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# **Managing Social Networks and Cyberbullying: Technology Guidelines for Parents and Teachers**

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## **Navigating the Risks: Guidelines for Parents**

It's a typical weekday evening for the Jenkins family. After dinner, Sophie is in her room doing homework. Television tuned to one of the entertainment channels and multiple windows open on her computer, she's completing her Calculus assignment online, body rocking to the percussion beat resounding from headphones. Concerned about a girl she can't stand who wants to be her "friend," she stops mid-problem to go to her Facebook page, but is interrupted by a text message from Joe. Even before she can respond, instant message alerts dart onto her computer screen. Giving up, she texts Ellie for the answer to the Calculus problem and responds to her messages while she waits.

Her parents peek in the room and shake their heads, wondering how she's able to complete her work while distracted by so many media. They know that she's tired most days and are concerned that her grades have dropped this tenth grade year, but attribute it to a competitive school volleyball season with several practices a week. They don't know that she's been sleeping with her smart phone under her pillow so that she and Joe can visit more personally during the night. To show him her commitment to their relationship, she gave him her password last week. He'll give her his new one as

soon as he has a chance to change it. He's been wanting private "face time" so that he can see how sexy she looks in bed, but she hasn't decided about that yet, although she knows that he won't show the pictures or videos to anyone. Her parents gone to bed, she changes her TV to a more "adult" channel he's mentioned. A great deal to think about for a fifteen-year-old.

Before it's too late, there are lots of things Sophie's parents need to do. Their concern about her ongoing tiredness is a wake-up call to their becoming more aware of the other factors in her world that are even more troubling. While earlier research focused primarily on high levels of fatigue in children who have televisions in their rooms, additional studies of thousands of youth have indicated that concerns about media use should not be limited to television alone (Van den Buick, 2004). Children who have access to computer games, and/or Internet connections in their rooms also go to bed far later each night and report significant levels of tiredness in the morning and after weekends.

Medina (2010) notes that children with their own televisions score an average of eight points lower on math and language arts tests than those in households with televisions in the family room. As child development columnist Katherine Lee (2012) notes, "Getting enough sleep can be challenging enough for busy kids today who often have homework and after-school activities crammed into their weekdays and extracurricular activities and sports on weekends. Add to that numerous hours of TV watching – which averages up to as much as 3 to 4 hours a day, according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry – and you have a recipe for sleep-deprivation in kids. Moreover, electronic stimulation, such as from watching TV or

using the computer, has been shown to interfere with sleep (both falling asleep and staying asleep) (para.3).” More sleep deprivation is added to the mix when teens such as Sophie keep their smart phones by their pillow at night. It’s difficult to fall back to sleep when you’re engaged in secretive and risky interactions with friends.

Of course, sleep is only one of many issues the Jenkins need to address. But they can improve Sophie’s health and personal safety by taking the first huge step that experts and common sense dictate: Remove all media from the child’s room. Only allow children to use media in open spaces in your home, so that you can supervise and monitor all activities. This includes televisions, smart phones, computers, gaming devices and other electronic equipment which provide both distractions and social network access. This isn’t to say that we’re prohibiting them from using these devices, but that we’re moving media to a location where adults can observe how children are involved at all times.

Before bedtime, all smart phones and other electronic hand-held devices should be collected and plugged into a charger overnight in the parents’ bedroom. It’s important to remember that many phones serve as mini-computers, and by restricting their use to open areas in the home or the parents’ room, you are both supervising and setting rules for their use. And if Sophie doesn’t have access to media in her room, then neither does Joe, and they are far less likely to engage in risky sexual behavior that can go viral with the click of a “Send” button.

As vice-chairman of the Texas Task Force to Reduce Child Abuse and Neglect, James Castro (2011) observed, “Children should never be allowed to surf the net in the privacy of their rooms or without a parent at home.” But with parents working and

“latchkey” kids spending a great deal of time on their own or at friends’ houses, this is very difficult to enforce. Yet, the significant outcomes of unsupervised children spending countless screen hours is important enough to make adults re-examine their childcare arrangements before and after school. When young people are engaged in an activity such as sports or the arts, they’re developing new skills in a healthy environment. Indeed, many campuses have YMCA after-school programs, and local daycare centers often provide their own transportation. Even teens who work after school should be involved in one or more campus activities in order to develop team and social skills, as well as intellectual challenges. Our job as a parent or educator is to be sure that youth participate in a myriad of experiences and not be left alone in a world that may be too adult for them to navigate successfully.

