Prevent and Address Cyberbullying Behaviors

Bullying behavior among kids from elementary, middle and high school has expanded beyond what parents and teachers may have experienced in their youth. Teasing and name calling have grown into full-fledged attacks spread wide by the use of the Internet, a form of abuse commonly known as cyberbullying.

Drs. Robin Kowalski, Susan Limber and Patricia Agatston, co-authors of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program's cyberbullying prevention curricula for grades 3-12, say cyberbullying occurs when children and youth use technology such as text messaging, Internet sites and cell phones to bully others. They suggest some ideas to help protect your child from becoming involved in bullying situations as well as ways to get help.

Keep Tabs on Technology
While placing your home computer(s) in open access areas, such as family rooms or kitchens, can be helpful, it is important to remember that kids can access the Internet from a variety of sources including mobile phones, an iPod touch and handheld gaming devices. Tell your children you may review their online communications if you think there is reason for concern. Consider installing parental control monitoring and/or filtering programs on your computer(s), but don't rely solely on these tools. Blocking or filtering content works well for younger children. Monitoring and discussion works best for tweens and teens.

Communication is the Key
Talk regularly with your children about online activities, specifically cyberbullying, and encourage your children to tell you immediately if they become the victim of cyberbullying, cyber-stalking, or other illegal or troublesome online behaviors. Encourage your children to tell you if they are aware of others who may be the targeted by such behavior, and make sure your children understand cyberbullying is unacceptable behavior that will have consequences if they take part in it.

When Dealing with Cyber Bullying
Tell your children not to respond if they are cyberbullied but to tell an adult immediately and to save all messages as evidence. Contact the school if you suspect the school district's Internet system is being used for nefarious purposes; the school is obligated to prevent negative use of its own networks. In any case, you should enlist the school to help you resolve the problem if the children involved attend the same school.

The Rules of the "Superhighway" Can Help
Try to identify the individual doing the bullying. Even if the person is anonymous there are ways to track people down through Internet service providers. Sending inappropriate language may violate the "terms and conditions" of e-mail services and Internet providers, Web sites and cell phone companies. You can contact these companies to get help in blocking the perpetrator or removing offensive content.

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Get the Police Involved

Cyberbullying is criminal if it includes threats of violence, extortion, obscene or harassing phone calls or text messages, stalking, hate crimes or child pornography. If any of these are present ,it is time to contact the police and let them track the person down.