

Facebook, a Hot Spot for Cyber-bullying Tips for Parents and Students

If your child has a cell phone, laptop computer or social media account (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), chances are they have either experienced cyber-bullying or know someone who has. According to the National Crime Prevention Council, *cyber-bullying is when the internet, cell phones or other devices are used to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person.*

Local high school students describe Facebook as a “HOT SPOT” for cyber-bullying. Facebook is an internet based social networking site intended to connect friends and family. According to students the following are some of the mistakes students make when using Facebook:

Allowing people they don’t know or don’t know well into their network of friends. One student expressed, “For many it’s a popularity contest, students want high numbers of friends.” When this happens strangers are allowed to view their personal information. “Sometimes students will request to friend someone with the malicious intent of creeping through their personal information and using that information against them.”

Prevention: Have your teen consider the following questions before he/she ‘friends’ someone.

Do I know this person? How long have I known this person? What do I know about this person? Is this someone I can trust?

Sharing their username and password with others and/or leaving their Facebook page unattended.

Students will post comments and photos on behalf of another person. This *impersonation/hacking* can create social mayhem for the target.

Prevention: Students should not share usernames and passwords with anyone but their parents. It is important to change passwords regularly and log out when one is finished with a session.

Some students use Facebook as a tool to manipulate and harass another student. Students say, “This is often done for entertainment or to get even with someone for a perceived wrong.” Students may, post photos and dialogue about an event where someone was intentionally not invited, crop that person out of photos or de-friend someone who has done nothing wrong. Some youth will post negative comments about another person and engage others in the negative banter.

Prevention: According to students, “Consider how you would feel if someone acted the same way towards you.” If you wouldn’t say it to a person face-to-face, don’t say it on line. If someone posts something unkind, “Discuss the problem with that person face-to-face.” What you say on Facebook takes on a meaning of its own, regardless of who started it. If you learn that a ‘friend’ has negative intention, remove that person from your account; don’t keep them on just to see what they are saying.

Many students are too young for Facebook. According to students, “When you are in elementary school and middle schools you tend to take everything people say about you to heart.” The things people say on Facebook can be devastating. “When you are older, you develop more confidence and become less vulnerable to other’s opinions.”

Prevention: According to Facebook guidelines user should be a minimum of 13 years of age.

Fortunately most teens use Facebook in the way it was intended. It is a good idea however, to monitor your teen's on-line behavior. Parents are encouraged to 'friend' their teen on Facebook. When users see a parental presence they are more likely to think twice before posting something negative. Discuss with your teen the negative impact his/her on line comments and posts can have. On line behavior can impact your student's reputation, employment opportunities and acceptance into college.

If your student is being harassed, tell him/her not to respond to the harassment. Responding only encourages the problem. Instead block the person and report the problem to the network moderator. Your student's school resource officer is a good person to discuss your concerns with especially if the student who is harassing your student attends the same school. There are more positive aspects to technology than negative. Help your student make good choices by being a POS, text slang for Parent Over Shoulder.

This article was written by Kerri Gray, MS, MFT with ReDiscover. Kerri is a consultant to Lee's Summit CARES and provides many educational resources to parents, teachers and students in Lee's Summit. To learn more about these resources visit www.lscares.org.