Castro (2011) also notes that parents should limit the time that children can play on a computer, setting a daily limit for its use. In establishing rules, it’s important to consider a time limit for the use of all media, including instant messaging, social network use, and Internet surfing. The amount of time can be in addition to that required to complete school homework assignments. And no child younger than 18 should be allowed to have a Facebook account without their parents as “friends” – or to use a level of “friends” that excludes parents.

Families in Boston, Cincinnati, and San Diego indicated improved relationships when rules were openly discussed and agreed upon for watching TV, computer usage, and the total number of screen time minutes allowed. Understandably, teens indicated that when a TV or video game system was in their bedroom, they spent markedly more time involved in screen activities. Without the media available and with follow-up rule

enforcement restricting usage, they noted a highly significant reduction in watching TV, playing video or computer games, and using the Internet and/or computer for entertainment (Ramirez, et al., 2011).

We all know that Sophie will be outraged when her media are moved to the family room and restrictions are placed on her screen time. “You don’t trust me!” she’ll likely shout. “How embarrassing to tell my friends that I live in a prison! Nobody else has to do this!!!” It’s important to protect her from negative comments from peers whose families don’t set these rules. That’s why parents and children need to discuss and participate in joint decision-making before the issues arrive or escalate into a power struggle. Adult safety needs can be satisfied by setting non-negotiable rules such as placing all technology in a public area and portable devices in the charger in the parents’ bedroom overnight. Yet, allowing Sophie to decide personally significant issues such as which hours before bedtime are best for her to contact friends will give her the ability to be included in her friendship circle and avoid the painful repercussions she anticipates.

But it’s never been popular to be a parent, and despite their upset we have to do what’s best for children’s long-term welfare. Joe isn’t thinking about Sophie’s needs, and being naïve of the possible consequences of their “private time,” she’s on the cusp of having some impossible-to-erase photos forwarded to his friends and possibly their entire social group, ruining her reputation and creating a firestorm she’ll never be able to undo. Additionally, with her password, he has full access to all her personal material, creating numerous potential problems if they have an argument or break up. To protect access to the family’s financial data, credit card and social security numbers, adults

should use separate passwords to which only they have access. If it's a shared computer, it's important to always close programs when finished and to clear caches and erase any history of previous surfing.

## **Critical Issues to Discuss with Children**

While we've always been uncertain about best ways to discuss sex with children, it's clear that the need for openness and frankness is even greater today. The "birds and bees" conversations of past generations need to be intensified greatly in an age where children are bombarded by media-based sexual images and acts from a very young age. There is no longer a real family hour, as adults on TV are the only ones in bed at 8 p.m. Unfortunately, their bedroom is our living room and the children are watching – very closely and with great interest. Since hundreds of channels allow easy access 24/7 to sex and violence, and with computer games and social networks embracing graphic and reality images, it's important for parents to set limits and establish rules for children from very early ages.

"Net Cetera" (2009) was published by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission to enhance computer security, guard against Internet fraud, and protect online privacy. It recommends a number of critical concerns that parents need to discuss with their younger children and teens. Of tremendous importance is the constant reminder that once information is posted on-line, it's available to others forever and it can't be taken back. Rather than lecturing about predators, parents can increase children's understanding by working together to create a list of what should remain private, such as personal information about themselves, family members, and friends: No discussion of ages, appearances, street or email addresses, phone numbers, or any contact

information or social security numbers. They should also discuss never giving out family financial information, such as bank accounts or credit card numbers, and stress the importance of passwords as extremely private and not to be shared outside the home.

