



Cyber- Bullying:

Counseling Corner

How to notice and help your student

The internet opens a world of possibilities for your student that were not available when you were a child or even as recently as a few years ago.

From a personal computer with an Internet connection, your student has access to almost any encyclopedia, dictionary, book, magazine or newspaper in the world. He or she can chat with friends and relatives, meet new people, learn foreign languages, and develop new interests. There is no doubting the tremendous benefits the Internet brings to your family.

However, the emergence of cyberbullying has intensified adolescent angst. It allows bullies to unleash put-downs, nasty rumors and humiliating pictures in e-mail and blogs that can strike victims at home and at any time. The damage can be devastating, psychologists say, even as it is not always obvious to parents and teachers.

Cyberbullies, mostly ages 9 to 14, are using the anonymity of the Web to mete out pain without witnessing the consequences. The problem — aggravated by widespread use of wireless devices such as cell phones and BlackBerrys — is especially prevalent in affluent communities, where high-speed Internet use is high and kids are technically adept.

Many victims don't tell their parents, out of fear they'll be barred from using the Internet. So what can you do to help protect your child?

Know what's going on: Keep the computer in the family room or another open area of your home. Let your children show you what they can do online, and visit their favorite sites or chat rooms with them. If you suspect online "stalking" or sexual exploitation of a child, report it to your local law enforcement agency. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) has a system, the CyberTipline, for identifying online predators and child pornographers and contributing to law-enforcement investigations. Leads forwarded to the site are acknowledged and shared with the appropriate law enforcement agency for investigation.

Set up rules: Post clear, simple, easy-to-read rules on or near the monitor. Create your own computer rules or print out the

Internet Safety Pledge from NetSmartz. You and your children should sign — and should be periodically review — the pledge.

Use filters: Consider using filtering or monitoring software for your computer. Look into safeguarding programs or options your online service provider might offer. These can include monitoring or filtering capabilities. Have your children use child-friendly search engines when completing homework. As the parent, the Internet accounts should be in your name, and you should have the primary screen name and control passwords. Don't allow your children to children complete a profile for a service provider, and make sure their screen names are nondescript enough that a stranger won't know the user is a child.

Check out privacy policies: Always read a Web site's privacy policy before you or your children provide any personal information. Also make sure that a Web site offers a secure connection before giving credit-card information. Web sites for children are not permitted to request personal information without a parent's permission. Talk to your children about what personal information is and why you should never give it to people online.

Talk about the dangers of e-mail and chat: If your children use chat or e-mail, talk to them about never meeting an online "friend" face-to-face. Talk to your children about not responding to offensive or dangerous e-mail, chat or other communications. Report any such communication to local law enforcement. Do not delete the offensive or dangerous e-mail; instead turn off the monitor, and contact local law enforcement. Know whom your children are exchanging e-mail with, and only let them use chat areas that you have visited.

Don't forget, **You don't have to be "Always On" turn off, disconnect, unplug, try actual reality instead of virtual reality!** -Give yourself a break. Don't stay online or connected too long. Spend time with your family and friends off line.

For more information, or to discuss any specific concerns, please contact Molly Kridel, School Counselor, at 925-3760 x2344 or mkridel@aspennk12.net