



# Today's Technology Challenges: Cyberbullying, Monitoring and Safety

## Am I Overreacting?

A common dilemma faced by parents is determining whether or not an event warrants a response or action. *What if I'm overreacting? What if it's not that serious? What if it turns out to be nothing at all?* And while it's quite normal to have these concerns, it's also commendable that you are monitoring your child's Internet communication.

When a case of cyberbullying manifests the characteristics of stalking or harassment, it's normally easy to identify the more serious cases. Conversely, a one-time incident of cyberbullying may be much less serious but may be useful in promoting dialog between you and your child. But what about

those cases more difficult to classify? The Wired Safety Group has created a useful checklist when you find yourself in the "gray" area of cyberbullying. Your answers will help guide you when to get involved with law enforcement and when to seek another course of action (Wired Safety Group, 2008).

- \*What is the kind of threat being received? (insults, threats, language usage)
- \*What is the frequency of the threats? (one-time, repeated, increasing in nature)
- \*What is the source of threat? (known or unknown individual, group of individuals)
- \*What other details might be of significance?



(posted images, stolen passwords, shared intimate information, malicious exchanges, posing as your child, text messaging, chat rooms, etc.).

The Wired Safety Group strongly encourages parents to know their ISP source and have offline contact information available in the event an IP address needs to be tracked or evidence needs to be preserved. "Many ISPs discard the subscriber/IP data after a week to thirty day period so time is crucial" (Wired Safety Group, 2008).

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### Special points of interest:

- ♦ *When should I seek the council of an outside resource?*
- ♦ *Computer safety tips...*
- ♦ *When safety overrides privacy concerns.*
- ♦ *A child's understanding of online expectations.*
- ♦ *Effective Internet monitoring.*

## Smart Safety Tips!

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has posted a list of safety tips for online behavior. Some of these tips are highlighted below (netsmartz.org, 2008):

\*Create and post rules for Internet access. A pledge of safety can be

signed as well.

\*Take advantage of safeguarding programs, such as monitored and filtered web sites.

\*Discuss the importance of safeguarding personal information.

\*Make sure your child understands the seriousness of dialoging with

someone unknown.

\*Keep the computer in an open area of your home, such as the family room or kitchen.

\*Supervise and monitor your child's computer activities.

**(continued on page 2)**

## Cyberbullying Confirmed

When your child has experienced cyberbullying, it can be disheartening to both the child and the parent. First and foremost, reassure your child that bullying of any nature is never his or her fault. The Health Resources and Services Administration has recommended actions to be taken “after-the-fact” and include some of the following:

\*Never respond to cyberbullying and save any messages or pictures as evidence.

\*Block email addresses and/or phone numbers when possible. Keep in mind that the perpetrator

may use another address or number afterwards to reach your child.

\*Attempt to identify the individual sending the messages. If unknown, contact your ISP (Internet Service Provider).

\*“Sending inappropriate language may violate the ‘Terms and Conditions’ of e-mail services, Internet Service Providers, web sites, and cell phone companies” (HRSA, 2008). A complaint can be filed with these services if terms and conditions have not been met.

\*If cyberbullying is occurring at

school, make the school administrators aware. If cyberbullying is occurring off-campus, you may still make the school administrators aware, but you will need to seek the help from other sources, such as the Police Department (threats, extortion, obscenities or harassment, stalking, pornography) or an attorney.

If you are unsure as to what to do, school administrators and your local police department can point you in the right direction.

## Smart Safety Tips (continued...)

\*Parents should control passwords and check internet accounts periodically.

\*Encourage your child to share anything upsetting while using the computer.

As your child surfs the Internet, he or she may see something that is inappropriate. “Emphasize that it’s not their fault if they see something upsetting” (netsmartz.org, 2008). If your child fears loss of computer use for stumbling upon an inappropriate site, he or she may be hesi-

“You may be tempted to give the ‘stick and stones may break your bones, but words will never hurt you’ lecture, but words and cyberattacks can wound a child easily and have a lasting effect.”  
(Wired Safety Group, 2008)

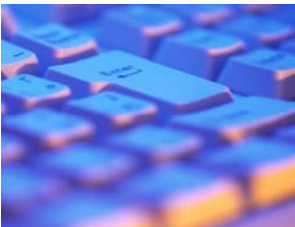
tant to tell you or another trusted adult. In addition, if your child is cyberbullied, he or she may fear losing their internet account if you

discover their embarrassment or humiliation. “Most children will avoid telling their parents about a cyberbullying incident fearing they will only make things worse” (The Wired Safety Group, 2008). Ohio University researcher Christine Suniti Bhat strongly encourages parental oversight stating “parents should be aware of who their children are communicating with online, and keep an open relationship with their children regarding online communication” (cyberbullying.org, 2008).

## Six Situations of “Never”

There are six things the NCPC recommends telling your child:

\*Never hide anything frightening or threatening you’ve discovered on the Internet.  
\*Never give out your name,



school name, parent’s name, address, telephone number or password. Personal information is off limits!

\*Never meet with someone you’ve met online.

\*Never respond to messages that “have bad words or seem scary or just weird” (NCPC, 2008).

\*Never enter an area that asks for

your name or a credit card number.

\*Never send or post a picture of yourself without parental permission.

Review your rules of “never” frequently, helping your child understand the importance of internet safety, responsibility and your expectations.

