

Children: Shamed and Text Attacked

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A thirteen year old has not been alive a day without the Internet in existence. That is a reality hard to comprehend for most adults. That means the difficulty one might have experienced socially in junior or senior high school twenty years ago could have been a welcome break once home from school. Now any social difficulty at school follows kids into their homes and into their bedroom via phone or notepad. The explosion of shame based bullying attacks on kids is something hard to comprehend in the adult world. It is something a child, just learning about boundaries and defenses, has to deal with often alone. How many have to deal with these personal attacks? Here are some statistics. I believe them to be conservative:

*About 42 percent of kids have been bullied while texting/online with one in four being verbally attacked more than once.

*About 35 percent of kids have been threatened online.

*About 58 percent of kids and teens have reported that something mean has been said about them or to them in a text or online. (Source: www.isafe.org)

The following is a "what to do" for parents and adults. It is comprehensive and worthwhile to directly quote here:

"Parents may be tempted to take away a teen's cell phone to prevent him or her from being a text bullying victim, or if he or she is already a victim, but this deprives teens of social connections that are very important to them and feels like a punishment for something that isn't their fault. Fear of losing their cell phones is a major reason why teens don't report text bullying. There are, however, other ways that parents can help combat text/online bullying:

Talk to your kids about text bullying and why it is wrong. Tell them if they ever are the victim that it's not their fault and they won't be punished. They should not respond to the bullying, but instead should save it to report to a parent. If the message is sexual or threatening in nature they can report it to the police, who can trace it and take legal action against the bully.

Consider having a cell phone use contract with your teen that forbids text bullying, including forwarding mean messages, even if someone else starts it. Take away the cell phone for a set period of time if the teen text bullies anyone. You can also limit the times when teens can use their cell phones, such as requiring them to turn it off at night, and reserve the right to ask questions about whom the teen is texting and what they are texting about.

Encourage your child's school to ban cell phones during school hours.

Teach teens not to accept calls from someone they don't know.

Encourage teens to think before sending messages, and not to send a message they wouldn't want everyone else to see since they don't know if the person they send a message to may forward it to others, or if they are even texting the person they think they are.

Help teens block numbers that are sending mean text messages.

Tell teens not to let anyone else use their phone to send messages.

If the text bullying is serious, contact the cell phone company to get the teen a new phone number and have the teen be very careful about who they give it to.

If the teen knows who the bully is, let the bully's parents know what they are doing. If the text bullying doesn't stop, make the parents aware that they may face legal action if it doesn't stop, and be prepared to consult an attorney if necessary.

It is important for teens who are the victims of text bullying to know that they should not blame themselves for it, and that you care about them and think they are worthwhile regardless of what the bully says.”

Sources: Committee for Children, Cyber Bullying and Media Safety; "Dealing with Text Message Bullying" [online]; Kathy Brock, ABC News, "Text Bullying" [online]; Stop Bullying Now, "Cyberbullying" [online]

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