

## Why Prevention Must Begin In The Classroom

The National Crime Prevention Council estimates that 43 percent of teens ages 13 to 18 have been victims of cyberbullying in the last year. That statistic translates to between 6.9 and 8.7 million American teens. If you throw in pre-teens and tweens, the number almost doubles to 13 million.

That's 13 million students who should be focusing on their education, but are worried about digital whispers and Internet hearsay.

**Cyberbullying is more than a nuisance when it prevents a child from learning.**

Despite this alarming trend, 58 percent of teens say they've never told their parents or any other adult about the harassment.

Why not? Because victims of cyberbullying are put in a precarious position. On one hand, they long for the harassment to end. On the other hand, they fear over-reaction from adults, resulting in the loss of access to their digital world. Anxiety over breaking a "code of silence" and making the harassment worse only compounds the problem.

We cannot count on cyberbullying victims to speak up. We must open the lines of communication. Teachers and counselors. Coaches and administrators. It's up to us.

Cyberbullying prevention must begin in the classroom.

Here's how to start:

- Educate your staff, students and families about cyberbullying. Use open house nights and PTA meetings. Use report cards and e-mails.
- Update and post anti-bullying policies to address cyberbullying in a prominent place.

- Use filtering and tracking software on all computers and identify staff with permission to override the filters.
- Closely monitor students' use of computers at school. Even seemingly benign sites can offer a platform for harassment.
- Investigate any and all reports of cyberbullying immediately. Learn the facts and report.
- Take action if cyberbullying occurs through the school district's Internet system. Remember, you are liable for damages if you don't.
- Notify parents of victims and parents of known or suspected cyberbullies. Your combined efforts could help heal the wounds and curb bad behavior.
- Notify the police if the known or suspected cyberbullying involves a threat. In today's culture of school violence, take nothing lightly.
- Closely monitor the behavior of cyberbullying victims. Repressed anger can become dangerous.
- Investigate to see if the victim of cyberbullying could use support from a counselor or mental health professional.

Most importantly, advocate the establishment of a standards-based curriculum on cyberbullying and on-line anti-social behavior. In today's technology-driven world, creating good Internet habits, teaching positive and productive uses for the Web and preempting negative behavior are as essential among today's educational priorities as any social science.