At the top of this list is avoidance of sexual comments and images. Parents such as the Jenkins need to have ongoing conversations about never discussing anything sexual on-line, even with closest friends. Sophie and her peers are focused on the immediate and can't understand how a simple comment can attract predators, might be shared immediately with those who aren't her "friends," and could permanently damage her reputation or become part of her file when later read by college admissions committees and potential employers. Parents need to advise that before sending a text message, she should always consider how it might be interpreted by someone else and the impression she is giving others about herself. And she needs to carefully review who's on the message address list before using that "Reply All" key.

Smallbone (2012) describes a high school newspaper staff that created a fake Facebook profile for a student at their school. Within two weeks, this fictional student had acquired 345 "friends" on campus, none of whom knew that this person didn't really exist. Only 37 students rejected the friend request, while 8 others actually initiated a request for this fictional person to become a friend. Ninety percent of these students had accepted a friend request from a stranger (cited in Leeds, 2012).

As Head of Lower and Middle Schools at The Winston School San Antonio, Louise Pastorino constantly tells students to think carefully before they send any message: "If I wouldn't say it or show it to my mother, I shouldn't write it down or send it



out.” Lacking full understanding of consequences, she adds that young children and teens may view social networks as interactive games, not appreciating the full impact of the information they share publically. She adds that they often can become competitive about the number of “friends” they have on networks such as Facebook, equating them with popularity.

She advises teaching children what a true friend is in comparison with a Facebook “friend” and limiting children’s online “friends” to people they actually know and like. Yet, even within this comfortable circle friendships can change, and as peers become upset with each other the press of a finger can send private information viral and make it very public (L. Pastorino, personal communication, February 21, 2012).

### **Rules for Internet Safety**

It’s important for adults to openly tell kids never to risk “sexting” (sending or forwarding sexually explicit written messages, photos, or videos). Let them know that in addition to losing friends and ruining their own or someone else’s reputation, they may be breaking the law if they create, forward, or even save this kind of message. Attorney Donna McElroy provides “Five Rules before *SEND*”:

“1. Nothing you send or post will remain private: 40% of teens and young adults say they received a sexually suggestive message meant to be private, and 50% of those admitted that they shared the message.

“2. No changing your mind in cyberspace: Anything you say or post may never go away.

“3. Don’t give in to the pressure: 47% of teens said they received ‘pressure from guys,’ and 24% of teens said they received ‘pressure from friends.’

“4. Consider the recipient’s reaction: 4 of 10 teen girls thought it was sent as a joke; 29% of teen guys said that if you send such content, they expect that you will ‘hook up or date in real life.’

“5. Nothing is truly anonymous. Even if someone only knows you by screen name, online profile, phone number or email address, they can probably find you if they try hard enough.” (Proceedings from the Winston School San Antonio Symposium, 2012).

While these ongoing discussions are critical, as every parent knows, they’ll have to do more than just warn children in order to assure their safety. Smart phones have become pocket computers carried everywhere, so we have to exert some controls over their use when children are away and vulnerable. Parents can limit access to certain sites, words, or images on websites, email, chat rooms, and instant messaging by filtering and blocking outgoing or incoming content. They can have access to information when their child’s name or address appears online, and can also can limit the amount of time spent online and set the time of day for Internet access. Specific online tools and additional recommendations for parental monitoring appear on [www.onguardonline.gov](http://www.onguardonline.gov), an excellent source of ongoing support in dealing with social network issues.

Effectively finding ways to shut parents out, many children have developed work-arounds for their personal computer use. Nothing can replace parents’ daily involvement. Adults need to constantly review and monitor children’s contacts on social media as well as to review text and email messages. To respond to children’s concerns about their lack of privacy, when developing technology rules with their children, parents

should be honest and openly state that to avoid potential dangers, they maintain the right to read all texts, emails, and social media messages across sites. A child who is old enough to have a Facebook page should have a parent on it who is a true friend with total access.

The key to keeping an honest conversation open in the household is not to lecture, but to discuss these points with children, creating an atmosphere where if they regret a mistake such as sending out private information, they're not afraid to tell us and ask our help. Nowhere is this issue more critical than with Cyberbullying.

