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Cyber Bullying: What You Need To Know To Keep Your Family Safe

From the Desk of CPT Jeff Elliott, Oklahoma Office of Homeland Security

The Internet allows instantaneous connections with people from across the street or across the world. Because of the perceived anonymous nature of communicating online, however, some individuals use the Internet as a medium to communicate in inappropriate, harmful, and even threatening ways. A growing concern has been the use of the Internet to "bully" or harass someone, which is called cyber bullying. While the activity affects both adults and children, this newsletter will focus on the impact to children and what steps can be taken to protect them.

Online Bullying

While both traditional "offline" bullying and cyber bullying can have serious negative impacts on the victim, cyber bullying has its own special concerns:

- Cyber bullying allows a level of anonymity. Children who would never say certain things in person can now make attacks or threats anonymously. A bully can more easily hide their identity or use an alias to trick their victims into thinking they are someone else.
- Cyber bullying eliminates the safe haven of "home." Children used to be able to retreat to safety of their home to escape traditional "offline" bullying, but in the always-connected world of today that is not always the case. Physical walls cannot block text messages, instant messages, social networks, emails and other forms of instantaneous communication. The constant barrage of attacks can greatly increase the stress on a victim of cyber bullying.
- Cyber bullying attacks can have a greatly magnified audience and a permanent impact. With the click of a button, embarrassing images, sensitive information, or even misinformation can be sent to hundreds, thousands, even millions of people. This greatly increases the potential damage one instance of cyber bullying can have. Once something is made public on the Internet it can be impossible to remove it, leaving a legacy of the event that can haunt an individual for years.

What can you do to protect your child?

- Talk to your child about cyber bullying. Make sure you keep an open dialogue so he/she feels comfortable coming to you with any issues.
- Be familiar with your child's interactions with friends and others. While cyber bullying can be caused by a random person (and thus difficult to prepare for) trouble with friends and others in your child's social circle can also lead to cyber bullying.
- Teach your child not to respond to cyber bullies. Bullies enjoy the response; by not responding, that may encourage them to move on.
- Limit the amount of information your child shares online. Bullies can use multiple methods of communication to taunt or harass; by limiting your child's exposure, you make it easier to limit a bully's access. This may also limit the chance of a random cyber-bullying incident.
- If the bullying is a problem, consider closing down the particular point of access, if possible. Email, instant message accounts and even some phone companies allow you to block specific user names or phone numbers. Most companies will even let you change cell phone numbers, email addresses and instant message accounts if needed.

- If your children are being harassed or threatened, report the activity. Many schools have instituted bullying programs, so school officials may have established policies for handling incidents. If necessary, contact your local law enforcement-- your local police department or FBI branch are good starting points.

Resources for More Information:

National Cyber Security Alliance, Cyber Bullying and Harassment
www.staysafeonline.org/in-the-home/cyberbullying-and-harassment

Stop Cyberbullying
www.stopcyberbullying.org/index2.html

Cyberbullying Research Center
www.cyberbullying.us/

US-CERT tip, Dealing with Cyberbullies
www.us-cert.gov/cas/tips/ST06-005.html

MS-ISAC Newsletter, Protecting Children Online
http://msisac.cisecurity.org/newsletters/2010-08.cfm

For more monthly cyber security newsletter tips, visit:
www.msisac.org/awareness/news/

The information provided in the Monthly Security Tips Newsletters is intended to increase the security awareness of an organization's end users and to help them behave in a more secure manner within their work environment. While some of the tips may relate to maintaining a home computer, the increased awareness is intended to help improve the organization's overall cyber security posture. This is especially critical if employees access their work network from their home computer. ***Organizations have permission and are encouraged to brand and redistribute this newsletter in whole for educational, non-commercial purposes.***

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