

# Cyberbullying & Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Electronic Aggression

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## Introduction

### Impact of Cyberbullying

- ✦ The impact of cyberbullying:
  - Jeopardizes the safety of students.
  - Interferes with their educational performance.
  - Damages the school climate.
- ✦ So this is a new issue that school officials must address. Saying “off-campus, not my job.” is not an acceptable response.

### This Presentation

- ✦ This presentation will:
  - Provide an overview of the concerns.

- Address the legal parameters.
- Provide guidance on effective investigation and response.
- Set forth a comprehensive approach to address the concerns.

### Notes

- ✦ The term “online” will be used to refer to all electronic communications, which includes the Internet and cell phones. At times there will be a need to distinguish between the technologies.
  - ✦ This symbol denotes an information point.
  - ✓ This symbol denotes a recommended action.
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## Cyberbullying Insight From Observation and Research

### Cyberbullying

- ✦ Cyberbullying is the use of electronic communication technologies to intentionally engage in repeated or widely disseminated acts of cruelty towards another that result in emotional harm.
- ✦ Emerging terminology concern: The term “cyberbullying” is being used to describe a range of acts of electronic aggression ~ which may or may not cause significant emotional harm or distress.
  - Among youth, electronic communications are a primary form of peer-to-peer communications. All forms of aggression ~ insults, minor fights, relationship break-ups, bullying, and the like ~ are being accomplished electronically. These are primarily interpersonal relationship difficulties or disputes.
  - As a result, we are seeing reports documenting large numbers of young people who are involved in “cyberbullying” ~ when many of these reported incidents are not causing significant harm or distress.
- ✦ “Electronic Aggression” would likely be a better term to use for the full range of acts of aggression ~ but it is likely that the term “cyberbullying” will continue to be used in a more expansive manner. .
- ✦ The bottom line:
  - We need to help all young people effectively prevent and respond to a wide range of acts of electronic aggression.
    - Just because the electronic aggression does not meet the conditions of traditional bullying does not mean that it is not a concern.

- We should expect that young people will be able to resolve many of these incidents by themselves ~ and help them learn how to do so effectively.
- Comprehensive bullying intervention efforts will be necessary to prevent and resolve the more significant and emotionally harmful incidents.

### Bullying/Aggression or Internet Safety?

- ✦ Cyberbullying is primarily a bullying or aggression concern ~ not an Internet safety concern. But there are specific technology-related aspects to this behavior:
  - Students are providing material in permanent electronic form that can then be used to denigrate or cause harm to them.
  - Technologies provide the ability to hide identity or create a “fake profile” ~ thus a young person or school official may not know who is causing the harm.
  - Young people are interacting with people online who are not known in the real world ~ who could become hurtful or aggressive. But these incidents are usually easy to resolve.
  - Electronic communications allow for a much wider range of dissemination of harmful material ~ thus a single incident can cause greater emotional harm. This leads to incidents that cause emotional harm but that do not meet the traditional bullying description of “repeated acts.”
  - Online interactions can lead to a limited-dimensional perspective of people. This can result in fantasy relationships ~ aggression or harm when “reality strikes.”

- Electronic communications allow young people with lower “social power” to more safely attack or retaliate online. This leads to incidents that do not meet the traditional bullying description that involves the more powerful young person bullying the less powerful.
- Electronic communications allow for the involvement of many. This appears to be stimulating increased involvement by online groups of aggressors ~ with varying degrees of involvement. This means the typical disciplinary response to aggression ~ suspension ~ frequently will not be effective.
- There are some significant “silver linings.”
  - The aggression is recorded in electronic form ~ thus can support more effective investigation and accountability. This helps prevent the “he said, she said” and “my child would never do that” arguments and allows school officials to more clearly understand the interactive aspects of hurtful interpersonal relationships and aggression.
  - Adults can also be invisible. Often if a student reports bullying to school personnel this results in increased bullying ~ because the student is perceived as “weak.” The best, possibly only, way to stop ongoing bullying is to empower the target to stand up to the bullies. In many situations, school personnel can provide “invisible assistance” that empowers the target to effectively respond by him or herself. This could include direct electronic communications with the aggressor and filing a complaint with the site to remove harmful material and place restrictions on the aggressor’s use.<sup>1</sup>

### Different Forms

- Flaming.
  - Online “fights” using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language. Generally involves equivalent strength aggressors.
- Harassment.
  - Repeatedly sending offensive and insulting messages. The online equivalent to direct bullying.
- Denigration.
  - Sending or posting cruel gossip or rumors about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships. The online equivalent to indirect bullying with wider dissemination.
- Exclusion.
  - Intentionally excluding someone from an online group, like a “buddy list.” The online equivalent to relational aggression ~ “you are not our friend.”
- Impersonation.
  - Impersonating someone to make the person look bad, get that person in trouble or danger, or damage that person’s reputation or friendships. A new form of aggression made possible by the ability to create a fake profile.

- Outing.
  - Sharing someone’s secrets or embarrassing information or images online. A new form of aggression made possible because targets put damaging material in electronic form that others can use against them.
- Trickery.
  - Tricking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information, which is shared. Deceiving someone online to humiliate or cause harm. A new form of aggression made possible because it is easier to deceive someone online and obtain damaging information that can be shared.
- Cyberstalking.
  - Engaging in online activities that make a person afraid for her or her safety. Using technology for control in an abusive dating relationship. Includes many of the above forms of aggression. Is generally in the context of a personal relationship. Generates fear.

### Insight Grounded in Observation

#### How

- Posted on social networking profile or sent via social networking, instant, or text messaging and email.
  - When young people expand their use of specific technologies, then cyberbullying associated with those technologies emerges.

#### Where

- Vast majority of really harmful incidents occur when students post material while off-campus ~ but is negatively impacting relationships on-campus.
  - Also occurs through the district Internet system or personal digital devices used on-campus.

#### Who

- Possibilities to keep in mind:
  - Total stranger.
  - Known individual.
  - Anonymous ~ but obviously knows target.
  - Cyberbullying-by-proxy ~ involving online “friends.”
  - Impersonation.
- Teens are not very good at hiding identity.
  - Interview with the target, review of material posted and friendship links, and interviews of identified less-involved students will frequently lead to accurate identification.
- Law enforcement officials have greater ability to obtain information leading to identification.

### Relation to School Bullying

- Cyberbullying may be a continuation of ~ **or in retaliation for** ~ on-campus bullying. Students who are victimized at school ~ by students or teachers ~ are retaliating online.
- Do not immediately assume that the student posting the harmful material is the origin of the problem.

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<sup>1</sup> This approach is somewhat at odds with some guidance on bullying prevention. It is my perspective that guidance that views “victims” as weak and helpless and always requiring adult intervention only disempowers these young people and sets them up for ongoing aggression. It is my perspective that all young people can and must be empowered with the knowledge that they are special, do not deserve to be treated with disrespect, and can stand up to those who are aggressive. Sometimes standing up for yourself requires obtaining assistance from others ~ just like sometimes adults must obtain assistance from human resources, attorneys, or the police. But in most cases, the bullying and aggression the best way to stop the ongoing harm is to ensure the target becomes secure and strong enough to stand up for him or herself. AND this is easier to do online than in the Real World.

- › Evaluate the substance of the communications. Look at the “social status” level of all participants. Determine the overall relationship dynamics.

### Other Dynamics

- ✦ Personal and sexual relationships are frequently implicated ~ break-ups, fights between, fights about.
- ✦ Aggression may be based on race, religion, obesity, disability, or sexual orientation ~ or may involve competition related to athletics.
- ✦ Aggression may involve students at different schools who come together for competition activities. Online fights about school competitions are leading to violence at the events.