### **The Pain of Cyberbullying**

Sophie has just received another phone call from Mia, in tears over the vicious and untrue comments about her sent out to classmates again. She knows where they've started: It's the ever-popular Janie and her circle of with-it friends. They've made Mia's life miserable all year by continual on-line mocking of her appearance, from her "disgusting face" to her "barrio clothes." Last month, as a joke, they posted a photo of their homeroom class and "photo-shopped" her out of the picture. Now they're going viral.

"They've gotten into my Facebook page, Sophie! Somebody posted comments I never made about me wanting to hook up with Ben – and they put it on my site as if I wrote it. They said that now that I'm done having sex with that loser Chris, I'm ready to move on. You know I've never had anything to do with Chris, and Ben hooks up with anybody around. They're making me a tramp! It looks so real, and my parents won't understand how this can happen, so they'll blame me. I don't know what to do...." And then she just cried.

Unable to understand why Janie and her circle of friends harass her all the time, Mia's life has been a personal hell ever since her family arrived from Guatemala a few years ago. But Sophie sees what's going on here. Mia is smart and pretty, but awkward socially in a different country where she doesn't understand high school social rules. Newly relocated, her parents are working class and don't have the money to buy expensive clothes like Janie's family. Sadly, they used some of their hard-earned money to buy a computer so that their children could be successful in school and to improve their English. Now it's become a torment for their daughter.

While Mia's English is really good, she speaks with a strong accent and is easily embarrassed if she feels she's not saying something correctly. She's quiet and timidly keeps to herself, but the boys have become very interested in her. She doesn't know how to handle their advances and normally just talks to them and walks away. Janie is threatened by their attention to Mia and has retaliated using sophisticated computer skills. She also has a group of followers who think her status rubs off on them, so she's encouraged them to participate in the cyber-gossip as well.

While they aren't close friends, Sophie understands why Mia has come to her for help. Like everyone, Sophie used to look up to Janie, but was furious earlier this year when the "in-group" started making fun of Andy, Sophie's younger brother. They actually posted lies about Andy on-line, making up comments involving his name-calling of gang members and attributing to him things that he would never say. When several huge guys pushed him to the ground after school one day, screaming "gay" and "homo" in the courtyard, he was defenseless. Sophie told Janie to make it stop. Janie just

shrugged and laughed, saying “Wake up! It’s probably true.” Understanding for the first time the incredible pain potential of hate crimes, Sophie never spoke to her again,

When Andy dropped out of activities and began retreating to his room for days at a time, Sophie joined the PALS group at school. While there was no national model that seemed to meet their unique campus needs, this program was developed at Sophie’s school to underscore the philosophy of active student involvement as critical to a zero-tolerance attitude. (Even the acronym, “PALS,” received much discussion and a school-wide vote, with supporters feeling that the goal to “Protect and Lead Students” was important to the elimination of all physical, psychological, and cyber-bullying on their campus.) To gain peer awareness and support, members have been fund-raising to provide PALS t-shirts for all interested students.

Administrators decided that PALS should be led by a trained teacher-coordinator who educates student members on how to respond to complaints about being harassed physically, verbally, or online. As peers are more likely to contact each other than an adult, student involvement plays a critical role. When a PALS’ Partner (student member) is contacted with a complaint, he or she discusses it with the classmate in order to gather background information and then forwards the grievance to an adult committee comprised of the coordinator, school counselor, and assistant principal. They decide the appropriate intervention. When there is a clear case of students using any type of bullying, the offending students and their parents are contacted and appropriate consequences determined, ranging from counseling to punishment, including suspension.

After receiving training as a PALS Partner, Sophie coaxed Andy to join as well so that he could see that Janie's online misrepresentations weren't really about him at all, but from her need to exert status and power over others. Through PALS, Andy was encouraged to return to the school band, where he plays saxophone. The teacher-coordinator spoke to the head of the Jazz band who visited with Andy and asked him to join their group as well. Now, instead of rushing home and heading to his bedroom each day, he's busy after school at practices and is expanding his peer group to those who appreciate his musical skills. He's learned not to respond to online negative postings of any kind, but to save them and give them directly to PALS. The boys who attacked him at school have been identified and suspended. Clever enough to remain anonymous, Janie has escaped punishment so far. But Andy's lack of response to her online harassment has cooled her fervor and she's moved on to other targets. Like Mia.

