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Adopting Human Values while Cyber-Surfing

The internet is a valuable provider of information and in recent times an avid medium of communication. However within its depths also lurks potential danger and non-retractable innuendo. As children and teenagers become more reliant on the internet they become more susceptible to internet fraud, identity theft, cyber bullying and other pitfalls. The challenge therefore is how do we protect and empower the children against these dangers.

This paper will analyse one such danger, namely, cyber bullying, its effects on children in particular and society as a whole for the purpose of formulating possible safeguards through the practice of the five human values.

What is cyber bullying?

Prior to gaining an understanding of cyber bullying, one must first have an understanding of bullying.

Definition of Bullying

“Repeated intimidation, over time, of a physical, verbal or psychological nature of a less powerful person by a more powerful person or a group of persons.” Professor Phillip Slee.

Cyber bullying is bullying carried out with the aid of modern technologies, such as the email, chat rooms, discussion boards, Facebook, Twitter and SMS.

How are individuals intimidated by bullies?

Examples:

1. Teasing online
2. Spreading rumours online
3. Insulting and ridiculing in chat-rooms
4. Posting photos with nasty comments
5. Tricking individuals into sharing private information which is then shared online
6. Sending unwanted messages

The technology today allows the bully to act anonymously and the scope is ever widening. There are very few who do not use the internet or own a mobile phone. Cyber bullying can occur anywhere at any time.

As teachers of children do we have a “Duty of Care”?

A school has a duty to care for its students while they are at school during usual school hours.

“A school authority owes to its pupil a duty to ensure that reasonable care is taken of them whilst they are on the school premises during hours when the school is open for attendance.” *Justice J Mason*, High Court of Australia.

However it is unclear whether the duty exists beyond the school gate and before and after school hours.

Breach of Duty

There is a duty to take precautions if the answer is “YES” to all of the following questions:

- Is the risk foreseeable?
- Is the risk more than insignificant?
- Would a reasonable teacher have taken precautions?





What are reasonable steps?

1. Learn about cyberspace and about cyber bullying and introduce/amend policies
2. Train staff
3. Implement bullying prevention activities
4. Educate and warn parents and students
5. Strengthen after-school care programs

Research Findings

Research undertaken by Megan Price and John Dalgeish in 2009 among 548 young Australians.

The most common situations for cyber bullying to occur were:

-  Email (46%)
-  Online chat rooms (44%)
-  Social network sites (43%)
-  Mobile phones (41%)

Cyber bullying was found to occur most commonly during the following ages:

- 10 -12 years (49%)
- 13-14 years (52%)
- 15-16 years (29%)

Impacts of cyber bullying

86% reported that cyber bullying had impacted them in some way.

- Self confidence (78%)
- Self esteem (70%)
- Friendships (42%)
- Negative effect on school grades (35%)
- School attendance (28%)
- Family relationships (19%)

Emotional response

Percentage of participants feeling each emotion

Emotion	Not Felt	Mild	Extreme
Sadness	25%	21%	54%
Anger	28%	20%	52%
Frustration	42%	23%	35%
Embarrassment	51%	20%	28%
Fear	52%	18%	30%

Use and effectiveness of strategies

Strategy	Tried %	Help Received %
Told an Adult	44.3%	76.0%
Confronted bully	44.2%	31.8%
Told a friend	39.4%	68.5%
Stayed Offline	32.3%	62.9%
Stopped looking	29.7%	59.3%
Did nothing	27.0%	35.5%
Retaliated	16.1%	51.7%

Conclusion of study

The study found a higher proportion of female victims compared to males, but it is unclear if this is truly indicative of the gender split or a reflection of national help-seeking trends and related sampling bias.

Effective addressing cyber bullying relies on both increasing the help-seeking behaviour of victimised young people and improving the efficacy of those they speak to.

Human Values

The practice of the five human values, namely, truth, right conduct, non-violence, peace and love when surfing the internet would result in creating a safer environment for the participants.

The following are some suggestions on how the values may be incorporated:

One must practice discrimination when surfing the net. You cannot control information you post on the net, therefore you must not spread rumours, lies or gossip to hurt a person's reputation.

You must follow the rules and regulations regarding cyber safety at all times. Do not react when being bullied, instead you must respond to the situation. Do not post any information while you are emotional. Use 3HV (head, heart, hand) prior to responding.

Be disciplined and limit the hours spent online to the bare minimum.

It is not the quantity of friends you have but the quality of friends. Be true to yourself at all times.

Unlike face to face contact, the person you are communicating with cannot see your facial expression or detect your tone of voice, therefore humour can be easily misinterpreted.

Avoid the following practices and also encourage any of your peers to also stop :

- Flaming: Using inflammatory or vulgar words to provoke an online fight
- Harassment: Continually sending vicious, mean, or disturbing e-mails to an individual
- Denigration: Spreading rumours, lies or gossip to hurt a person's reputation
- Impersonation: Posting offensive or aggressive messages under another person's name
- Outing: Posting or sharing confidential or compromising information or images
- Trickery: Fooling someone into sharing personal information which you then post online
- Exclusion: Purposefully excluding someone from an online group
- Cyber stalking: Ongoing harassment and denigration that causes a person considerable fear for his/her safety

In conclusion, if you believe that you are being bullied in any form then you should:

- Tell a trusted adult about the bullying, and keep telling until the adult takes action.
- Don't open or read messages by cyber bullies.
- Tell your school if it is school related. Schools have a bullying solution in place.
- Don't erase the messages—they may be needed to take action.
- Protect yourself—never agree to meet with the person or with anyone you meet online.
- If bullied through chat or instant messaging, the "bully" can often be blocked.
- If you are threatened with harm, inform the local police.