### Group Dynamics

- ✦ Many situations involve groups of students.
  - › A hurtful online group is established by one student, generally working with several close friends, to attack another student or group of students. When announced, other students join.

### Impact

- ✦ The harm caused by cyberbullying may, in some cases, be greater than traditional bullying.
  - › Vicious online communications.
  - › No escape ~ happens 24/7.
  - › Wider distribution of harmful materials.
  - › Anonymous bullies.
  - › Bullying-by-proxy.
- ✦ Cyberbullying is resulting in school failure, school avoidance, violence, and suicide.

### Reporting

- ✦ Many young people do not report because they have effectively responded to the aggression.
- ✦ Other young people are reluctant to tell adults because they fear adults will:
  - › Overreact.
  - › Blame them.
  - › Not know what to do.
  - › Make matters worse.
  - › Restrict their online access.
- ✦ They will not report until they are assured adults will handle these situations effectively.

### Possible Players

- ✦ The following are possible roles students could play:
  - › Both students cause and receive harm on an equivalent basis ~ equivalent aggressors.
  - › Primarily causes harm or sets up a situation ~ an online hurtful group or profile ~ to cause harm. But at school could be either causing or receiving harm.
  - › Primarily receives harm online. But at school, could be either causing or receiving harm.
  - › Thinks the bullying is funny or the person receiving harm deserves it ~ but does not participate other than to view harmful material or join the hurtful group or profile.
  - › Privately provides support or encouragement for the student(s) causing harm.

- › Actively assists or joins with the student(s) causing harm.
- › Think the bullying is sad, but does not know how to help or is afraid to provide help and so does nothing.
- › Privately provides help and support to student(s) receiving harm.
- › Files an abuse report with the site.
- › Reports concern to an adult.
- › Tries to resolve a dispute between two aggressors.
- › Privately communicates to the student(s) causing the harm, trying to get it stopped.
- › Publicly objects to the harm.

### Peer Leadership

- ✦ Online communications are not generally supervised by responsible adults.
- ✦ The role of “friends” appears to be very important to the emotional well-being of the target and resolution of the problem.
- ✦ Empowering peer leaders will be a key prevention strategy. Peer leaders can:
  - › Powerfully influence the online social climate.
  - › Give the targets strength and guidance.
  - › Confront the aggressor privately or publicly.
  - › Negotiate a “truce.”
  - › Report serious concerns to adults or sites.
  - › Provide valuable guidance to adults on effective strategies to prevent and intervene.

### Insight Grounded in Research

#### New Technology and Youth Violence

- ✦ Center for Disease Control ~ September 2006 Panel.
  - › Youth Violence and Electronic Media: Similar Behaviors, Different Venues? *Journal of Adolescent Health*.<sup>2</sup>

#### Findings Based on Survey Research in JAH

(The following is a synthesis of the findings of the research reports based on surveys in this journal.)

- ✦ Depending on how the questions were asked, between 9% and 35% of middle and high school students reported being victimized by cyberbullying.
  - › Many targets reported they were not distressed.
- ✦ The greater the level of Internet use, the greater the likelihood of being harassed online.
- ✦ Girls outnumbered boys in victimization ~ but no gender differences in perpetration.
- ✦ Students who were not involved in traditional bullying reported involvement in cyberbullying.
  - › The more frequently victimized youth also reported being bullied at school and greater distress.
- ✦ Approximately half of targets reported they did not know the identity of the aggressor or they only knew the aggressor online.
- ✦ There are significant differences between online-only and known-peer situations.
  - › A significant number of online-only incidents were ended with simple or no action.

- Situations involving known-peers more often involved indirect bullying, were a series of incidents, and the target was female.
- Those harassed by known-peers were significantly more likely to also have engaged in online harassment ~ and to report high conflict with parents, abuse, and psychosocial problems.
- ✦ Aggressors were significantly likely also to report offline victimization.
- ✦ Youth involved in cyberbullying demonstrate significant psychosocial concerns.
  - Aggressors were significantly more likely to report beliefs endorsing bullying behavior, a negative perception of school climate, and a negative perception of peer social support.
  - Both aggressors and targets reported a high degree of involvement in offline relational, physical, and sexual aggression, problems in school, poor relationships with care-givers, and involvement with alcohol and drugs. Targets were 8 times more likely to report recently carrying a weapon to school.
  - Targets were significantly more likely to also report being aggressors.
  - As the frequency of involvement in online aggression increased, the prevalence of reports of psychosocial problems significantly increased.

#### Findings Based on Focus Group Research in JAH

- ✦ Students, especially females, view cyberbullying as a problem.
- ✦ Students did not think school personnel can help. They were more likely to report serious problems to parents ~ but fearful of loss of Internet access.
- ✦ The majority of experiences are occurring off-campus, but there is an impact at school.
- ✦ Cyberbullying through text messaging is occurring at school ~ but students will not report because using a cell phone at school is violation of school policy.
  - Students can also easily bypass the filter.
- ✦ Students knew they could block or ignore the communications ~ but did not know how to file a complaint or respond as a helpful bystander.

#### Other Studies

- ✦ Cyberbullying.us.<sup>3</sup>
  - 2007 study found 17% of students reported having been cyberbullied or engaged in cyberbullying. When asked about specific online harmful acts, the rate was 43%.
  - A 2005 study of girls revealed that 38% reported they had been bullied online. 67% reported the bully was someone from school. 27% reported they had retaliated. Only 20% told an adult. 35% reported feeling angry, 30% reported feeling sad, 41% reported feeling frustrated. But 55% reported no negative effect.
- ✦ UCLA study.<sup>4</sup>
  - 71% of young people reported being cyberbullied in the last year ~ defined as anything that someone does that upsets or offends someone else, including name-calling, threats, sending embarrassing/ private pictures, sharing private information without permission, and password

theft ~ overly broad definition and self-selected respondents.

- The probability of being bullied online was substantially higher for those who had been the victims of school bullying.
- Heavy use of the Internet was associated with increased likelihood of repeated online cyberbullying.
- 90% did not tell an adult about the incident. The most common reasons for not telling an adult were the belief that they "need to learn to deal with it" (50%) or that their parents might restrict Internet access (31%).
- 73% reported of those cyberbullied said they knew, or were pretty sure they knew, who was doing the bullying. 51% said the bullying was done by schoolmates,
- Both cyberbullying and bullying were associated with elevated levels of distress and social anxiety.
- Of the 48% targets who reported retaliating to school-based bullying, 60% retaliated at school, 28% retaliated both in school and online, and 12% retaliated online.

#### Summary and Implications

- ✦ Cyberbullying is a significant concern.
  - But the incident rate of cyberbullying reported is related to how the questions are asked. Some surveys are not yet effectively distinguishing between minor and significant incidents. In the surveys that ask, generally half of the respondents say they were not distressed.
  - Increased use of technologies results in increased use of the technologies for cyberbullying.
- ✦ Educating young people about how to avoid and effectively respond to online-only or other minor incidents will help make these incidents more easily manageable, less distressing, and stop escalation.
- ✦ The continuing incidents between known peers are causing the highest degree of distress. Addressing these incidents will be challenging.
  - These incidents will impact schools because they appear to be related to on-campus bullying or could lead to retaliation at school.
  - A significant portion of incidents appear to involve retaliation ~ online and at school.
- ✦ Both aggressors and targets appear to present significant psychosocial concerns.
  - Report disrupted care-giver-child relationships, which means schools will be less able to rely on parents for effective supervision, prevention, and response.
  - Report involvement in offline aggression, which is more likely to occur where they are physically together.
- ✦ The vast majority of young people are not reporting these incidents to adults.
  - The primary reason reported for this is that young people have or feel they should be able to handle the situation on their own ~ which we should encourage.
  - But many say they do not tell for fear of getting into trouble or losing Internet access. This may, in some cases, be a legitimate concern.

