

Cyber-Bullying

Unfortunately for many teens across the country, especially young girls, cyber-bullying is now a frequent occurrence. Cyber-bullying can result in depression, school-related violence, or even suicide. Cyber-bullying may occur via personal websites, blogs, Instant Messenger, email, chat, discussion groups, and through text/picture messaging. Bullies often send offensive messages or pictures, spread personal information, pretend to be someone else and post hurtful information, or taunt and tease through the internet.

One of the problems with cyber bullying, unlike traditional face-to-face bullying, is that the bully generally remains anonymous. Many bullies post from anonymous names or create new email addresses or screen names with fake information just for the purposes of bullying. Another problem with cyber-bullying is that the bully doesn't need to be strong or scary; they just have to have access to a computer or cell phone.

To protect your child from cyber-bullying, try monitoring their internet use. If you notice a change in your child's frequency of use or mood when they are using the internet, don't hesitate to find out which site your child uses. Review what they are posting or what emails they receive. If your child believes that you are invading their privacy, remind them that most of these places (blogs, websites, chat rooms) can be accessed by the public. Look at their cell-phone bill and monitor any unusual incoming or outgoing calls. The most important thing to do if you find evidence that your child is being bullied is to save it. Contact your internet or cellular provider to see if they can identify who is doing the bullying. Things such as threats of school-related violence, suicide, self-harm or signs of emotional disturbance should be reported to your child's school or guidance counselor. If your child is involved with an online sexual predator or

being sexually exploited, contact the police immediately. Most importantly, make sure you talk with your child. Make sure they know it is okay to come to you no matter what. Explain to them that sending hurtful text messages or emails is wrong and is just as bad as physically bullying someone. If they use the internet or their cell phone to cyber-bully, take it away. Cyber-bullying is an incredibly painful experience that is likely to make your child feel helpless, so being there for them and monitoring their use of these technologies can help.

For information on cyber-bullying visit:

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/03/21/earlyshow/living/caught/main681867.shtml>.

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