School administrators at Sophie's school are aware of the wide-spread problem on their campus and that some students, such as Janie, continue to escape detection. Realizing that bullying of any kind may go unreported to PALS due to fear of retaliation, school administrators are considering adding an on-line reporting system similar to the award-winning one developed by 15 New Haven teens in Adam Scott's research design and development class at magnet school Metropolitan Business Academy (Bailey, 2012). Students there created an app, "BOB" (for "Back off, Bully"), that works on any cell phone, tablet, or computer with Internet access. A student who witnesses or is the victim of campus bullying files an anonymous report to school administrators with a simple touch of the finger, adding details about the incident, such as the time, location, and method. Reports go immediately to an administrative data base so that educators

can intervene in future incidents and break the bully's pattern. Additional selections on the BOB app allow students to get personal support by making an appointment with the school counselor and to further educate themselves by reading a section about the nature of bullying.

## **The Cyberbullying Tide**

Sophie and her friends are at an "in-between" point in their understanding of technology use. Despite her participation in PALS, Sophie still can't fully grasp the possible consequences of her own online intimacy with her boyfriend. Yet, she's a kind person from a caring family and realizes the pain that Mia, Andy, and others experience from abuse by students like Janie. While she and her peers may be naïve about the long-term personal and legal implications of Internet postings, they realize that media can hurt others and are empathetic and angry when it's used as a weapon on friends and family.

Many adults are still trying to grasp the breadth and types of cyberbullying, since it's foreign to their own childhood experiences. The bullying we most often discuss involves direct physical and verbal abuse where more powerful students target others repeatedly, often as an attempt to gain attention and respect from peers. Cyberbullying incorporates technology to expand bullying to twenty-four hours a day and beyond the confines of school and local neighborhood. It's a type of harassment that occurs online through texts and other instant messaging, emails, slanderous personal and contrived websites, online polling sites and digital photography, with the intent of embarrassment, intimidation, and humiliation of the victim (Leeds, 2012. For complete data, see <http://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/what-is-it/index.html>).

The bully involved in physical attacks gets power from status, often based on size and strength. Cyberbullies don't need physical strength, but rely instead on their use of technology and the anonymity it provides. Since it's easier to reach more people by spreading unproven gossip than it is to physically attack someone, the cyberbully is more powerful and often escapes punishment while leaving a permanent scar on the victim's reputation. Once posted, a vicious comment usually is there forever. Indeed, it can be in the "cloud" above us for the rest of our lives.

Most often, cyberbullying takes place in the privacy of a home or setting that removes the bully from face-to-face contact with the victim. Sometimes it occurs at a sleepover, where everyone "jokes" about another student. With group encouragement, they post their gossip and ugly comments online, feeling protected and safe in the midst of encouragement by their close-knit group and not realizing the terrible long-term damage they're inflicting or that their comments are irretrievable. Conflict Management Mediator and Trainer Margaret Leeds writes, "They don't 'see' the harm they have caused or the consequences of their actions, which minimizes any feelings of remorse or empathy. This creates a situation where kids do and say things on the Internet that they would be much less likely to do in person (2012)." (For more extensive discussion, see <http://internetsafetytips.pbworks.com/w/page/20093276/Cyberbullying%20-%20Middle%20School>)

Like Janie, peers may intimidate to increase their esteem and sense of power by being mean to others, especially students like Mia, whom they feel may pose a threat or are different in some way. Power here is all on the bully's side: Janie has status, money, numbers of supporters, and is from her peers' dominant ethnic culture. As a



newcomer who doesn't understand the system, Mia doesn't stand a chance without assistance from classmates and adults.

While Mia feels helpless, other student targets may seek to gain more power by retaliating online, resulting in an escalation of cyber-aggression from both sides. Some victims respond in kind by creating their own websites and posting threatening and angry online responses. The repetition of Columbine shooting attempts on numerous school campuses underscores the violence that can occur when students are continuously mocked and humiliated by peers and finally seek revenge. Seventy-one percent of school shooters reported being bullied, threatened, attacked, or persecuted (Safe School Initiative, 2002).