3 Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J. W. (2009). *Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying*. Sage Publications (Corwin Press).

4 Juvonen, J. & Gross, E. (2008) Extending the school grounds?--Bullying experiences in cyberspace. *Journal of School Health*. Vol. 78, Issue 9, p 496. <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/121371836/abstract?>

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## Cyberthreats Insight

### Cyberthreats

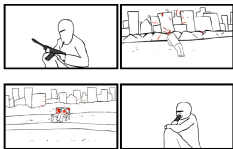
- ◆ Cyberthreats include direct threats or distressing material that raises concerns the person is emotionally distraught and may be considering harming someone, harming him or herself, or committing suicide.

### Is It Real?

- ◆ Young people make threats all the time. Their tone of voice, posture, overall interaction allow others to determine if it is a “real threat.”
- ◆ Young people are biologically incapable of fully comprehending how others might perceive online material that appears threatening ~ especially if they are emotionally upset.
  - ▶ Adults often overreact to threatening online material.
  - ▶ Just because material has been posted online does not make more of a threat.
  - ▶ Adults may impose harsh punishment on a student without just cause ~ or turn a student into even more of a threat!
- ◆ Online threatening material could be:
  - ▶ Joke, parody, or game.
  - ▶ Rumor that has grown and spread.
  - ▶ Fictitious threatening online character.
  - ▶ The final salvos of a heated argument.
  - ▶ Impersonation for the purpose of getting someone in trouble for posting a threat.
  - ▶ Distressing material ~ emotional concerns.
  - ▶ In retaliation for abuse inflicted by others at school.
  - ▶ Legitimate imminent threat.

### Online Threats Can be VERY Real!

- ◆ Several school shooters had posted distressing material online that forecast their shootings.<sup>5</sup>



- ◆ Suicidal youth are posting material online that clearly demonstrates a high degree of concern.
- ◆ It is highly probable that if a student is considering violence against others or self he or she will be discussing and posting material related to this distress online ~ and other students will know.

### Response

- ◆ School officials must respond in the most appropriate manner given the knowledge at the time.
  - ▶ But reassessment is necessary to determine whether the online threat is real and the true identity of the person posting the material.
  - ▶ Essential that officials assess whether the student **poses** a threat ~ not whether a threat was **posted**.
- ◆ The manner in which officials respond to a situation that was not a “real threat” will influence whether students will report suspected threats in the future!
  - ▶ Imposing a significant consequence on a student who was found not to pose a “real threat” could lead students to decide not to report the next time they see an online threat.

### Unresolved Victimization

- ◆ Students victimized at school ~ by students or staff ~ are retaliating by expressing anger or threats online.
  - ▶ If they are then subjected to punishment for the threatening or harmful online material ~ without addressing underlying victimization ~ this is unfair and could create a greater security risk.

### Threat Assessment and Suicide Prevention

- ✓ Assume that emotional distraught young people will post material online that provides insight into their mental state.
  - The FBI calls this “leakage” ~ when a student intentionally or unintentionally reveals clues to feelings, thoughts, fantasies, attitudes, or intentions that may signal an impending violent act against self or others.
- ✓ Threat assessment protocols and suicide prevention plans **MUST** be revised to incorporate the reality that significant amount of teen communication related to threats and suicide will be occurring online!

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## Targeting School Staff or Challenging School Policies

### Range of Material

- ◆ The material students post that targets school staff or policies represents a range of material.
    - ▶ Staff member is targeted by a “nasty” student ~ based on a “status” issue or simply to cause harm.
    - ▶ Staff is convenient target and there is a lack of sensitivity to the harm.
  - ▶ Perception that staff member is “inadequate.”
  - ▶ Student is venting frustration due to problems related to learning difficulties or personal relationships.
  - ▶ Student has been mistreated by the staff member.
  - ▶ Legitimate objections to the actions or policies of the school or staff.
- ◆ Students are posting images of staff captured using cell phone video recorders ~ range from funny, to

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<sup>5</sup> Including the Columbine and Red Lake incidents. The image was posted by Jeff Weise, the shooter at Red Lake.

embarrassing, to damaging, to documentation of serious concerns.

## Perspective

- ✦ Students who are happy, successful, feel connected to their school community, are receiving effective instruction, and can effectively communicate their concerns are not generally attacking school staff online.
- ✦ The concern of school staff bullying students is real! Has received very little research or policy attention. Students who are bullied by school staff are very likely sustain significant long-term emotional damage and drop out. For students, reporting staff abuse is very risky and often ineffective.
- ✦ Schools face significant challenges and expense to remove abusive or inadequate staff.
- ✦ Many reported incidents involving school staff raise concerns that the student who posted material is the recipient of abuse by that staff member or there are concerns that the staff member is inadequate.
  - Students are using cell phones to record and post staff abuse and inadequacy.
- ✓ If a student attacks a school staff member online, something is going on in this student's life and/or in the classroom that must be investigated and addressed.
  - Do not immediately assume the student is the source of the problem. Review the situation objectively. Hold all participants appropriately accountable.
  - School officials should not take responsibility for review and response if they are the target.

- ✓ Schools must develop better policies and procedures to handle the concerns of abusive staff.
  - If schools do not provide an effective and safe internal process to address these concerns, students WILL share these concerns online.

## Legitimate Protest

- ✦ "Congress shall make no law ... abridging ... the right of the people ... to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."<sup>6</sup>
  - The right of citizens to petition government officials to correct a policy or right a wrong is fundamental to a democratic society. Our founders called King George a "tyrant."
  - Some students are using the Internet to communicate their displeasure of school policies or the actions of school staff ~ frequently using objectionable language. This is obviously displeasing school officials.
- ✦ The right of students to use the Internet to petition must be supported ~ it is their constitutional right.
  - The right to petition does not extend to defamation, invade the privacy of others, or post material that shows someone in "false light" ~ all of which are civil law remedies to speech that has "crossed the line" from political protest to causing harm.
- ✓ It is advisable for school officials to implement more effective vehicles to allow for such protest ~ and provide guidance to students on how to more effectively and respectfully engage in political protest.
  - Persuasive writing and appropriate civic engagement are important instructional objectives.

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## Related Online Risks<sup>7</sup>

### Youth Risk Online

- ✦ Other youth risk online issues are closely related to the concerns of cyberbullying and cyberthreats.

### Sexually Related Risks

- ✦ Teens are emerging sexually and may engage in a range of sexually related activities online that presents concern. Those that are related to electronic aggression include
  - Sexual harassment.
  - Sexual exploitation.
  - Use of technologies by abusive partners.
  - Creating, demanding, or sending nude sexual images.
- ✓ Help teens understand the kinds of sexual risks they may face online, what activities might place them at risk, and how certain activities are harmful or potentially criminal.

### Unsafe Online Communities

- ✦ Teens are involved in self-harm communities.
  - Self-cutting, anorexia, drug-use, suicide, others.
  - These communities provide strong emotional support for highly vulnerable youth. They find acceptance and

support from like-minded peers. Leads to contagion of unhealthy attitudes and behavior.

- ✓ Develop a safety plan to disentangle a student's association with one of these communities. Do not simply try to cut off access!

### Dangerous Online Groups

- ✦ Teens are involved in hate groups, gangs, or may form their own troublesome youth group.
  - May be specifically recruited. Find acceptance from like-minded peers or adults. Leads to contagion of unhealthy attitudes and behavior.
- ✓ Incorporate the reality of online gangs and dangerous groups into gang and violence prevention efforts.

