

Bullying Prevention Newsletter

Cyber-Bullying: What Parents Need to Know

Township High School District 211



For Parents of Academy-North Students

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What is Cyber-Bullying?

Cyber-bullying is defined as harassing, embarrassing, or taunting another person through the use of the Internet, a cellphone or other type of social media. Some examples we have seen of cyber-bullying include the following: Sending embarrassing photos or messages by e-mail or on a cell phone; harassing another student through text messages, instant messages, or in a chat room; sharing messages with people other than the intended recipient; writing hurtful messages on a personal blog or website; and posting embarrassing videos or pictures online. Cyber-bullying is very different from face-to-face bullying because messages and images can be sent 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Though cyber-bullying typically occurs outside of school, it can have a significant impact on the school environment. The use of social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube has never been more prevalent. Teens are among their largest user groups – as well as the most vulnerable. A recent study found that 68% of teens reported that at least one “friend invitation” from a stranger – granting them access to their pictures, personal thoughts, location, and life. Teens need guidance from parents on how to navigate social media safely, establish a responsible online presence, recognize and respond to cyber-bullying, and how to tell trusted adults when a situation goes beyond their control.

How do Teens Elude Their Parents?

- ◆ Teens will block their parents on social networks (e.g., Facebook). They will also filter what information their parents can see on their pages.
- ◆ Even if they are not blocking or filtering what their parents can see, teens will set up multiple accounts or user names without telling their parents. To hide, a teen may create alternative names, nicknames [or] secret email addresses.
- ◆ Teens will access social media sites from alternative devices, such as, phones, gaming devices, and MP3 players.
- ◆ They will also access the internet from sources other than their home internet connection (e.g., Library computer, friend’s house, public wi-fi connection, and neighbor’s wi-fi connection).

What Can I Do as a Parent?

- ◆ Be savvy about social networking and online/text communication (see the websites listed in this newsletter for helpful resources to get informed).
- ◆ Keep family communication about social networking open and positive. Discuss this as you would other social activities your teen participates in. Start the conversation with your teen about which sites they use, and why.
- ◆ Have access to their online profiles and passwords. If they have a Facebook account insist that you be their “friend” and monitor their activity.
- ◆ Create a list of Internet house rules as a family, including off-limit sites, hours of usage, and guidelines for information sharing as well as what to keep private. Insist that your teen never agrees to meet an online “friend”.
- ◆ Keep computers in open and public areas and not in your teen’s bedroom. Be aware and limit the amount the time your student is using social media.
- ◆ Encourage your teen to tell you if something online makes them feel uncomfortable – you can help them tell the school, if need be.
- ◆ Emphasize the importance of responsible and ethical online behavior. Discuss consequences of what can occur both at home and at school if your teen uses the internet to bully others.
- ◆ Ensure your teen understands that once a photo or message is posted on the Internet, it is there forever. Discuss how this can impact your teen’s post-high school education and employment plans.
- ◆ Install an internet monitoring/filtering software program to help monitor and restrict internet usage. There are many different programs available for purchase.
- ◆ Keep in mind that teens can be very sly and that a large percentage of activities take place via private chat messages, groups, closed forums, personal SMS texts, and other forms of communication that cannot be viewed by even the most diligent parent. Thus, it is crucial to closely monitor all their activity and rather than only monitoring their Facebook page and installing an internet monitoring/filtering program.
- ◆ If your child does experience cyber bullying, **keep evidence of cyber-bullying**. Record the dates, times and descriptions of instances when cyber-bullying has occurred. Save and print screenshots, e-mails, and text messages. **Give or have your teen give the evidence to their administrator.**

Which Sites are Teens Using?

Facebook is a social networking website where users are able to share pictures, videos, and communicate with each other using a platform where an infinite number of teens can simultaneously view comments posted for others to see. They can indicate whether they liked the comment or comments and/or can post their own comments for everyone to see. Communication can also be made private and there is an “honesty box” feature where teens can anonymously post comments for others to see.
<http://www.facebook.com/>

Myspace is a social networking website.
<http://www.myspace.com/>

Twitter is a social networking website where teens can post comments (“tweets”) publicly.
<http://twitter.com/>

Tumblr allows users to post multimedia (eg., pictures, videos, music, etc.) and other content to a short-form blog, named a “tumblelog.” Users can follow other users’ blogs, and can also make their blogs private.
<http://www.tumblr.com/>

YouTube is a video-sharing website, where teens can upload, review, and share with others.
<http://www.youtube.com/>

Formspring is a global social network, where members ask each other questions and learn more about one other through interesting, funny and personal responses. People use Formspring to get to know friends and friends of friends.
<http://www.formspring.me/>

...and don't forget cell phone text messages and other devices your teen can use to access the internet and send text messages (e.g., Game Systems, IPAD, IPOD Touch, and other MP3 Players, Game Systems, etc.)!

What are school consequences for bullying?

Students determined to have been involved in bullying may face disciplinary consequences up to and including a recommendation of expulsion, as well as possible referral to the police consultant for criminal offenses.

How Can I Get More Information?

The first step to ensuring online safety is to be online-savvy. The following websites can serve as resources to help.

<http://wiredsafety.org/>
This site includes many resources for parents and teens.

<http://www.facebook.com/safety/>
This site includes new features such as ‘Social Reporting’, where offensive posts or pages may be reported directly to trusted adults.

www.cyberbully.org and www.cyberbullying.us
Both sites include information on how to identify and intervene in cases of cyber-bullying.

<http://www.stopbullying.gov/>
This is a government task force that evolved from a Bullying Summit in 2010.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/10/21/president-obama-it-gets-better>
This site includes Obama’s “It Gets Better” speech.

Step UP – So Others Won’t Get Stepped ON

District 211 welcomes input or reports from parents as well as students and other members of the school community.

Reports can be made **anonymously** to report bullying that you have experienced or witnessed by calling **847/755-6700** or by using the following link: http://www.academy-north.org/index.php?option=com_forme&Itemid=88

- ◆ “43% of teens age 13-17 report that they have experienced some type of cyber-bullying in the past year.” (www.internetsafety101.org)
- ◆ “Bullying is a problem...people are sending text messages and posting things on Facebook that hurt, judge, or exclude others based on gossip or rumors, and not enough is being done.” (Student response from D211 Bullying Survey, Spring 2011)

Cyber-bullying is a problem that we need everyone’s help to reduce!