head and wipes his brow. His voice quivering, he continues, "We wrote that we wanted to weed out the people we didn't like. Anybody that we didn't hang out with was on the list. We titled it 'People We're Gonna Whack.'" The boys did not send the "hit list" to anyone. Instead, they bragged about the Web site and invited classmates to log on. Jay says it was just a joke that went too far. But the joke was on these "wise guys" who weren't too bright. Not only did they list their screen names on the site, they included their legal names, making it easy for the victims and their parents to report them. "One of the kids on the list went to the principal with a copy of the Web site," says Jay, and from there it snowballed.

The bullies and their parents met with the principal, who wanted to keep the matter in-house. The boys were verbally disciplined and warned to destroy the Web site immediately, which they did. But the other parents were outraged. They weren't convinced that the Web site was just fun and games. One parent filed a complaint with the local police. Jay and his fellow accomplices were called into the

Are Your Kids Safe on the Internet? Check out our complete series:

- [Introduction](#)
- [Online Risks & Threats](#)
- [Profile of a Predator](#)
- [Parent Power!](#)
- [Chat Room Lingo](#)
- [Warning Signs](#)
- [Online Safety Guidelines](#)



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evidence. Jay's mother describes the experience as "the worst moment of my life. I was so angry at my son for his stupidity. What he did was cruel, but, on the other hand, he was only 13 years old." She says that when it was time for Jay to go to the precinct, "He was hysterical. He was holding onto me and sobbing."

Four months after the incident, after close examination, the police closed the case and the computers were returned to the families. Jay's parents banned him from going online for six months. They forbade him to socialize with any of the boys involved and, the following school year, Jay says he had to work hard to regain the trust of his teachers, classmates and his family. Today, he spends his free time playing school sports and volunteering at church functions.

Whose Problem Is It?

"If it's a one-time thing – ignore it," says Fagin, regarding an annoying e-mail from a known bully. "If it persists, do not engage the bully, get help." Kids should tell a parent, she advises. But who do parents turn to?

"Bullying comes under everyone's jurisdiction," says Steve Treglia of the Nassau County (N.Y.) District Attorney's office. As the crime unit's chief of technology, Treglia says these cases are "not easy to prosecute." "The biggest issue is proving who is behind the keyboard." Treglia believes that if a child is being bullied online and there is no immediate danger, the best thing to do is to "preserve whatever you can." Save the threatening messages on a floppy disc or print out copies and then go to the school principal with your child. Sometimes the principal may be privy to a "history" between the bully and the target. "There may be bad blood between the kids," suggests Treglia. Or parents may be surprised to learn that their own child, who is claiming to be the target, may actually be the perpetrator, and the threatening e-mails may be coming from the victim who just wants him to back off.

In any case, Treglia and other experts advise parents to make the judgment call. If there is an immediate threat of physical harm, call 911 or your local precinct for help. However, if the bullying incident can be handled without police involvement, in most cases, school officials can squelch the problem. They have been trained to deal with school violence, since the Safe Schools Against Violence in Education Act (SAVE) was enacted by New York state legislators in 2000.

Whether bullying occurs in school, outside or over the Internet, it's vital for parents to tell their kids to speak up, although Joakim Lartey, a training coordinator for the New York State Center for School Safety, notes that in focus groups, most kids say they don't want to tell because they feel like a "snitch." "We need to send kids a message. Reporting a dangerous incident does not mean you are a tattletale. Parents should explain to their children that it is their responsibility as a citizen to help protect others," Lartey says.

Teaching Internet Responsibility

Experts agree that parents need to keep a close watch on their young children, whether they are accessing the Internet for research or to chat with friends. Treglia believes that parents need to understand their child's Internet habits. "They also need to teach them how to spot when they are being harassed and they need to teach them not to harass others."

GetNetWise.org is a Web site created by a coalition of Internet corporations and public interest groups, whose aim is to educate families about online safety. The site offers a wealth of information for parents and children. Regarding threats, the site suggests that parents share this information with their children: "It is



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whether those threats are delivered in person, on the phone, via the mail or over the Internet." If your child is the recipient of an immediate personal threat of harm, GetNetWise.org recommends that parents call 911.

With summer approaching, Fagin suggests that parents be extra vigilant. "Our kids will spend more time online, unsupervised. Most of us wouldn't drop our middle school kids off at the mall and leave them unsupervised, but we do that when we let them surf the Internet unsupervised."

RESOURCES

- **Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)** – 202-324-3666; www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguide.htm – Access this Web site for the document, "A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety." Offers tips to keep kids safe online and a basic glossary of terms associated with Internet use.
- **CyberAngels** – www.cyberangels.org – Described as a "cyber-neighborhood watch," this Internet safety organization has a Web site that offers information for kids and parents regarding cyberstalking, online predators and more. It is a branch of the Guardian Angels crime-fighting organization.
- **GetNetWise.org** – www.GetNetWise.org – Offers guidance for families on Internet use and safety.
- **Child Abuse Prevention Services (CAPS)** – 516-621-0552; www.kidsafe-caps.org – The organization's mission is to respond to child abuse and neglect on Long Island. Child safety and child abuse prevention workshops are offered, as well as bully prevention programs. The Web site offers information about bullies and what to do if your child is a victim.

See also: [Cyber Tips for Parents](#)

Marie Wolf is the associate editor of Long Island Parenting News, a United Parenting Publication. From United Parenting Publications, June 2003.