### Online Gaming

- ✦ Cyberthreats could be related to role-playing games.
  - Games involve small groups of players who develop plans for violent attacks within the game. May lead to groups of teens "playing a game" of planning a violent attack at school.

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<sup>6</sup> First Amendment Right to Petition.

<sup>7</sup> A more extensive presentation on Youth Risk Online is available through CSRIU.

- ✓ Within the context of threat assessment it will be important to recognize that some players may not distinguish game fantasy from reality.

### **Addictive Access**

- ✦ An excessive amount of time spent online resulting in lack of healthy engagement in other areas of life.
  - Social anxiety over acceptance and status.
  - Addictive features of gaming environments.
  - Lack of healthy peer connections.
  - Could be implicated in school failure.
- ✓ Help young people learn to keep life in balance.

### **Unsafe Personal Disclosure**

- ✦ Many teens appear to have limited understanding of the potential harm from unsafe personal disclosure.

- ✓ Teach young people to differentiate and protect different kinds of personal information in different places ~ generally private, protected, and public ~ and to different kinds of people ~ friends, friends of friends, strangers and web forms.

### **Unsafe Interactions with Others**

- ✦ Young people with interact with friends, acquaintances, friends of friends and strangers. Most are safe ~ some are not.
- ✓ Teach young people how to safely interact with others online.
  - Recognize the signs of danger ~ excessive complements, offers of gifts or opportunities, seek to establish a “special relationship,” encourage to be part of a “team.”
  - Know how to effectively respond to inappropriate communications or people.

## **Good Choice ~ Bad Choice**

### **Influences on Online Behavior<sup>8</sup>**

#### **You Can't See Me**

##### **Perception of Invisibility**

- ✦ The perception of invisibility or ability to achieve anonymity removes concerns of detection which could lead to disapproval or punishment. This aspect of the Internet is changing with the advent of social networking. Online environments that provide greater anonymity, such as chat rooms, present greater concerns than social networking sites.
- ✓ Ensure young people understand that it is possible to trace wrong-doers. Encourage involvement in less anonymous environments. Encourage youth to act in accord with internalized values.

#### **I Can't See You**

##### **Lack of Tangible Feedback**

- ✦ The lack of tangible feedback about consequences of online actions on others or self interferes with empathy ~ which should lead to remorse. It also interferes with the recognition that their actions have caused a harmful consequence. As young people grow they become better able to predict how others might feel even if those others are not present. They also become more skilled in predicting the possible consequences of actions ~ which is critically important to learning how to make good choices.
- ✓ Enhance the ability of young people to predict how unseen others might feel and the consequences of actions. Impose discipline that will lead to a recognition of how actions have caused harm.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Didn't Think**

##### **Brain Development**

- ✦ Teens' frontal cortex is undergoing significant development.<sup>10</sup> The frontal cortex supports rational, ethical decision-making. Learning to make good decisions requires practice and paying attention to actions and their consequences ~ which is more difficult online. Teens process emotions in the “flight or flight” region of brain. So if emotions are involved, teens are even less able to make good decisions. Teens are biologically incapable of consistently making good decisions ~ but also biologically compelled to make their own decisions ~ because this is how they develop capacity.
- ✓ Teach teens to make good decisions using effective problem solving strategies.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Who Am I?**

##### **Exploration of Identity**

- ✦ Teens' social networking profiles have become a public venue to explore their emerging personal identity.<sup>12</sup> This can lead to disclosure of inappropriate material. The number of friends and amount of communication activity is new measure of social status. High social anxiety can fuel bad attention-getting choices and addictive access. They may experiment with new personal identities by establishing a “false persona” ~ profile that presents an image that is not consistent with Real Life.
- ✦ For teens who are at greater risk, their profiles will provide a rich resource that can help professionals better understand the factors, influences, and friends who might be placing this teen at risk.

<sup>8</sup> These issues are discussed in more depth in: Willard, N. (2004) *I Can't See You – You Can't See Me: How the Use of Information and Communication Technologies Can Impact Responsible Behavior*. <http://csriu.org/documents/disinhibition.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> The Committee for Childhood's excellent resources focus on the development of empathy. <http://www.cfchildren.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> National Institute of Mental Health (2001) *Teenage Brain: A Work In Progress*. <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/teenage-brain-a-work-in-progress.shtml>.

<sup>11</sup> *The Raising a Thinking Child, I Can Problem-Solve* work of Myrna Shure is an excellent resource. [http://www.strengtheningfamilies.org/html/programs\\_1999/13\\_RTC\\_ICPS.html](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.org/html/programs_1999/13_RTC_ICPS.html).

<sup>12</sup> boyd, d. (2007) “Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life.” *MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Learning – Youth, Identity, and Digital Media Volume* (ed. David Buckingham). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. <http://www.danah.org/>.

- ✓ Teach young people how to use present a strong positive image online and to evaluate others by what they post. In a therapeutic setting, gain insight into the young person's perceptions of self and influences of others and use profile creation as a way to encourage reflection and the development of a positive self-image.

## Am I Hot?

### Maturing Sexuality

- ✦ Teens are exploring their maturing sexuality online, in a culture that promotes provocative sexuality.<sup>13</sup> They can find appropriate and helpful information and support about this online. Or may find unhealthy images and information. They are exploring personal relationships electronically, which can deepen personal relationships in a very healthy manner. Or can be used by manipulative partners in damaging ways. They may emulate the provocative images they are bombarded with in advertising and entertainment media.
- ✓ Address issues of media influence, use of technology in grooming and abusive relationships, safe cyberdating, and finding accurate health information online in comprehensive sex education programs.

## Everybody Does It

### Online Social Norms

- ✦ The combination of the factors leading to online disinhibition and tendency of teens to "act like a pack" can lead to online social norms that support irresponsible behavior. "At risk" youth frequently bond with other "at risk" youth online and reinforce even riskier behavior.
- ✓ Help young people learn to resist peer influence that is inconsistent with their personal values. Encourage them to think of the norms they want for cyberspace. Challenge online social norms that support irresponsible behavior by focusing on the predictable harmful consequences of following such norms. Therapeutically, use "electronic evidence" of unhealthy influences to help educate "at risk" youth.

## How Far Can I Go?

### Risk-Taking Behavior

- ✦ Young people test boundaries because this is how they learn where the limits are. Some take greater risks. They can be expected to engage in risk-taking behavior online ~ which may be a safer way to take risks than many of the Real World alternatives.
- ✓ Provide young people with accurate information about the risks, how to prevent risk, detect if they are at risk, and effectively respond. Respond to behavior that has "crossed the boundary" with a logical consequence that will help the young person understand why the behavior was wrong.<sup>14</sup>

## Doing What They Say

### Social Manipulation

- ✦ Social influence techniques are used online by dangerous individuals, as well as commercial sites and advertisers.<sup>15</sup>

- ✦ The most common way that these techniques are used online include overly friendly messages, excessive compliments, offers of gift or opportunities. and encouragement of a commitment to a special relationship or a group.

- ✓ Teach young people to watch for manipulation.

