

### *Talking with Your Kids About Cyberbullying*

There are a number of useful tips regarding safety on the Internet, and there is software available to filter out or block access to certain sites. Nothing is more powerful or effective than parental supervision and interaction.

The best line of defense is communication. It's very important as parents, teachers and caregivers to talk about online interactions. We've created a number of scenarios to help you open a dialogue with teens around cyberbullying.

#### **Cyberbullying on Social Networking Sites**

Parent: Surfin' the net?

Teenager: Yeah, it's fun. All my friends are doing it, too.

Parent: What kind of things do you look at online?

Teenager: I visit cool sites like YouTube, play games, stay in touch with my friends, meet new people.

Parent: I've heard stories about people being bullied on the Internet. You can always tell me if anything like that ever happens to you. Do you know of any problems like that?

Teenager: Sometimes things happen. Once in a while people make fun of me while I'm talking online. Someone even left rude comments on my MySpace page that other people saw and teased me about.

Parent: What happened?

Teenager: Well, someone made up a MySpace page that isn't mine. They posted stupid things about me and goofy pictures. It's really embarrassing, but I don't know what to do about it.

Parent: That's terrible, but I'm glad you told me about it. It's not your fault, and now that you told me we can do something about it. We can get in touch with someone at MySpace and tell them what's going on. When they see the site and understand what's going on, they'll take it down. I don't want you go through this any more, so we'll do all of this confidentially. I think this will help. What do you think?

#### **Cyberbullying via Email**

Parent: I've been noticing you've been using your computer a lot less lately. Is something up?

Teenager: Why?

Parent: Well, I've seen a lot of stories in the news about kids using email to harass each other. And I was just wondering if there was something or someone bothering you?

Teenager: Yeah, that's happened to me a few times. Someone once sent me rude emails that kind of freaked me out. I have no clue where they got my email address, because I don't give it out.

Parent: I'm glad you don't give out your email. Do you think that maybe they got your email address from one of your friends, or one of those networking sites you're on? Ever posted your email address online?

Teenager: Never. Wait... Well, I have put my email address in messages I send to friend's pages so they can get back to me. Come to think of it, everyone can see those messages.

Parent: We can fix this. For a start, we can use the email software on your computer to block senders. We can also check the email header information to find out which Internet Service Provider the messages came from. Once we contact the ISP with this information and give them a copy of the message as evidence, they will look into it. We can even call the police if these emails threatened you. Are you ok with that?

Teenager: That sounds good. The emails weren't threatening, so why don't we just block the senders?

Parent: Perfect. Let's do it right now. And if the cyberbullying continues, tell me, and we'll find a solution together.

### **Cyberbullying via Cell Phone Text Message**

Parent: Why is your cell phone beeping like that?

Teenager: Just some people sending lots of text messages to me.

Parent: What are they saying?

Teenager: I dunno. I guess they think it's some kind of big joke.

Parent: What's the joke?

Teenager: Well... it's not a joke to me. They're making fun of me.

Parent: That's not ok, I'm sure it's bothering you.

Teenager: It is. I could turn my phone off, but then my friends can't reach me.

Parent: Tell you what we can do. Let's report this to the cell phone company. They have

rules regarding cell phone use and can block those numbers. If it gets worse, we'll get you a new number.

Teenager: Changing my number is a lot of hassle just because a couple of people are being jerks.

Parent: Yeah, I understand that but first we'll contact the cell phone company and get them to block the number. If it continues, let me know and we'll work out a solution to make sure it stops.

### **Other Questions to Promote Dialogue**

The most important thing you can do to prevent and adequately respond to cyberbullying is to talk about online interactions with your kids. Check with them on a regular basis to make sure everything's OK, and watch for any changes in their behaviour regarding cell phone and computer use. Do everything you can to make sure your kids feel comfortable coming to you with any issues they have.

Here are some questions to help you start a dialogue with your kids:

- Are other children picking on you online? If so, how?
  - Is it via email, or chat, or instant message, or on MySpace or similar sites?
  - Does it just happen once in a while, or is it a constant problem?
- Do you get concerned that people will read what others have written about you online and think it's true?
- Have you ever been threatened for your physical or personal safety on the Internet?
  - Did you know that physical and personal threats online are against the law and are a crime, just like offline threats?
- Has any online argument also popped up in real-life, maybe at school or when you're hanging out with your friends?
- When someone picks on you or makes fun of you online, do you usually know who the person is in real life?
- Do you know in real life everyone who you've accepted as a "Friend" on your MySpace (or equivalent) page? Are some of your "Friends" people you only know online? How do you know you can trust them viewing the contents of your page?
- Has anyone said anything sexually offensive to you over the Internet?
  - Like what? How often does this happen?
  - How do you deal with it?
  - How can I help you make it stop, without embarrassing you?