It's important for adults to realize that while bullies have always existed, they are not a natural part of childhood, and their behavior cannot be excused or tolerated. Because of its anonymity and frequent lack of punishment, cyberbullying takes us all to the next level of aggression. Within seconds to minutes, slanderous postings can be read by hundreds of students on a campus. Indeed, many bystanders view them as a soap opera, attending closely to the mean-spirited comments volleyed back and forth so that they can determine a "winner." Janie revels in this attention and peers may decide to join her or use her as a model in order to have their own time in the spotlight. It becomes another computer game, but with very dangerous consequences.

Other victims don't react outwardly, but inwardly instead, withdrawing as Andy did to avoid attention and further taunting. Yet, while we encourage students not to respond, we can't ignore the situation. Adults must react quickly and powerfully. Smallbone (2012) elaborated the results of bullying on its victims: Short-term effects

include lowered self-esteem, depression, illness, and absenteeism. Long-term effects are extreme depression, withdrawal, and self-destructive behaviors including suicide (cited in Leeds, 2012; For a more extensive discussion of bullying, see [http://www.creducation.org/resources/bullying\\_prevention/index.html](http://www.creducation.org/resources/bullying_prevention/index.html))

Tragically, we're seeing growing numbers of "bullycide," where teens take their own lives as a result of bullying. Feeling powerless and unable to visualize a future without harassment and humiliation, they try to escape, leaving behind grief-stricken families and friends who ask "What could we have done?"

## **Ways to Stop Cyberbullying**

Along with Sophie and Mia, there's actually a great deal that all of us can do. The most important thing is to let the bullied child know that he or she matters. Both Mia and Andy need family and real friends right now to convince them that what is being said about them is untrue and that they can re-take control of their lives and reputations. Researchers have indicated that an effective way to stop bullying quickly is to intervene on the part of the victim (Netcetera, 2009). Since bullies thrive on approval and want a reaction from others, the best way to respond is through a non-response, by encouraging peers to isolate them and not join in their harmful activities. Groups like PALS have developed in schools across the country as adults fight a battle to have children understand the impact of their behavior and to pull supporters away from influence of Janie and other cyberbullies.

Based on effective methods to help students respond to cyberbullying, Net Cetera (2009) includes recommendations for parents and educators to share with children:

- If you see cyberbullying on-line, don't engage in it or forward messages. Never post anything on "slam sites," where you make judgments or criticisms of another person.
- Tell the cyberbully to stop. Join together with classmates and let bullies know that they're losing campus respect because of cruelty.
- Let the victim know that you realize the slanderous comments are not true.
- Tell parents and school counselors if an online message or picture makes you or someone else feel badly or threatened. Only one-third of victims report cyberbullying to any adult (McElroy, 2012). Children have to feel that adults will help them and not discipline them for reports of online provocations.
- If the child is the victim, he/she should not respond, as cyberbullies are looking for a reaction from their target. The victim should save the message and share it with parents, school officials, or the police.
- If a social profile has been created or changed without permission, contact the company that runs the site and have it removed. Adults should assist where needed or this process can seem overwhelming.
- Delete or block cyberbullies' names and addresses from any IM or online service that requires "friends" or a "buddy" list.

Since bullying of any kind impacts children's personal well-being and academic performance, Louise Pastorino (personal communication, February 21, 2012) adds the following recommendations for parents:

- Modeling and teaching responsibility are far more effective than just monitoring behavior. Talk to your children and listen to the pressures they're experiencing in order to help them determine how to respond.
- Teach empathy: "How would you feel if someone said that about you?"
- Educate children about how nothing is ever really "erased" once it's posted to the internet and what the repercussions could be when applying to college and for jobs.
- Attack the popular myth that if something is posted on the Internet, it must be true.
- Communicate with the school to let them know what's been happening.
- Contact other parents, especially those of your children's friends, so that you can jointly supervise children's online behaviors when they're together at someone's home.
- Ask other parents how they monitor on-line activity and texting. Discuss how to set reasonable expectations and limits for children.
- Review laws on child pornography and defamation and discuss them in order to prevent legal repercussions. Teens have been arrested for "sexting" with underage students at their school. No sexual pictures should be stored or forwarded or students may face criminal charges.