## Looking for Love

### Youth Risk

- ✦ Young people who are at the greatest risk online are the ones who are at greater risk in the Real World.
  - ✦ Savvy youth have effective knowledge, skills, and values to make good decisions online. They are generally older teens who have good values and decision-making skills and come from families with actively and positively engaged parents.
  - ✦ Naïve youth lack sufficient knowledge and skills to engage in effective decision-making, but can become savvy with education and experience. They are generally younger teens, but may also be older teens from families that have been restrictive.
  - ✦ Vulnerable youth are going through a period of emotional "teen angst," likely have impaired relations with parents and/or peers, and are less likely to make good decisions online because they are emotionally upset.
  - ✦ At Risk youth face major ongoing challenges related to personal mental health and disruptions in relations with parents, school, and/or peers. They are at highest risk online.
- ✦ The higher the degree of risk, the greater the probability the young person will be:
  - ✦ Searching for acceptance and attention online.
  - ✦ More vulnerable to manipulation.
  - ✦ Emotionally upset, and thus less likely to make good choices because they are not "thinking clearly."
  - ✦ Less attentive to Internet safety messages.
  - ✦ Less resilient in getting out of a difficult situation, even if they want to.
  - ✦ Less able or willing to rely on parents for assistance.
  - ✦ More likely to be associating with other youth in the Real World or online who are also engaged in risk behavior.
  - ✦ Less likely to report an online dangerous situation to an adult because this will likely reveal evidence of their own unsafe or inappropriate choices.
- ✓ Empower savvy youth to effectively educate their peers and younger youth, to assist naïve and vulnerable peers who are facing online concerns, and report to adults if someone is at risk or causing harm.
- ✓ Help naïve and vulnerable youth become savvy with effective education using savvy youth as educators.
- ✓ Implement comprehensive risk prevention approaches to address the concerns presented by vulnerable and "at risk" teens..

<sup>13</sup> Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls. (2007) American Psychological Association. <http://www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Dreikurs, R. and Grey, L. (1968). *The New Approach to Discipline: Logical Consequences*, A Plum Book

<sup>15</sup> Cialdini, R.B. (2001). *Influence Science and Practice*, 4th Ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. <http://www.influenceatwork.com/>.

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## Legal Issues

This discussion relates primarily to public schools in the U.S. Other countries have similar free speech protections. Issues for private schools will be briefly addressed. Comprehensive research materials are available from CSRIU.

### Free Speech v. Student Safety

- ✦ The challenge: The more harmful incidents of cyberbullying occur when students post harmful material while off-campus ~ because this is where they have more unsupervised use. But the harmful impact is at school ~ because this is where students are physically together.
- ✦ The balance: Students have important free speech rights. School officials have an important obligation to ensure the safety of students and the delivery of instruction.
- ✦ The bottom line: Regardless of where the speech occurs, when the impact is at school and jeopardizes the safety and well-being of students or the delivery of instruction, school officials must respond to protect the rights of other students.
- ✦ BUT, in a significant number of cyberbullying situations, a formal disciplinary response will either be entirely ineffective ~ or create greater problems. More on effective responses below.

### Philosophies of Free Speech

- ✦ Two philosophies underly free speech.<sup>16</sup>
  - English common law: Government has the authority to restrict speech for the common good.<sup>17</sup>
  - Natural rights: Government has the authority to restrict the speech of one to protect the rights of others.<sup>18</sup>
- ✦ Cases addressing a school response to student speech have relied on both philosophies when students are at school.
  - *Tinker v. Des Moines* ~ school officials can restrict student speech if such speech has or could cause a substantial disruption or interference with the rights of students to be secure ~ grounded in natural rights.<sup>19</sup>
  - *Bethel v. Fraser* ~ school officials can restrict offensive speech, inconsistent with educational mission ~ grounded in common law.<sup>20</sup>
- ✦ Cases addressing school response to off-campus student speech has limited school officials to *Tinker*.<sup>21</sup>
  - School officials have the authority to formally respond to off-campus speech if that speech has created, or a reasonable person would perceive it could create, a substantial disruption at school or interference with the rights of students to be secure.
  - But school officials may not respond based on disapproval of the content or manner of the speech,

however offensive, or the perspective that the student's speech is inconsistent with educational standards.

- When students are off-campus, parents are responsible for imparting values.

### Requirements to Respond to Off-Campus Speech That Targets Students<sup>22</sup>

- ✦ School "nexus." A nexus between the off-campus online speech and the school community.
  - Speech involves students or staff or is in some other manner connected to the school community.
- ✦ Impact at school. The impact has, or it is reasonably foreseeable it will be, at school.
  - "School" includes school-sponsored field trips, extracurricular activities, sporting events, and transit to and from school or such activities.
- ✦ Has occurred or reasonably foreseeable. School officials must be able to point to a specific and particularized reason why they anticipate a substantial disruption or interference ~ not mere apprehension of the possibility of a disruption.
  - Timing is an issue. Formal response is for the purpose of preventing an imminent foreseeable substantial disruption or interference ~ not after the fact because a disruption could possibly have occurred, but did not.
- ✦ Material and substantial impact. The impact has, or it is reasonably foreseeable it will be, significant.
  - Not anger or annoyance. Not disapproval of the expression of a controversial opinion. Not simply a situation that requires investigation.
- ✦ Disruption of school or interference with rights of students. The speech has caused, or it is reasonably foreseeable it will, cause.<sup>23</sup>
  - Significant interference with instructional activities, school activities, or school operations.
  - Physical or verbal violent altercations.
  - A hostile environment for any student that impairs that student's ability to participate in educational programs or school activities.
- ✦ Hostile Environment.<sup>24</sup>
  - Assess hostile environment based on the target's subjective response and a reasonable observer perspective.
- ✦ Causal relationship.
  - The speech has, or it is reasonably foreseeable it will, be the actual cause of the disruption. Not some other factor, such as administrator action.

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<sup>16</sup> Leonard W. Levy, *The Emergence of a Free Press* 220-81 (1985)

<sup>17</sup> William Blackstone, 4, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* 151-52 (1783 ed.) (reprint ed. 1978).

<sup>18</sup> Of Freedom of Speech", No 15, Feb 4, 1720, in John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, 1 *Cato's Letters: Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious* 96 (reprint ed. 1971).

<sup>19</sup> 393 U.S. 503, 507 (1969).

<sup>20</sup> 478 U.S. 675 (1986).

<sup>21</sup> *Layshock v. Hermitage Sch. Dist.*, No. 06-116 (July 10, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> These requirements came primarily from the well-reasoned *Layshock* decision.

<sup>23</sup> This is based on an in-depth analysis of cases involving both on and off-campus speech that have been decided under *Tinker*. An extensive analysis is available from CSRIU.

<sup>24</sup> *Saxe v. State College Area School District*, 240 F.3d 200 (3rd Cir. 2001).

## Off-Campus Speech That Targets School Staff or Challenges School Policy

- ♦ Likely will not meet substantial disruption standard ~ unless speech has, or it is reasonably foreseeable it will, cause a significant interference with the delivery of instruction, school activities, or operations.
  - It is presumed that staff are not going to get into violent altercations and the hostile environment standard is not relevant.
  - Under the First Amendment students have the right to protest school policies and the actions of school staff.
- ♦ But speech that is truly harmful could provide the basis for civil litigation under theories of defamation, invasion of privacy, false light, and intentional infliction of emotional distress ~ which likely would have a significantly greater deterrent impact on all students.

## Potential Threat

- ♦ School officials have clear authority to respond to online material that raises a concern that a student may pose a threat to self or others.<sup>25</sup> Ask:
  - Does the student POSE a threat, not did the student POST a threat?
  - Has this online material been posted in retaliation for unresolved conflict or abuse the poster has been subjected to at school? Don't reward an abuser by imposing severe punishment on the target who does not know how to get the abuse to stop.

## Responding to On-Campus Speech

- ♦ School officials have the authority and responsibility to respond to any harmful or inappropriate speech through the District Internet system.
  - Probably both *Tinker* and *Bethel* apply.
- ♦ School officials can impose educationally based standards on student material posted publicly on district web pages ~ *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*.<sup>26</sup>
  - But state student free press statutes will impact this.<sup>27</sup>
- ♦ School officials have the authority and responsibility to respond to any harmful speech that takes place while students are using cell phone or other personal digital devices on-campus.
  - But searching a student's cell phone or PDA without parent permission may violate state wiretapping laws. Legal standards are unclear ~ check with school counsel.<sup>28</sup>
  - May also find nude images, which could be considered child pornography. Do not provide to anyone other than the police. That could be considered distributing child porn ~ a crime!

