



CYBERBULLYING -- Understanding and Addressing Online Cruelty*

(For more information, check the Diversity & Inclusion Committee Website at

<http://popeptsa.org/pope-programs.html>)

According to Cox Communications and the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 93% of youth in the U.S. are online and 73% have a cell phone. For the current generation of teens, IM-ing, text messaging, social networking and tweeting are a vital means of self-expression and a central part of their social lives.

There are increasing reports, however, that some youth are misusing Internet and cell phone technology to bully and harass others, and even to incite violence against them. According to a study by the Cyberbullying Research Center, approximately 20% of young people reported experiencing cyberbullying in their lifetimes. Another study by Cox Communications and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children indicates that about 1 in 10 teens have cyberbullied someone online or by text message and 16% have seen or heard of a friend who bullied others. For some of these youth, online cruelty may be a precursor to more destructive behavior, including involvement in hate groups and bias-related violence.

The impact of bullying has been well documented—studies have shown that difficulty making friends, loneliness, low self-esteem, depression, poor academic achievement, truancy and suicide are all associated with being bullied. In addition to these risk factors, the targets of cyberbullying may be subject to additional distress due to the pervasive and invasive nature of modern communication technology: cyberbullying messages can be circulated far and wide in an instant and are usually irrevocable; cyberbullying is ubiquitous—there is no refuge and victimization can be relentless; and cyberbullying is often anonymous and can rapidly swell as countless and unknown others join in on “the fun.”

Despite the prevalence and impact of cyberbullying, many adults are unaware of the problem due to a lack of fluency in new technologies, limited involvement in and oversight of youth online activity, and strong social norms among youth against disclosure of online behavior.

Families and caregivers can become more aware and involved in internet and cell phone safety through the prevention and intervention tips shared below:

Prevention:

- Talk to your child/teen about responsible online behavior.
- Monitor the amount of time your child/teen spends online and provide guidance for online surfing.
- Set up the computer in a common area where you can supervise your child's/teen's Internet use.
- Purchase tracking software to block inappropriate Web content and check your child's/teen's online activities.
- Encourage your child/teen to tell a parent or trusted adult about threatening or harassing messages.
- Discuss and provide opportunities to practice strategies for responding to cyberbullying.
- Exemplify safe use of the Internet.
- Encourage your child's/teen's personal responsibility in respectful Internet use.

Intervention:

- Don't reply to cyberbullying and save the evidence.

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- Block offending e-mail addresses and cell phone numbers, or change your child's/teen's phone number and e-mail address.
- Try to identify the perpetrator and contact the parents if feasible.
- Report incidents and file complaints with communication services providers and Web sites where the cyberbullying is occurring.
- Report any potential criminal behavior related to cyberbullying to law enforcement
- Get legal advice.
- Notify your child's/teen's school of the problem.

*Sources: http://www.adl.org/education/curriculum_connections/cyberbullying/ and <http://www.adl.org/education/cyberbullying/tips.asp> Anti-Defamation League Curriculum Connections. The Anti-Defamation League is a not-for-profit organization recognized as tax-exempt under Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3).