Los Angeles Unified School District
Office of Human Relations, Diversity and Equity
School Operations

CYBER-BULLYING
What Parents and Students Should Know

What is Cyberbullying?

Online bullying, called cyberbullying or electronic bullying, occurs when a person uses electronic communication technology, such as the Internet, cell phones, or other devices, to embarrass, humiliate, threaten, or intimidate another person. Sending sexually explicit images, even consensually, may be considered as distribution of child pornography, which is a felony. CA Ed. Code § 32261.

Cyberbullying is a problem that affects almost half of all American teens. Whether you've been a target of cyberbullying, know someone who has been cyberbullied, or have even cyberbullied yourself, there are steps you can take to stop cyberbullying, and keep you and your children cyber-safe.

Is cyberbullying a suspendable offense even if the cyberbullying occurred away from school?

YES, under certain circumstances it can be. Effective January 01, 2009, CA Ed. Code § 48900(r) states that bullying can be a suspendable offense with the possibility of expulsion for *engaging in an act of bullying, including, but not limited to bullying committed by means of an electronic act, as defined in subdivisions (f) and (g) of* CA Ed. Code § 32261.

Are students protected under the First Amendment, Freedom of Speech?

NO, not always. Students do have the right to express contrary or unfavorable opinions, but according to case law, *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, 393 U.S. 503, (1969),* the U.S. Supreme Court held that students' freedom of speech could be restricted when the speech "materially disrupts class work or involves substantial disorder or invasion of the rights of others".

In *Bethel School District No. 403 v. Fraser, 478 U.S. 675 (1986),* the court held that a high school student whose campaign speech for student government included "obscene, profane language or gestures" could be punished.

In *Hazelwood School District v. Kulmeier, 484 U.S. 260 (1988),* the Supreme Court allowed school censorship of a school-sponsored newspaper because it was "reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns".

CA Ed. Code § 48907 allows schools to restrict on-campus student expression which is obscene, libelous, or slanderous. Also prohibited is material which so incites students as to create a clear and present danger of the commission of unlawful acts on school premises or the violation of lawful school regulations, or the substantial disruption of the orderly operation of the school.

How are students cyberbullied?

Some people who cyberbully:

- Conceal their true identity by assuming an alias
- Spread lies and rumors about the targets
- Trick people into revealing their personal information
- Send or forward mean text messages
- Post pictures or distorted images of the target without his or her consent

When youth were asked why people cyberbully, 81 percent said that cyberbullies think it's funny. Other youth believe that those who cyberbully:

- Don't think it's a big deal
- Don't think about the consequences
- Are encouraged by friends
- Think everybody cyberbullies
- Think they won't get caught

How do targets react?

Contrary to what cyberbullies may believe, cyberbullying is a big deal, and can cause a variety of reactions in youth. Being a target of cyberbullying can be a painful experience. Youth who have been targets of cyberbullying may experience a variety of emotions. They may feel angry, hurt, embarrassed, or scared. Targets to react in ways such as:

- Feeling publically humiliated

- Feeling anxiety and distrust, not knowing the true identity of the bully
- To seek revenge on the bully
- To be reluctant to use the computer or other electronic devices
- Avoid discussion about what they are doing on the computer, or other electronic devices
- Feeling nervous or jumpy when receiving an email, IM or text message
- Displaying unusual anger, sadness, and depression after using the computer or electronic device
- Exit or click out of whatever they are doing, if someone walks by
- Having trouble sleeping or have other sleeping disturbances
- Decline in school homework or grades
- Have an unusual interest in self-harm or in suicide
- Exhibit unusual mood swings
- Not feeling well, headaches, upset stomach
- Become withdrawn, anti-social and/or is losing friends
- Not want to be involved in family or school activities

Signs a child may be cyberbullying others

- He or she uses numerous online accounts or accounts that are not theirs
- Laughs excessively when using the computer or electronic device
- May avoid discussion or conversations regarding online activities
- May close or click out whatever he or she is doing when someone walks past
- May use the computer frequently, especially at night
- May become upset if computer access or other electronic device is restricted

Although cyberbullies may think they are anonymous, their identity can be discovered. If you are cyberbullied or harassed and need help, save all communication with the cyberbully and talk to a parent, teacher, law enforcement officer, or other adult you trust.

How can students prevent or respond to cyberbullying?