## Liability for Hostile Environment

- ♦ School officials clearly have the responsibility to respond if a hostile environment has been created for a student on-campus if they know of the concern and have the ability to respond.<sup>29</sup>
  - School officials likely have the responsibility to respond to off-campus online speech that has created a hostile environment at school for a protected student, if they know of the concern.
    - While a school official may not be able to control what a student posts online, that official certainly has the right to control whether or not a student who is intentionally harming another student is allowed to sit in the same classroom with the student being harmed.
  - School officials definitely have a responsibility to respond if there are any associated on-campus harmful interactions ~ which there most frequently are.
    - Failure to investigate and interene because of the misperception that this is "off-campus, not my job" could constitute "deliberate indifference" and lead to liability.

## Private Schools

- ♦ Private schools are not bound by the U.S. Constitution. Still need to be concerned about liability for negligence and wiretapping law.
- ♦ Private schools have the ability to address these issues by contract signed by parent.

## Key Question

- ♦ How much responsibility does your private school want to assume for off-campus harmful speech posted by your students?
  - Where does your school want to establish the boundary between school and parents on issues of authority and responsibility for students are doing online when outside of school?
    - Be careful, the greater the authority the school assumes, the greater the workload and the greater the potential liability for failure to respond appropriately.

## Recommendations

- ♦ Follow the public school standards with one key expansion.
  - Creation of an environment for any student or staff member that is abusive or hostile. (Note: by including staff this is expanding beyond current standards impacting public schools.)
  - Physical or verbal altercations between students."
- ♦ Statement in contract that parents grant continuing permission for school staff to review records on student's cell phone upon reasonable suspicion that the cell phone has been used in violation of policies.

25 Sarah E. Redfield, Threats Made, Threats Posed: School and Judicial Analysis in Need of Redirection, 2003 *BYU EDUC. & L.J.* 663.

26 484 U.S. 260 (1988).

27 Understanding student free-expression laws: Renewed push to pass state laws as courts chip away at First Amendment rights in schools. [http://www.splc.org/report\\_detail.asp?id=1351&edition=43](http://www.splc.org/report_detail.asp?id=1351&edition=43).

28 *Klump v. Nazareth Area Sch. Dist.*, 425 F. Supp. 2d 622, 641-42 (E.D. Pa. 2006).

29 *Davis v. Monroe Bd. of Educ.*, 526 U.S. 629 (1999).

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## Investigation & Intervention

### Set the Stage

- ✓ Establish a response team. Team members could include an administrator, counselor/ psychologist, technology coordinator, school resource officer.
  - Technology coordinator (or librarian) can save all online materials and interact with the site to arrange for a “take down.”
  - Counselor or psychologist can contribute insight into the student relationships and may be the best individuals to interview and intervene with specific students.
  - School resource officer can assist if any indications of criminal or threatening issues, or if officer is working with any of the involved students.
- ✦ Schools must depend on student report and be able to effectively investigate.
- ✓ Make sure students can easily report anonymously and make a commitment to confidentiality.
  - Many students have likely seen the material, so detection of the one reporting is less of a concern.
- ✓ Make sure that all response team members can quickly override the filter to investigate.
  - Many times the profiles are “protected.” The student who reports is the only one who can provide access. Thus the ability to achieve a bypass of the filter needs to be immediate.

### Investigation

#### Gather Evidence

- ✓ Preserve **all** evidence.
- ✓ Determine the identity of cyberbully(ies).
- ✓ Search for additional harmful material or interactions.
  - It might be appropriate to conduct analysis of all involved students through District Internet system.
  - Ask about related on-campus actions.

#### Review the Situation

- ✓ Review the material looking for insight into the harmful relationships.
  - Who is engaging in aggression against whom for what reasons? Determine who is playing what role in this situation (See Player descriptions above).
- ✓ Look closely to determine whether online incident is a continuation or or in retaliation for other hurtful interactions between the parties.
- ✓ Ask: Does evidence gathered raise concerns that any student(s) may pose a risk of harm to others or self?
  - Recognize that the threat of harm may come from student(s) who posted the material or from student(s) who were victimized.
- ✓ Gain insight from student who has reported.

### Intervening

#### Imminent Threat

- ✓ If the speech appears to present an imminent threat, contact law enforcement and initiate a protective response.

- Watch out for all of the possible alternatives. This could just be a joke.

#### Avoid Suspensions

- ✓ Avoid the “suspension” response unless there are student safety reasons to temporarily remove a student from the school environment. Suspensions are often ineffective.
  - Suspensions often result in retaliation against the target or “snitch” by the aggressor and friends. If the disciplinary response generates anger, the student can very effectively engage in invisible online retaliation against target, “snitch,” or school staff member who imposed discipline.
  - Suspensions lead to increased negative relationship between students and school.
  - The nature of the aggression online has changed from isolated players to groups of aggressors. Suspending the entire group be difficult.
  - Suspending student(s) for off-campus actions can lead to law suits.
- ✓ In situations that have created a hostile environment for a vulnerable or protected class student or that could lead to violent altercations or substantial interference with instruction/operations, a formal disciplinary response may be justified.
  - Fully document the evidence, the decision-making process, and rationale to support that there was or there were reasons to anticipate a substantial disruption or interference.

#### Take-Down

- ✦ If harmful material appears online, it needs to be taken down. A request from a school official can facilitate this.
  - All of the popular sites have Terms of Use that prohibit the use of their sites for hurtful purposes. If the material is causing concerns, it it highly probably it will violate the Terms of Use of the sites.
- ✓ Once the materials have been preserved, get them taken down as rapidly as possible and request that account restrictions be placed on the aggressor.
  - Look on home page or page material is on for “complaint,” “abuse,” or “contact.”

#### Identity of Reporter

- ✦ The fact that these communications are in electronic form and are, or could be made, public presents significant advantages when it comes to student reporting. When a student reports these kinds of situations to school officials this can create problems for the reporter.
  - If the target reports, this can result in the assessment that the target is a “baby” who can’t stand up for him or herself. If another student reports, that student is a “snitch. Either situation can lead to retaliation.
  - When handled effectively by the school official, the aggressor will never know who reported, thus significantly limiting the potential for retaliation.
- ✓ If the aggressor asks who reported, an effective response might be, “You know that we will protect the confidentiality of a student who reports a concern and you know that anything you post online either is or easily can become

public so that many students could see this. So you will never actually be able to determine who reported. But I will tell you that the majority of students do not like to see other students being harmed.”

- If the target does report, be sure to tell the target not to tell anyone that he or she was the source of the report.

