



Letter to Parents

Lesson 3, Counselor Resource

To the Parent or Guardian:

Greetings!

As a school counselor, I'm hit with issues and situations that revolve around Cyberbullying almost daily. Because it has such a huge impact on our teenager's lives, I feel terribly compelled to bring you in this loop with us. This lesson may seem very technical at first. It looks carefully at all the myriad of devices and services that are available these days. There are so many! I encourage you to go on line at some point and review this lesson in its entirety; I think you'd be amazed by all the facets that it covers. I'm going to stress one central point with you, however. I want to look very specifically at the phrase "**code of conduct.**"

Code of conduct is defined in this lesson as "A set of rules governing how people should behave in a certain setting, such as on a social networking site." While "code of conduct" relates to the concept of the social contract that we spoke of in lesson 1, it is much more specific and objective; it also strikes a very significant and meaningful legal tone. I believe as a society that we have glossed over the parameters of this piece and left out some very pertinent pieces of information that our children need to be safe and protected.

I was thinking about the time my children first received a cell phone. In one case it was for a birthday – another child got theirs at Christmas. As I reflected further, I remembered that a great deal of time and attention was paid to the technical aspects of the phone (ring tones, etc) – and in my case – a great deal of threats about use of minutes and staying within the family plan – but virtually no time at looking at the code of conduct that I had agreed on prior to purchasing the phone. I'm humbled to admit that I took no time talking to my children about other aspects and responsibilities of a cell phone. Now – think about all the devices that your children have today – MySpace, Gaming Consoles, Computer Services, You Tube, etc. Do you realize that each and every one of those comes with a code of conduct? You probably agreed to the rules without even reading them. In all likelihood the rules listed in the code of conduct are rules that seem perfectly logical and reasonable to you as an adult.

Here's the rub. Many of the children today do not seem to have internalized the codes of conduct that you just take for granted. Here's an example from MSN and Windows Live Code of Conduct. (MS-Lesson 3 SA3.doc)

Prohibited Uses

You will not upload, post, transmit, transfer, distribute or facilitate distribution of any content (including text, images, sound, video, data, information or software) or otherwise use the service in a way that:

- *Depicts nudity of any sort including full or partial human nudity or nudity in non-human forms such as cartoons, fantasy art or manga.*

I cite this specific example because it seems so logical and common sense. However, we've discovered lately that the sharing of nude pictures has become a common behavior among junior high aged kids. That may shock you – it certainly surprised me. I've been hearing more and more about it. Let me share a couple of stories:

- A young girl came in to see me because she had been repeatedly texted the night before by a young man who wanted her to send nude pictures of herself to him. She told me that the text conversation went back and forth for hours trying to convince her. Although she felt it was wrong, and didn't comply –she felt compelled to justify her reason and argue her case. For reasons that astound me – it somehow wasn't okay to simply just say no to such a request.
- Another young girl was approached to do the same thing by a boy that she liked. She was flattered by the attention and decided to do it. Later she found out that her pictures were being forwarded through the school. Feeling overwhelmed and confused she confided in both her mother and I, but still was left feeling humiliated, guilty and chastised.
- Another young man supposedly was bragging to friends that he has dozens of nude pictures of girls on his phone.
- A police officer who visited the school this fall spontaneously started talking to kids about not sending nude pictures over the phone. He said the practice was rampant in King County.

The students referred to above are normal students. They get good grades; they are involved in all aspects of school activities and organizations and come from loving and responsible families. With all those advantages, they still didn't truly understand the code of conduct that needed to be in place to help them when pressured to make unsafe choices. My hope is that when we all spend more time with our children stressing the legalities of the codes of conduct that are inherent in all cyber communication that they will make safe and appropriate decisions with more confidence.

Best regards,

Chris