Newsletter

SAFEGUARDING ALL OF GOD'S FAMILY

Dear Friends,

At its best, the Internet helps students find information and stay in touch with friends. From text and instant messaging to blogs and social-networking sites, the use of social media is on the rise. However, this expanding technology has also escalated cyber bullying to a whole new level.

Cyber bullying, while similar to traditional harassment, is somewhat different, namely because it enhances others to aggressively target and harm their peers by spreading humiliating rumors and vicious taunts, all of which can be viewed by millions online. To make matters worse, they can never be removed from the Internet. The audience of this type of bullying is no longer limited to the kids who are witnesses in the school hallway. With technology to virally spread harmful messages all around the world, the bystanders are online and now able to direct access another persons' trauma and suffering.

While students are most likely engaging in this activity outside of school, the wrongdoer, the victim, and possibly other participants, are often times in school together. This serious and harmful behavior can interfere with the students' ability to learn and affect the climate on school campuses preventing students from believing that they are in a safe environment.

This newsletter will help to educate parents, caregivers, teacher and all adults to the current problem of cyber bullying among our children and youth. I also hope to offer some helpful suggestions as to what we, as a community, can do to identify, prevent and respond to cyber bulling.

Patti Loehrer
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Cyber bullying is bullying using technology as a means of victimizing others. It is the use of an Internet service or mobile technologies - such as e-mail, chat room discussion groups, instant messaging, text messaging or web pages with the intention of harming another person.

Some forms of Cyber bullying are:

• **Flaming-**Online fights using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language.
• **Harassment-**Repeatedly sending nasty, mean, and insulting messages.
• **Denigration-**"Dissing" someone online. Sending or posting gossip or rumors about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships.
• **Impersonation-**Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material to get that person in trouble or danger or to damage that person's reputation or friendships.
• **Outing-**Sharing someone's secrets or embarrassing information or images online.
• **Trickery-**Talking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information, then sharing it online.
• **Exclusion-**Intentionally and cruelly excluding someone from an online group.
• **Cyberstalking-**Repeated, intense harassment and denigration that includes threats or creates significant fear.

Consequences

Threats, taunts and harassing remarks can have serious consequences, and can result in, but are not limited to, suspension or expulsion from school or involvement of law enforcement.

Impact of Cyber bullying

Bullying, and in this case cyber bullying can result in long-term psychological harm. This can include low self-esteem, depression, anger, failure in the classroom, avoidance and in some cases, violence. Forms of electronic communication that can contribute to harm include:

- Victimization can be constant, 24/7. To end the cyber bullying it may be essential to end the use of certain technologies, which can also result in disengaging from online friends.
- Information and material, even if it has been sent privately, can be quickly distributed to others and most often is irretrievable.
- Cyber bullies can be anonymous and can solicit and involve others; including unknown "friends."
- Individuals do not exhibit the same inhibitions as they would in face-to-face contact therefore enabling online communications to become extremely vicious.
- Kids and teens may be reluctant to inform parents or teachers of what is happening because they are traumatized, fear greater retribution or fear that their own online activities will be restricted.

Cyber Bullying Statistics
(Based on 2004 i-Safe survey of 1,500 students grades 4-8)

- 42% of kids have been bullied while online. One in four have had it happen to more than once.
- 35% of kids have been threatened online. Nearly one in five have had it happen more than once.
- 21% of kids have received mean or threatening e-mail or other messages.
- 58% of kids admit someone has said mean or hurtful things to them online. More than four out of ten say it has happened more than once.
- 53% of kids admit having said something mean or hurtful to another person online. More than one in three have done it more than once.
- 58% have not told their parents or an adult about something mean or hurtful that happened to them online.

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Responding to Cyber Bullying: Tips to share with your child

- ♦**Don't respond**. If someone bullies you, remember that your reaction is usually exactly what the bully wants. It gives him or her power over you. Who wants to empower a bully?

- ♦**Don't retaliate**. Getting back at the bully turns you into one and reinforces the bully's behavior. Help avoid a whole cycle of aggression.

- ♦**Save the evidence**. The only good news about digital bullying is that the harassing messages can usually be captured, saved, and shown to someone who can help. You need to do this even if it's minor stuff, in case things escalate.

- ♦**Talk to a trusted adult**. You deserve backup. It's always good to involve a parent but – if you can't – a school counselor usually knows how to help. Sometimes both are needed. If you're really nervous about saying something, see if there's a way to report the incident anonymously at school.

- ♦**Block the bully**. If the harassment's coming in the form of instant messages, texts, or profile comments, do yourself a favor: Use preferences or privacy tools to block the person. If it's in chat, leave the "room."

- ♦**Be civil**. Even if you don't like someone, it's a good idea to be decent and not sink to the other person's level. Also, research shows that gossiping about and trash talking others increases your risk of being bullied. Treat people the way you want to be treated.

- ♦**Don't be a bully.** How would you feel if someone harassed you? You know the old saying about walking a mile in someone's shoes; even a *few seconds* of thinking about how another person might feel can put a big damper on aggression. That's needed in this world.

- ♦**Be a friend, not a bystander**. Watching or forwarding mean messages empowers bullies and hurts victims even more. If you can, tell bullies to stop or let them know harassment makes people look stupid and mean. It's time to let bullies know their behavior is unacceptable – cruel abuse of fellow human beings. If you can't stop the bully, at least try to help the victim and report the behavior.

Information from SafeTeens.com

A copy of this Newsletter can be found on the Archdiocese of Milwaukee website www.archmil.org under Resources.