### Discussions with Target(s)

- ✦ Students targeted online likely are also experiencing ~ or causing ~ difficult relationships at school.
- ✓ Discuss relationship issues at school to develop a plan of action to resolve.
  - This may include the need to help the target recognize and eliminate irritating or hurtful behaviors that are contributing to these relationship problems.
- ✓ If a hostile environment exists at school, make sure the environment ~ and protective responses taken ~ are documented.
  - Obtain and retain a written report by a school or community counselor or psychologist, written or documented statement by the target and parent, and school performance and attendance reports.
- ✓ Make sure your plan to proceed is something the target agrees with. Recognize the target is at risk of retaliation as a result of reporting to an adult.
- ✦ Bullying behavior is grounded in differences in social power. Sometimes, students who report bullying to an adult set themselves up for further victimization because the act of reporting is perceived to prove lower social status and vulnerability.
  - In some situations it may be far more effective for a principal or counselor to work with the target to help that student respond to the cyberbullying in a manner that appears to be independent of adult assistance. Because these communications are electronic and asynchronous the response assistance provided by an adult will not be evident to the aggressor.
- ✓ Whenever possible, provide “invisible assistance” to the target to assist that student in presenting a strong demand that it stop and filing a complaint for takedown and account restriction.
- ✦ The Sources of Strength model is showing excellent results in suicide prevention.<sup>30</sup> This model has identified eight sources of strength that individuals who are in a position of emotional trauma could rely on. Individuals in trauma are advised of the importance of finding at least four areas of strength to assist.
  - Family Support.
  - Healthy Activities.
  - Caring Adult Relationships.
  - Medical Access.

- Spirituality.
- Generosity.
- Mental Health Access.
- Healthy Friends/Peers.

- ✓ Discuss with the target these sources of strength and help the target identify at least four sources in his or her life and a “next steps” strategy the target can use to tap into these four sources of strength.

### Discussions with Aggressor(s)

- ✦ The primary objective is to get students to the point of feeling remorse and a desire to remedy and discontinue the harm ~ not anger. Focus on restorative justice.
- ✦ Aggressor(s) often are having challenges that are not being effectively addressed.
- ✓ Ask about, listen to, and develop a plan to address these challenges. This can increase the potential of a successful resolution.
- ✓ Ask questions that lead to remorse and shame by focusing on harmful consequences to others and self:
  - How would you feel if someone did the same thing to you - or to your best friend or younger sibling?
  - What will your mom, dad, or guardian think about your actions - which I will be reporting to them?
  - How would you feel if everyone in this school knew about this incident and knew that you are the one who intentionally caused harm to another student? Do you think they will think you are cool ~ or will they think you are cruel?
  - How do these actions reflect on the kind of person you are and the way you want other students and adults to see you?
- ✓ Ask the student what actions he or she proposes should be taken to remedy the harm.
  - Tell the student that his or her parents will be informed of the incident, as well as what he or she proposed as a remedy. Students will be highly motivated to avoid parental restrictions on online access, therefore motivated to engage in reparations.

### Teachable Moments

- ✦ Sometimes, the incident is so well-known that it can provide a teachable moment for student and parents. Other times, any public discussions would only increase the harm.
- ✓ Send letter home to parents.
- ✓ Discuss in home rooms or student advisories.
  - How does this make you feel? What do you think about people who do this? What are things you can do?

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## Comprehensive Prevention Approach

### Comprehensive Approach

- ✦ Recommended approach is grounded in Olweus school-wide approach but will easily integrate into any comprehensive school planning approach.

- Enhanced with insight into cyberbullying, technical issues, and legal issues.
- ✦ This approach is not evidence-based because that takes time and this is a new concern that we are still seeking to understand ~ but contains elements necessary to achieve

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.sourcesofstrength.info/>.

a waiver of Safe Schools Principles of Effectiveness requirement.

## Social Intelligence & Bullying Prevention

- ♦ Many aspects of cyberbullying appear to relate to underlying problems young people have in handling personal and social interactions ~ the domain of social intelligence.
  - Social intelligence is as important as performance in language arts and mathematics.
- ✓ The foundation for addressing Internet safety and youth risk online is helping students gain effective social and personal relationship understandings and skills. Schools are strongly advised to have in place a program to support social intelligence and positive social and relationship development, including youth leadership.
  - Provide support for positive behavior.
  - Strengthen skills in empathy and interpersonal relationship problem-solving.
  - Engage bystanders in prevention.
  - Train students in peer mediation.

## Safe Schools and Educational Technology

### Systemic Change in Organizational Structure.

- ♦ Safe schools committees manage youth risk issues.
  - Often have limited understanding of technology.
- ♦ Technology services departments manage the technical system and educational technology staff address how students are using technologies.
  - Often have limited understanding of youth risk.
- ✓ Establish a joint Youth Risk Online group involving safe school and technology participants to address cyberbullying and other youth risk online issues.

### Student Involvement

- ♦ Many students are simply not listening to any adults when it comes to Internet or cell phone use issues ~ they will listen far better to their peers.
- ♦ The most effective risk prevention approaches are grounded in social norms ~ which requires student involvement.
- ✓ At the secondary level, involve students in all aspects of planning ~ including policy development.

### Sources of Strength

- ♦ The Sources of Strength model for suicide prevention has shown excellent results.<sup>31</sup> This model can be adapted to specifically address electronic aggression and other risk factors leading to youth risk online.
  - Training for diverse student peer leaders who conduct focused 'peer-to-peer' prevention activities in their school with adult mentoring. A key goal is to increase positive help-seeking behaviors among all students in a school and break down "codes of silence" that often keep teens from seeking adult help when in crisis and promote understanding of sources of strength to support resilience.

## Needs Assessment

- ✓ Conduct a formal or informal needs assessment to provide insight into the extent of the problem.

- May want to address all youth risk online issues.

## Policy and Practice Review

- ✓ The Youth Risk Online group should undertake a review of district policies and practices.

### Bypass Internet Filter

- ✓ All safe school personnel must be able to achieve an immediate bypass of the filter to investigate online material that may impact student or school safety.
- ♦ Bypasses are recorded which can ensure accountability. Authorizing bypass is not a violation of the Children's Online Protection Act. Failure to provide immediate bypass for safe school personnel could constitute deliberate indifference.

### Cyberbullying

- ✓ Expand the bullying report and review process to incorporate cyberbullying.
  - Ensure complete confidentiality for student reports.
  - Know how and by whom these reports will be investigated and handled.
- ✓ Add cyberbullying to bullying policy.
  - ... bullying that takes place on or immediately adjacent to school grounds, at any school-sponsored activity, on school-provided transportation or at any official school bus stop, through the use of the district Internet system while on or off-campus, through the use of a personal digital device on campus, or off-campus activities that cause or threaten to cause a substantial disruption at school or school activities.
  - "Substantial disruption" means:
    - Significant interference with instructional activities, school activities, or school operations.
    - Physical or verbal violent altercations between students.
    - A hostile environment for any student that impairs that student's ability to participate in educational programs or school activities.

### Cyberthreats

- ✓ Revise threat assessment protocol and suicide prevention planning to address Internet communications.
  - Investigate possible link between online communications and altercations between students at school.
  - If any suggestion of threat is reported or a student appears to be distressed, it is advisable to search online for additional material, if possible.
  - Encourage students to confidentially report online material that raises concerns of violence or suicide.

### Cell Phone Policy

- ✓ Work with legal counsel to craft cell phone, personal digital device policy that is in accord with state wiretapping law.
  - Any use on campus or when participating in school activities subject to disciplinary code.
  - Implied consent to review records if reasonable suspicion of misuse may be an option.
  - Any use in classroom or school activity must be specifically approved by teacher, with signed consent of agreement to allow review at any time.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.sourcesofstrength.info/>.

- ✓ Develop a strategy to encourage reports of abuse using cell phone without subjecting student who reports to discipline for inappropriate use of cell phone.
  - Given that students often text during class breaks ~ despite rules against this ~ it may be safer to allow cell phone use during this time so students will feel they can safely report cell phone abuse.

