



Cyber Bullying and Internet Safety

As young people embrace the Internet and other mobile communication technologies, bullying has manifested itself in a new and potentially more dangerous way – through cyber bullying. Cyber bullying can generally be defined as sending or posting harmful or malicious messages or images through e-mail, instant messages, cell phones and websites. It is emerging as one of the more challenging issues facing educators, since it has a direct impact on students but often occurs away from school property.

Examples of cyber bullying include

- Sending cruel, vicious and sometimes threatening messages,
- Creating web sites that contain stories, cartoons, pictures and jokes ridiculing others,
- Posting pictures of classmates online with intent to embarrass them,
- Breaking into an e-mail account and sending vicious or embarrassing material to others,
- Engaging in IM (instant messaging) to trick another person into revealing sensitive or personal information and forwarding that information to others and
- Taking a picture of a person using a digital phone camera and sending that picture electronically to others without consent.

Social Networking Sites

Most teenagers visit websites to communicate with friends and meet new people.

MySpace.com is a social networking site, one of many that has become increasingly popular with students. MySpace allows students to create a personal website (for free), post pictures, add comments and use it to meet “online friends.” The website often includes their full name, telephone number, address, school name and a picture.

YouTube is a similar site dedicated to hosting user video clips.

About 68 million people reportedly use MySpace, and millions more use other social networking sites such as friendster.com, livejournal.com, nexopia.com and facebook.com. According to MySpace, 22 per cent of its users are younger than 18.

The danger lies in that the Internet is vast, public and constantly expanding. And, if students have not developed critical thinking skills, are unsupervised or create websites that are not monitored, they can be at risk of unknowingly communicating with predators, spammers and pornographers.

As such sites proliferate, students should be warned not to post identifying information to the site and never to meet someone in person they have met through the site unless an adult accompanies them. And parents should conduct frequent reviews of the site to ensure that identifying information or pictures have not been posted.