Some youth have reacted in positive ways to try to prevent cyberbullying by:

- Blocking communication with the cyberbully
- Deleting messages without reading them
- Talking to a friend about the bullying
- Reporting the problem to an Internet service provider or website moderator

Youth can prevent cyberbullying in the following ways:

- Refuse to pass along cyberbullying messages
- Tell friends to stop cyberbullying

- Block communication with cyberbullies
- Report cyberbullying to a trusted adult
- Guard your identifying information (name, sex, age, address, school, teams).
- Make your username and on-line profile generic and anonymous
- Never post or share your personal information online (this includes your full name, address, telephone number, school name, parents' names, credit card number, or Social Security number) or your friends' personal information
- Never share your Internet passwords with anyone
- Never meet anyone face-to-face whom you only know online
- Talk to your parents about what you do online
- Know how to exit inappropriate websites
- Delete attachments from strangers as they can have Viruses and Worms
- Refrain from sending pictures to an internet friend as posting your pictures gives hackers the chance to change your picture and make fun of you.
- Remember that chat room "friends" are not always who they say they are.
- Speak with other students, as well as teachers and school administrators, to develop rules against cyberbullying
- Raise awareness of the cyberbullying problem in your community by holding an assembly and creating fliers to give to younger kids or parents

Don't forget: even though you can't see a cyberbully or the target, cyberbullying causes real problems.

If you wouldn't say it in person, don't say it online. Delete cyberbullying. Don't write it. Don't forward it.

How can parents prevent cyberbullying?

This is the first generation of children to grow up with the internet. Technology increases the advantages children and youth may have. It does not change how you parent your child. The rules may have changed with the internet, but parents are still making the rules. Whether or not parents are savvy with the internet, these tips are easy to understand, follow, and implement.

- Keep your child's computer in an open area. Never allow a computer with the internet access in your child's bedroom.
- Communicate. There is no better tool.
- Become part of your child's online experience. If your child participates in cyber social networking site, e.g., FaceBook, MySpace, Yahoo groups, insist that you be a "friend" or member of that group.
- Respect your child's privacy.
- Regularly review your computer files.
- Teach your child the responsible use of online resources.

- Talk to your child about online dangers. Let them know you are there to help them get out of a bad situation.
- Educate yourself about the internet.
- Talk to other parents about your experience.
- Let your child know that responsible adults do not pursue relationships with minors.

When should law enforcement get involved?

It is not always easy to tell the difference between flaming, cyber-bullying, harassment and cyberstalking, but often "you know it when you see it." Law enforcement may consider the frequency, nature, intention and severity of the incidents, in addition to the ages of both the targets and perpetrators in determining if a law has been broken.

Contact law enforcement if:

- **The threats are severe and specific.**
  - The communication threatens your child with bodily harm or death. (I'm going to beat you up!" or "I'm going to kill you!")
  - There is a general serious threat. ("There is a bomb in the school!" or "Don't take the school bus today!")
- **The threats are escalating in frequency and/or severity.**
- **The nature of the threat**
  - To humiliate or terrorize your child
  - Identity theft, posing as your child, breaking into accounts, building false and humiliating web profiles, signing up for porn sites.
  - Sexual in nature, you suspect this person may be a sexual predator.
- **It doesn't matter whether you know who the sender is. If the situation is serious, contact law enforcement.**

The more repeated the communications are, (or enlarging this to include third-parties) the greater the threat, and the more dangerous the methods, the more likely law enforcement or legal process needs to be used. If personal contact information is being shared online, this must be treated very seriously.

If the child thinks they know who is doing this, that may either make this more serious, or less. But once third-parties are involved (e.g., hate groups, sexually-deviant groups) cyberbullying can escalate quickly and become dangerous.

Be familiar with your local law enforcement agency to request support. The Los Angeles School Police Department may be contacted at (213) 625-6631. They know the appropriate steps to take, especially regarding preserving the evidence.

4 R's of CyberSafety

- **Recognize** the various forms of cyberbullying and techniques used by online cyberbullies and predators.
- **Refuse** requests to provide personal information.
- **Respond** assertively, print a copy of the material for evidence, log off or turn off the computer.
- **Report** to a trusted adult any suspicious or dangerous content that makes you feel uncomfortable, school administrator or contact law enforcement.

For more information

You may contact your child's school for support and there are a variety of resources available on the following websites:

Check out the following resources to learn more about preventing cyberbullying:

- www.ncpc.org provides information about stopping cyberbullying before it starts.
- Stop Cyberbullying Before It Starts (PDF) provides useful information for parents.
- Cyberbullying.us provides cyberbullying research, stories, cases, downloads, fact sheets, tips and strategies, news headlines, a blog, and a number of other helpful resources on their comprehensive public service website.
- www.stopcyberbullying.org has a fun quiz to rate your online behavior, information about why some people cyberbully, and how to stop yourself from cyberbullying.
- www.wiredsafety.com provides information about what to do if you are cyberbullied.
- www.stopbullyingnow.com has information about what you can do to stop bullying.
- www.Internet.suite.101.com offers helpful information for parents.

All statistics from the 2006 Harris Interactive *Cyberbullying Research Report,* commissioned by the National Crime Prevention Council.