If your child is the victim, depending on the situation, Pastorino suggests that adults can

- Call the parent of the offending child or children.
- Tell the school administration and counselor.
- When criminal activity occurs, report actions to local law enforcement.
- Find alternative groups of friends for children. Get them involved in sports, youth groups, clubs, and with peers who share common interests.
- If cyberbullying continues, the last resort is to request a transfer to another school.

Fearing reprisals from peers, many students will still hesitate about talking to adults. Importantly, schools need to provide a way that students can report cyberbullying directly to the counselor or school administration (McElroy, 2012). Some schools have appointed an adult to handle charges of bullying, and students can contact them anonymously through a note or, hopefully, by conversation based on trust. When organizations such as PALS exist to stop all types of school bullying, students can contact a peer member. As a student participant, Sophie needs to take Mia's concerns forward to the adult in charge. While painful, Mia needs to save Janie's postings so that adults can review them. Typically, this will result in Janie's parents being contacted and follow-up rules and restrictions being set for her online behavior.

However, while they can restrict the use of district Internet services on campus and can set rules for daytime smart phone use, schools cannot be held responsible for children's online behaviors off-campus and after-hours. That role has to be assumed by parents. While Janie's family may at first deny her involvement and look to place blame

elsewhere, if the messages can be traced to her, the evidence will be there. At a school meeting, her parents may be embarrassed and deny the need to monitor her Internet use. Once home again, likely they'll become more vigilant and look for signs such as her creating cruel comments or photos about others, resulting in their more carefully monitoring her messages and sites in the future.

Since Internet harassment is forwarded so quickly to so many students, it may be difficult to decide which other students in Janie's circle are also involved. Mia should be invited to join the PALS group to help her learn ways to talk to her parents about what's been happening and to provide her and her family an understanding of how to best respond. The counselor should also suggest other school organizations where she can develop a healthy peer group of friends who like and support her. Since she may be reticent to explore these groups on their own, the counselor can ask the organization teacher sponsors to contact Mia directly and invite her to join. Her teachers should also be part of the discussion so they can be vigilant for signs of depression or further harassment by any students during classes, hallway time, and lunch.

Educators can help prevent bullying of any kind through vigilance and informal observations on campus, but especially through understanding the types of students who are most likely to be bullied. Some are passive children, appearing quiet, anxious, and insecure. Others are more provocative and may appear impulsive and irritating to be around as a result of hyperactivity or difficulty concentrating. They may try to fight back at bullies, but do so ineffectively and may post things online that encourage peers to laugh at or further humiliate them. McElroy (2012) reports research showing that approximately 65 percent of bullied students are harassed because of their appearance

or speech and students with special education needs are more likely to be continuously cyberbullied over an extended period of time. Educators need to note these students early and engage them in activities to encourage appropriate social and classroom behaviors while simultaneously observing student interactions and responding immediately to any negative behaviors.

Peers can be educated through anti-bullying programs, and there has to be a zero-tolerance on every campus for any student demonstrating mean-spirited or unkind behavior, both in person and online. Since serious behavioral problems have become so widespread, at times it's easy for educators to become immune, choosing to respond only to the most violently threatening and at times to ignore the rest.

At a school meeting, a teacher reported that she was so pleased that one student had “only” called another “a nerd” that week. “If you could hear what he normally calls him, this would be a step up,” she observed. Appropriately, the other teachers were horrified and reminded her that no disparaging name is ever acceptable. The teacher needed to feel what it would be like to wear the victim's shoes for just one day.

While these issues of cyberbullying and inappropriate use of social media cause upset for many adults and children, it's important to remember that the impact of technology is only as powerful as we allow it to be in our personal lives, homes, and schools. Using media to support us while not letting it control us is an important goal for families and educators. Consistent monitoring, along with our modeling respect for ourselves and others, will not only lessen misuse, but guide our children toward reaching their potential with technology's positive support. To do nothing is unacceptable.

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