## Are Parents Effectively Monitoring?

In 2006, The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and Cox Communications found that 51% of parents do not have, or do not know if they have, software programs to monitor online behavior in their home. When asked if parents monitor chat rooms or instant messaging, 42% said they do not review content. Chat room lingo, such as POS (parents over shoulder) or P911 (Parent Alert) were unknown to 95% of parents. “95% of parents couldn’t identify common chat room lingo used to warn people they’re chatting with that their parents are watch-

ing” (netsmartz.org, 2008).

In this same national sample of Internet users, ages 10 to 17, both genders “who reported high levels of Internet use and home Internet access were more likely to report close online relationships” (netsmartz.org, 2008). Statistics provide evidence that parents must become more involved in the social behavior the Internet has made available. From questionable friendships to facets of bullying activities, without monitoring internet activity, a parent today can not be aware of their child’s

wellbeing. The National Crime Prevention Council has stated that parents must have a computer policy in place, “listing acceptable and unacceptable activities or resources, etiquette on the Internet, and consequences for violations” (NCPC, 2008).



## Rules of the Road

The Internet is a wonderful innovation, providing instant access to information and creating a whole new communication network. However, the Internet has also introduced dangers creating avenues for your child to interact with persons who may do them harm.

The National Crime Prevention Council has created a guideline for parents, which begins by instilling the fact that even though you may be alone in a room, one is never alone when on the Internet; a con-

cept that surprises many children.

The NCPC encourages parents to discuss issues of concern, such as violence, exploitation, and pornography. Although control features, such as blocking software are avail-

able, children may still stumble upon an inappropriate site or receive a frightening picture or message. When this happens, your child needs to know your rules (tell a trusted adult) and understand your expectations.

Your child’s reaction to your presence is a key indicator of their activities. “If a child becomes uneasy or defensive when you walk into the room or when you linger, this could be a sign that he or she is up to something unusual or even forbidden” (NCPC, 2008).

“Just as you wouldn’t send children near a busy road without some safety rules, you shouldn’t send them on to the information superhighway without rules of the road.”  
(NCPC, 2008)

## Privacy Please!

As a parent who does monitor online behavior, you will most likely hear “I need my privacy!,” “That’s private!” or “Why don’t you trust me?” As children grow into young adults, parental involvement becomes more contentious. Although begging and pouting may prompt you to give in, explain why your oversight is critical. Cyberbullying is potentially harmful but so are many

other situations. “Although adults must respect the privacy of children and youth, concerns for your child’s safety may sometimes override these privacy concerns” (HRSA, 2008).

In today’s world, software and tracking programs are recommended but not enough. “Teens who have talked to parents and

guardians [about online safety] ignore messages from unfamiliar people, refuse to reply or chat, block unknown senders, and report these occurrences to trusted adults” (netsmartz.org, 2008). Consistent monitoring and open communication are vital to defining “appropriate and inappropriate online behavior” (netsmartz.org, 2008).

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### Resources:

Bill Belsey. "Beyond the Schoolyard: Bullies take their intimidation to digital media."

[http://www.cyberbullying.org/pdf/Beyond\\_the\\_Schoolyard\\_Nov\\_26\\_2007.pdf](http://www.cyberbullying.org/pdf/Beyond_the_Schoolyard_Nov_26_2007.pdf) (accessed October, 2008).

Health Resources and Services Administration. "Cyberbullying."

<http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/adult/indexAdult.asp?Area=cyberbullying> (accessed October, 2008).

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. "Online Victimization of Youth: Five Years Later (2006)."

<http://www.netsmart.org/safety/statistics.htm> (accessed October, 2008).

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. "Safety Tips."

<http://www.netsmart.org/safety/safetytips.htm> (accessed October, 2008).

National Crime Prevention Council. "Cybersafety for Kids Online: A Parent's Guide." <http://www.ncpc.org/publications/brochures/children/chcyber.pdf> (accessed October, 2008).

Wired Safety Group. "STOP Cyberbullying."

<http://www.stopcyberbullying.org/prevention/index.html> (accessed October, 2008).

## October Q&A

*My child has been bullied online and I know the cyberbully's parents. Should I contact the parent directly?*

Cyberbullying of any nature is a serious accusation. First and foremost, make sure you have evidence, such as copies of emails, available to the parent of the child being accused of cyberbullying. Keep in mind that you will likely receive one of two reactions. The parent may be very concerned and work with you to effectively end the bullying or the reaction may not be as positive. The parent may accuse your child of lying, setting their child up, or "deserving" the behavior in response to something that has occurred previous to this event. Unfortunately, parents sometimes take the extreme on

either end. "Parents tend to over-react...sometimes under react, and rarely get it 'just right'" (Wired Safety Group, 2008).

Although your child may have been cyberbullied, be prepared to face other truths as well, such as your child being involved in the same type of behavior. "Parents need to understand that a child is just as likely to be a cyberbully as a victim of cyberbullying and often go back and forth between the two roles during one incident" (Wired Safety Group, 2008).

If you feel you want, or need, to contact the parent, it may be best to do so in writing. "If you decide to contact a cyberbully's parents, communicate with them in writing – not face-to-face" (HRSA, 2008).

In addition, provide copies of emails and ask the parent to ensure the bullying will stop.

As with any potentially awkward interaction, the nature of your existing relationship with the parents involved should help guide your decision.

If you have a question concerning cyberbullying or any other topic our company covers, please email [daphne@trevorromain.com](mailto:daphne@trevorromain.com). Your name and email address will remain confidential.

