CENTER for SCHOOL SAFETY

"Creating Safer Schools…..Building by Building"
"Creando Escuelas Seguras….Escuela Por Escuela"

FACT SHEET

November 2009

What is Cyberbullying?

Our children are using the internet more frequently and for more purposes than ever before—the variety of cybertools available to our children is staggering and offers a myriad of potential social and academic benefits. However, as parents and educators, we must be equally conscious of the internet's potential dangers as we are of its constructive uses. Cyberbullying, or any intentional use of cybertools meant to cause verbal, emotional, or psychological harm to another, is a growing problem among our children—we must be aware of its nature, its causes, and its solutions if we are to reduce its prevalence.

Cyberbullying presents an easy way for students to intimidate, threaten, or verbally humiliate others. It is difficult to catch cyberbullies due to the anonymity that the internet provides, and their harmful messages can easily be spread to a larger audience than traditional bullying would make possible. Cyberbullies can easily spread private information, threaten other students, or make sexual advances with almost no threat of repercussion. The different ways that the internet can be used to impersonate, stalk, threaten, sexually harass, and embarrass students is nearly limitless. Fortunately, there are well-defined methods that we can use to reduce cyberbullying within our community and make the internet a safer place for our children.

We Need Policies

Cyberbullying needs to be taken very seriously—one in three teens has been the victim of cyberbullying, and the effects on its victims can be catastrophic; poor school performance, anxiety, school violence, depression, and even suicide have all been linked to cyberbullying. Just as we have created safety plans, Codes of Conduct, and other systems in order to prevent violence within our schools, we must create systems and policies to prevent harm to our children through their use of cybertools.

Your school should have strict policies in place to prevent cyberbullying and to assist all of its victims. These policies should include:

- Standardized definitions of cyberbullying.

- Standardized disciplinary actions to punish those guilty of cyberbullying.

- Widely-distributed educational programs meant to inform parents and students about the dangers of cyberbullying.

- Well-publicized support resources for those students who have been victimized by cyberbullying.

- Easy ways for children to report cyberbullying to their teachers, parents, and school administrators.

- Defined transgressions that call for immediate police involvement, including but not limited to death threats, hate or bias-based language, the distribution of child pornography, and other offensive or private imagery, and engagement in extortion or coercion.

- It is your job to make sure that a strict cyberbullying policy exists within your school community. If policies are not changed and transgressions go unpunished, this problem will continue to threaten more of our children every day.

What Can Be Done?

There are nearly countless ways that parents and teachers can inform students about the nature and dangers of cyberbullying and prevent its occurrence.

Some of the best ways that you can get involved are:

Parents:

- Keeping your computer in an easily-monitored area of the house to prevent inappropriate use of the internet
- Informing your children of the implications of distributing intimate personal information, whether it be their own or that of others
- Teaching your child how easily online identities can be traced
- Watching for behavioral signs indicating that your child does not want you to see how he or she is using the internet
- Establishing well-defined behavioral ground rules for what will and will not be viewed as acceptable internet use.
- Impose appropriate consequences when your child uses cybertools inappropriately

Teachers:

- Develop, distribute, and update annually school cyber tool and bullying rules, policies, and procedures.
- Create informational cyberbullying workshops for students and staff.
- Model respectful, empathetic and positive behaviors within your school environment.
- Encourage students to report known incidents of cyberbullying and provide confidential means of reporting these incidents.

- Educate students that cyber tool users are not anonymous and that their online activities and files have limited privacy: computer information can be downloaded, internet Protocol (IP) addresses are generated and used for tracking, and communications can be traced.
- Spend time teaching your students how harmful cyberbullying can be and how easily they can be punished for participating in it.
- Most importantly, make sure that psychological resources are available for both the students who are victimized by cyberbullies and for the cyberbullies themselves – both are equally as important.

Bringing Change to Your School

We can all do our part to change the ways that our children use the internet – the following are some of the best resources available concerning the responsible use of the internet and the establishment of school-wide policies on cyberbullying:

1. www.cyberbully.org A comprehensive resource dealing with all aspects of cyberbullying.
2. **i-Safe America, Inc.:** http://isafe.org/ i-SAFE America Inc. is the worldwide leader in the Internet safety education
3. **The Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use**: www.csriu.org
4. *An Educator's Guide to Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Online Social Aggression, Threats and Distress,* by Nancy Willard