

Letter to Parents

Lesson 1, Parent Resource 1

Dear Parent or Guardian:

We are beginning a series of lessons to prevent bullying over the Internet, called **Cyberbullying**. Cyberbullies use Internet services to degrade, insult, harass, threaten, and humiliate others.

The abuse may be carried out exclusively online, or it may be an extension of physical bullying that occurs before, during or after school. It is particularly damaging because it can be unrelenting for the target because it can happen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The anonymity of the Internet allows bullies to contact their target with less fear of retaliation than with traditional bullying. Also, cyberbullying can give the bully a much bigger audience and burden the target with the knowledge that everyone can see it. Furthermore, the words and images bullies post may be impossible to track down and remove.

The frequency of cyberbullying has risen sharply in the last few years and now directly affects over 30 percent of students across the nation. Virtually all students are indirectly impacted by cyberbullying in roles as bystanders, friends of the target, or as friends of and possibly accomplices to the bully.

We will be communicating with you about specific cyberbullying focuses during the next few months, and appreciate your ongoing involvement and comments.

Thank you for your interest and willingness to participate with your student.

What forms does cyberbullying take?

Cyberbullies take advantage of the Internet to harm others using the following tactics, among others:

- Send abusive text messages to cell phones, computers, or Internet- connected game consoles.
- Post abusive comments on someone's blog or social networking site (like MySpace or Facebook).
- Create a Web page that masquerades as the target's Web page and use it to embarrass him or her.
- Make it appear that the target is posting nasty comments about friends to isolate him or her from friends.
- Post the target's personally identifiable information on the site to put them at greater risk of contact by predators.
- Send abusive comments while playing interactive games.
- Take photos (often using a cell phone camera) and post them online, sometimes manipulating them to embarrass the target.

How can you help your child stay safe?

- Encourage your child to keep his or her online space private to avoid bullying by strangers.
- Explain the importance of protecting passwords so others cannot access a site to post damaging information.
- Tell your child not to retaliate if someone abuses him or her. Instead they should report the abuse to you immediately.

- Use features of Internet devices to block abusers and report abuse to the owners of the Web site where abuse takes place.
- Teach your child not to bully others, and to support to those who are being bullied. When students stand up for each other, they create a climate that discourages bullying.

What should you do if your child reports being cyberbullied?

- Don't dismiss the complaint; cyberbullying must be taken very seriously.
- Don't blame your child: he or she needs your support.
- Don't take away your child's ability to use the Internet, cell phone. or a particular service like MySpace or e-mail. These are a central part of kids' lives and cutting them off from using them will seem like punishment. It may also discourage your child from talking to you about a problem.
- Report abuse to the Internet service provider, and to your school, especially if abuse is occurring there. Call the police or local law enforcement immediately if you feel that your child is physically at risk in any way.

Cyberbullying Vocabulary This is a list of terms that your student will be learning, using and adding to in this course on cyberbullying.

Term	Definition
blog	An online personal journal (or Web log).
code of conduct	A set of rules governing how people should behave in a certain setting, such as on a social networking site.
device	In relation to the Internet, a device is any piece of equipment you use to access the Internet. Devices include personal computers, cell phones, gaming consoles, and personal digital assistants (PDA).
gamer tag	The name a player goes by when playing an online game.
instant messaging (or IM)	Exchange real time messages with someone else who is online using a program such as AIM from AOL.
personal information	Information about an individual that might identify them or make them easier to find, including home and e-mail address, school, age, gender, and phone number.
photo imaging software	Software, such as Photoshop, that can be used to change photos, for example placing the image of one person's head on a different body.
post	To place content online, as in posting a comment on a discussion board or blog.
social networking site	Web sites like MySpace or Facebook whose focus is on building online communities of people with similar interests. Members connect online to share information in personal blog pages, through chat, discussion boards, or sharing photos or video.
text messaging (or texting)	Sending short messages between cell phones.
virtual	Refers to objects, activities, and locations in the online world. A virtual community is a group that gathers on a particular Web site, for example.
Web (or World Wide Web)	A set of documents hosted on the Internet that make up Web sites, Web pages, and other online content.
wiki	Online content that anybody can edit. Wikipedia, for example, is an online encyclopedia created from contributions from the general public.

