

Cyber Bullying

The Internet and other technologies have created a whole new world of social communications for young people who are using e-mail, web sites, instant messaging, chat rooms and text messaging (STM) to stay in touch with friends and make new ones. The majority of these new social networking opportunities are positive and offer great potential for expanding our understanding of others.

However, these new technologies have created new opportunities to bully others. It is important that all members of our community be aware of cyber bullying and understands what they can do about it.

Cyber bullying is the use of technology to support deliberate, hostile and hurtful behaviour towards an individual or group of individuals. There are several ways that people bully others online. Here are a few examples:

- Sending e-mails or instant messages containing insults or threats directly to a person.
- Spreading hateful comments about a person through e-mail, instant messaging or posting on websites and blogs.
- Sending/posting pictures with derogatory comments through e-mails or social networking sites.

- Dealing passwords and sending out threatening e-mail or instant messages under another person's identity.
- Building websites to target specific people.

The statistics are alarming. One in four Grade 7 students in an Alberta study reports being a victim of cyber bullying. An additional concern is that the anonymity of online communications means teens feel free to do things online they would never do in the real world.

What do teens need to know?

- Guard your contact information. Be very careful about giving people you don't know your cell phone number, instant messaging name or e-mail address.
- If you're being harassed online, tell an adult you trust.
- Block the sender's messages. Do not reply.
- Keep the messages so that they can be referred to an appropriate agency (internet service providers, cell phone services providers, social networking site managers).
- If the bullying involves threats call the police.

Teens need to take a stand against all forms of bullying. Speak up when you see any form of harassment.

What do parents need to know?

Most cyber bullying occurs when adults aren't around.

To help prevent cyber bullying:

1. Talk to your kids about what they are doing online (where do they go online, monitor their personal home pages and social networking sites).
2. Teach them to never post or say anything on the Internet that they wouldn't want the whole world - including you - to read.
3. Encourage your kids to come to you if anybody says or does something online that makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened.

If your child is being bullied online, take action:

- Watch out for signs that your child is being bullied online - a reluctance to use the computer or go to school may be an indication.
- If the bully is a student at your child's school, meet with school officials and ask for help in resolving the situation.

- Report any incident of online harassment and physical threats to your local police and your Internet Service Provider (ISP).
- If your child is bullied through a cell phone, report the problem to your phone service provider. If it's a persistent problem, you can change the phone number.
- Additional websites: www.b-free.ca, www.bullyfreealberta.ca, www.cyberbullying.org

This article is one of a series by the Strathcona County Community Drug and Alcohol Strategy Committee addressing information about drug and alcohol issues.

For a complete listing of resources available, pick up the Drug/Alcohol Resource Directory at the Strathcona County Health Centre located at 2 Brower Drive or at Strathcona County Family and Community Services located at 2755 Broadmoor Boulevard (2nd Floor) in Sherwood Park.

Questions about drug or alcohol issues or bullying?

Call Strathcona County Family and Community Services at 464-4044