

Preventing Cyberbullying

Top Ten Tips for Educators



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- 1. Formally assess** the extent and scope of the problem within your school district by collecting survey and/or interview data from your students. Once you have a baseline measure of what is going on in your school, specific strategies can be implemented to educate students and staff about online safety and Internet use in creative and powerful ways.
- 2. Teach students that all forms of bullying are unacceptable**, and that cyberbullying behaviors are potentially subject to discipline. Have a conversation with students about what "substantial disruption" means. They need to know that even a behavior that occurs miles away from the school could be subject to school sanction if it substantially disrupts the school environment.
- 3. Specify clear rules** regarding the use of the Internet, computers, and other electronic devices. Acceptable Use Policies tend to be commonplace in school districts, but these must be updated to cover online harassment. **Post signs or posters** in school computer labs, hallways, and classrooms to remind students to responsibly use technology.
- 4. Use peer mentoring** - where older students informally teach lessons and share learning experiences with younger students - to promote positive online interactions.
- 5. Consult with your school attorney BEFORE incidents occur** to find out what actions you can or must take in varying situations.
- 6. Create a comprehensive formal contract** specific to cyberbullying in the school's policy manual, or introduce clauses within the formal "honor code" which identify cyberbullying as an example of inappropriate behavior.
- 7. Implement blocking/filtering software** on your computer network to prevent access to certain Web sites and software. Just remember that a tech-savvy student can often find ways around these programs.
- 8. Cultivate a positive school climate**, as research has shown a link between a perceived "negative" environment on campus and an increased prevalence of cyberbullying offending and victimization among students. In general, it is crucial to establish and maintain a school climate of respect and integrity where violations result in informal or formal sanction.
- 9. Educate your community.** Utilize specially-created cyberbullying curricula, or general information sessions such as assemblies and in-class discussions to raise awareness among youth. Invite specialists to come talk to staff and students. Send information out to parents. Sponsor a community education event. Invite parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and any other relevant adult. Bribe if necessary.
- 10. Designate a "Cyberbullying Expert"** at your school who is responsible for educating him/herself about the issues and then passing on important points to other youth-serving adults on campus.

Sameer Hinduja, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor at Florida Atlantic University and Justin W. Patchin, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Together, they lecture across the United States on the causes and consequences of cyberbullying and offer comprehensive workshops for parents, teachers, counselors, mental health professionals, law enforcement, youth and others concerned with addressing and preventing online aggression.

The Cyberbullying Research Center is dedicated to providing up-to-date information about the nature, extent, causes, and consequences of cyberbullying among adolescents. For more information, visit <http://www.cyberbullying.us>. © 2009 Cyberbullying Research Center - Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin

Responding to Cyberbullying

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- 1. Thoroughly investigate** all incidents so that you can direct resources and, if necessary, discipline to students who require it.
- 2. Enlist the support of a school liaison officer** or another member of law enforcement to help, especially when it involves a possible threat to the safety of your students or staff.
- 3.** Once you identify the offending party, **develop a response that is commensurate with the harm done** and the disruption that occurred.
- 4. Work with parents** to convey to the student that cyberbullying behaviors are taken seriously and will not be tolerated at your school.
- 5. Instruct parents to contact an attorney.** Some instances of cyberbullying just don't fall under the purview of the school. In these cases, parents may want to pursue other avenues for redress. All states allow for parties to sue others in civil court for harassment, intentional infliction of emotional distress, or a number of other torts.
- 6. Contact cell phone providers** if threats or explicit content are transmitted via these devices. These companies keep data that may serve as evidence on their servers for a limited period of time before deleting it.
- 7. Keep all evidence** of cyberbullying. Keep a file with screen shots, message logs, or any other evidence so that you can demonstrate the seriousness of the behavior and its impact on the school. This is especially critical if you intend to formally punish students (e.g., suspension, expulsion).
- 8. Contact and work with** MySpace, Facebook, or any other web environment where the bullying occurred. By now they are used to working through cyberbullying cases and can be a resource to assist you in removing offending content, gathering evidence, or put you in touch with someone who can help.
- 9. Solicit advice from neighboring schools** or districts about incidents they may have dealt with in the past.
- 10. Use creative informal response strategies,** particularly for relatively minor forms of cyberbullying that do not result in significant harm. For example, students may be required to create anti-cyberbullying posters to be displayed throughout the school. Older students might be required to give a brief presentation to younger students about the importance of responsibly using technology. It is important to condemn the behavior while sending a message to the rest of the school community that bullying in any form is wrong.

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