



Letter to Parents

Lesson 1, Counselor Resource

To the Parent or Guardian:

Greetings!

Our lessons on Cyberbullying have begun! I know that the teachers were excited about sharing some of the points of this dynamic curriculum with your children. As you can probably imagine, the subject of Cyberbullying is one of high interest to students. It is interesting to them because it speaks to their world; it is prevalent and it is rampant. Truthfully, technology has expanded so rapidly over the last few years that communication devices (internet, cell phones and gaming consoles) have virtually exploded in their usage. This explosion happened so quickly that healthy habits, social rules or contracts and common sense somehow was pushed aside. That's the gist of this lesson – stressing the importance of respect and responsibility as part of the contract that you agree to when you use technology as a communication tool.

This lesson has several goals.

1. **Understanding *Social Contracts*.** Social contracts are an agreed upon set of behaviors, actions and interactions that people use that show respect for each other. For example – we have pretty clear social contracts about driving, about waiting in lines and about behaviors in school and public places. The lesson stresses over and over that social contracts must be based *on mutual respect and taking responsibility for your actions*.
2. **Where are the *Social Contracts* in cyber communication?** One of the problems with communication technology is that it progressed faster and wider than we expected. Social contracts did **not** keep pace with that advancement. People – especially kids – weren't trained in respectful, appropriate and safe usage of cell phones, computer messaging and on line sites. Now – take a moment and think about how your children learned so many of the other social contracts that are needed to exist in society (i.e. waiting in line, crossing the street, or ordering food). They learned by watching you! From the time they were a very small child they probably stood with you and observed just how you behaved and reacted. They watched you wait your turn, speak politely and manage personal space and polite sound. That is called **modeling**. Modeling is the most effective teaching tool for children. Our children haven't had significant modeling in the area of cyber communications. If anything – they've had negative modeling. They've seen people talking on the phone at inappropriate times, using inappropriate language and disrespectful voice tones. Courtesy and civility have been abandoned all too often. They've come to believe that it is normal behavior.
3. **Creating Appropriate *Social Contracts* for communication technology.** It's amazing how much easier it is to fix a problem once you've identified the cause. It's helpful to reassure them that we can create appropriate rules for cyber communication now that we're acknowledging the fact that we just haven't done that effectively

before. This lesson has some highly engaging activities that help kids brainstorm healthy and civil ways to create effective and impactful social contracts that can be used to make cyber communication healthy, respectful and responsible.

Your child's teacher will make sure that all the kids are using the same set of terms as we proceed with these lessons. We will be sharing those vocabulary lists with you. We know that you'd like to support these lessons at home. Here are some things you can do:

- **Model.** Again, you are their first and best teacher! Think about your use of the computer and cell phone. Examine some of your habits and behaviors and make sure that you are honoring the guidelines of respect and personal responsibility that you want them to show.
- **Create Family Guidelines and Contracts.** I'm guessing that you are paying for the computer, the Internet and cell phone at this point in your child's life. You have a right to create appropriate written contracts with them that reflect respectful usage of those privileges – and privileges they indeed are! It is surprising how many kids feel that they are simply entitled to these devices. You're the parent – take control.
- **"What If" Scenarios.** Dinner time and/or car travel time is a great time to play the "what if" game. It can be used for any topic. In this case you could ask questions like:
 - What if you received an offensive text message? What would you do?
 - What if your friend did something on the Internet that was causing bad rumors?
 - What if you sent something out by mistake that you are ashamed of now?
 - What if someone was using their computer to harass you?

It's been a pleasure for me to study this lesson and find the kernels that I hope will be most interesting and helpful to you as parents. I look forward to our future conversations.

Best wishes!

Chris