



## HELP WITH CYBERBULLYING - A MUST READ FOR PARENTS

Text messaging and email has been around for years. But also more and more young people are using social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. As a result, Cyberbullying has become a defined problem that parents need to be aware of.

I have noticed that some parents have advised their children not to use their real names on Facebook to protect them from unknown predators. Even so, their own friends can end up cyberbullying them.

Cyberbullying is bullying using any type of technology. This can include Facebook, Twitter, cellphones, email or anything electronic or digital.

It can occur in up to a third of young people who use technology which is concerning. More concerning is that most do not report it to an adult.

The bullying causes negative consequences to the other person. Some doctors state that it is always intentional. However, it is my opinion that if the bully is mentally unwell, stressed or has a personality disorder, it is not always intentional. ( See article on bullying at work)

Cyberbullies tend to be heavy online users. Girls tend to be victimized more.

Cyberbullies tend to have aggressive personalities, want to create attention, and possibly have trouble making friends. As with schoolyard bullying, these people have often been bullied themselves, may have been in legal trouble, or may have had a poor upbringing.

The difference between cyberbullying and schoolyard bullying is that you may not know who the bully is and the bullying is often public. In the schoolyard, you know who it is, the bullying is contained, and you can feel safer when you get support from a friend or teacher and often the bully is dealt with.

In cyberbullying, you may get an anonymous message or not know who the bully is – this can cause anxiety and uncertainty. If the message has gone out to everyone the victim is connected with then it's very public and can be humiliating. Some can lose confidence, become depressed and even suicidal.

### What can parents do?

Have a high level of suspicion that cyber bullying could happen. Discuss frequently with your teenager how things are going and remind them that sometimes people can make upsetting comments on the internet. Make sure they know you are always available to discuss things no matter how trivial or silly they may sound.

It's very hard for teenagers to confess to parents and adults what is going on in their lives, so when they do, always take them seriously.

If cyberbullying occurs, keep documentation of everything. Try to get a name and bring the cyberbully to the attention of the school and parents. Sometimes the bully's family also needs help.

If the bully is known, then its possible their messages can be blocked.

If the messages are threatening, then the police need to be involved. Your teenager's safety

Watch for new symptoms like headaches, stomach aches, anxiety or sleep problems. If cyberbullying has affected your teenager, initial help from your family doctor is appropriate. Sometimes a referral for counselling is needed.

## **What can your teenager do?**

- Consider using a different name that is only known to their friends.
- Only accept people they actually know as online friends.
- Use the following format when using technology:
  - Read any message that is written before actually posting it.
  - Imagine if you were receiving the message whether it might be hurtful in any way.
  - Think about whether it needs to be sent now, or can it wait.
  - Understand that sometimes it therapeutic to write something down, read it, then delete it.
  - Do not send a message that you are uncertain of, especially if you wrote it in an emotional state – once sent, it is out forever and cannot be undone.
- Feel confident to discuss with parents any concerns, no matter how trivial.

Other Cyber concerns can include stalking, harassment and Sexting. Sexting is the act of sending sexually explicit messages or photographs, mainly between mobile phones. Teenagers need to know that they could get into legal trouble by doing this.

Some of this information has been taken from an interview of Dr Gwenn Schurgin O'Keeffe who is an American Paediatrician. Published 25/10/10