### **Personal Imaging Device**

- ✓ Develop a policy for students related to taking pictures at school.
  - School and school activities should be considered generally not a public place to take pictures of students or staff.
    - Specific permission should be required to take a picture of anyone at school or school activities.
    - This would exclude images taken as part of an approved school activity or for a specific school-related purpose, student journalism, public events like sporting events or concerts, or recording evidence of an abusive situation.
  - Taking a picture in a place where privacy is expected, like a locker room or restroom, is generally a violation of state statute and should also be a significant violation of school policy.
  - Taking a picture of someone at school and publishing it online, unless with permission or as part of an approved student project, should be considered a violation of that person's privacy and school policy.
  - Taking a picture of someone at school and publishing it online with an intent to harm or harass should be a significant violation of school policy.
  - Create means for students to provide images of staff or student abuse to appropriate officials.

### **Extracurricular Activities**

- ✦ Add the "substantial disruption" language to extracurricular activities policy.
  - ▷ Any on- or off-campus communications with students from other schools, that causes or threatens substantial disruption of any extracurricular activity should lead to restrictions on involvement.

### **Internet Use Management**

- ✦ There are significant issues that must be addressed about effective management of Internet use.<sup>32</sup>
  - ▷ Overreliance on filtering, which students can bypass.
  - ▷ Ineffective supervision and monitoring practices.
  - ▷ Essential to incorporate Web 2.0 communication technologies.
- ✓ Implement effective Internet management approach.
  - Focus on educational purpose and activities.
  - Controlled online instruction environments.
  - Increased technical monitoring.
  - Effective filter management.
  - Use Web 2.0-based instruction to address digital citizenship and responsible publishing.

### **Professional Development**

- ✓ Implement a "triage" approach to address professional development.
  - Key district/region staff need a high level of insight ~ including legal and technical dimensions ~ so they can advise school staff.
  - Safe school staff in the schools need insight into problem and ways to effectively prevent, educate, detect, review, and intervene.
  - All other staff need general awareness.

### **Parent Outreach**

- ✓ Provide information on how to ...
  - Prevent, detect and intervene if their child is victim.
  - Prevent their child from being cyberbully.
  - Empower their child to be a responsible bystander/peer leader.
- ✓ Provide information to parents through general information in newsletters, parent workshops, and "just-in-time" resources.

### **Community Outreach**

- ✓ Provide information and training to others.
  - Mental health and law enforcement professionals.
  - Community and youth organizations.
  - Media.

### **Student Education**

(The following is from a CSRIU document for students. My approach on responding is to focus on self-sufficiency and encourage safe reliance on adults, when necessary.)

The research documents that teens don't tell because they have fixed the problem or want to fix the problem on their own. They will not tell adults simply because we tell them to tell adults ~ because to tell an adult is to "lose face" and can lead to retaliation or aggregation of the problem.

So my materials honor their desire to be self-sufficient by telling them how they can respond independently. I also tell them how adults can help ~ including providing "invisible assistance" so that their peers do not know they are getting help from an adult.

It is my hope this approach will actually result in more teens reporting. This approach has been discussed with teens and they were very supportive ~ and thankful that I was honoring their desire to be independent.)

- ✦ Cyberbullies use the Internet or cell phones to send hurtful messages or post information to damage people's reputation and friendships. Nobody likes Mean Kids online.

### **Don't Put Yourself at Risk**

- ✓ Don't post or send information others could use against you.
- ✓ Pay attention to how you are communicating ~ be careful not to insult others.
- ✓ Don't hang around online places where people treat you badly.
  - Find friends who like you for who you are ~ don't waste your time with people who hurt others.

<sup>32</sup> A presentation on effective Internet use management in a Web 2.0 world, is available from CSRIU.

## **If You Are Cyberbullied**

- ✓ First step: Do nothing. Wait until you have calmed down so you will be effective.
- ✓ DON'T RETALIATE! This only gives the cyberbully a "win" and could make other people think you are part of the problem.
- ✓ Save the evidence.
- ✓ Try to figure out who the cyberbully is, if you do not know.
- ✓ Decide whether you can handle the situation by yourself or should tell an adult.
  - But if what you try does not work, be sure to get help from an adult.
  - (There is a very important reason for why this is phrased in this manner. The research indicates that young people want to be able to resolve these situations on their own. By suggesting that we think they can, it is my belief that they will be more, not less, inclined to ask for help if they really need help.)
- ✓ Steps to try first ...
  - If you are on a public site, simply leave or ignore.
  - Calmly and strongly tell the cyberbully to stop and to remove any harmful material or you will take further action.
  - Block the communications and remove friendship links.
  - File a complaint with the site or service.
  - Ask a friend for advise or help.
- ✓ Ways that adults can help ...
  - Provide "invisible assistance" to help you effectively take the steps to get the harm stopped.
  - Your parents can send the material the cyberbully has posted to his or her parents to demand it stop.
  - If the person cyberbullying you goes to your school, your school counselor, principal, or resource officer can help.
  - Your parents can contact an attorney to send a letter or file a lawsuit against the parents of the cyberbully.
  - Your parents or the school can contact the police if the cyberbullying includes any threats or is a crime.

## **Don't Be a Cyberbully**

- ✓ It's not "cool" ~ it's cruel.
- ✓ People do not "deserve" to be treated badly.

## **About the Author**

Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D. is the director of the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use. She has degrees in special education and law. She taught "at risk" children, practiced computer law, and was an educational technology consultant before focusing her professional attention on issues of youth risk online and effective management of student Internet use. Nancy is author of two books. *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Online Social Cruelty, Threats, and Distress* (Research Press) and *Cyber-Safe Kids, Cyber-Savvy Teens, Helping Young People Use the Internet Safely and Responsibly* (Jossey Bass). Nancy's focus is on applying research insight into youth risk and effective research-based risk prevention approaches to these new concerns of youth risk online. © 2009 Nancy Willard. Permission to reproduce through the Copyright Clearance Center or as granted by author. Email: [nwillard@csriu.org](mailto:nwillard@csriu.org) ~ Website: <http://csriu.org>.

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## **Other Great Resources**

- ♦ The Cyberbullying Research Center <http://cyberbullying.us/>. Dr. Sameer Hinduja (Florida Atlantic University) and Dr. Justin Patchin (University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire).
- ♦ Cyberbullying: Bullying in the Digital Age. <http://www.cyberbullyhelp.com/>. Dr. Robin Kowalski (Clemson University), Dr. Susan Liomber (Clemson University) and Dr. Patricia Agatston (Cobb County School District).

- ✓ Don't use the Internet to get back at someone who is bullying you.
  - You are the one who could be blamed.

## **Friends Don't Let Friends Get Hurt Online**

- ✓ Take responsible action if you see that someone is being cyberbullied.
  - Promote respectful communications.
  - Help the person being cyberbullied figure out what to do to get it stopped.
  - Tell the bully to stop or negotiate a "truce" ~ but only if you can do so safely.
  - Tell a trusted adult what is happening.
  - Don't retaliate ~ that will just make things worse.

## **Cyberthreats**

- ✓ Don't post anything that looks like threat
  - Someone might think it is real and you will get into trouble
- ✓ If you see threatening material, promptly show it to a trusted adult
  - It could be real and someone could be harmed

## **Evaluation and Assessment**

- ✓ Use a continuous improvement model. Research insight is still emerging. Technologies are always changing.
  - Can not wait for a "research proven model" ~ but must constantly evaluate and modify based on new insight and results of local efforts.
- ✓ Focus strongly on the adequacy of the school investigation and response to specific incidents.
  - Students will not report if they do not perceive this will effectively resolve the problem.
  - Obtain feedback from targets, aggressors, and parents.
  - Aggregate review at district level.

## **Cyber Savvy Schools**

- ♦ The fact that harmful material is or can be preserved in electronic format, and the true author can generally be identified, provides significant advantages for cyber-savvy school personnel to more effectively discover and intervene in situations that are negatively impacting students ~ which will contribute to their success in school and life