

Technology and Youth: Protecting your Child from Electronic Aggression

Tip Sheet

Technology and youth seem destined for each other. They are both young, fast paced, and ever changing. In the last 20 years there has been an explosion in new technology. This new technology has been eagerly embraced by young people and has led to expanding knowledge, social networks, and vocabulary that includes instant messaging (“IMing”), blogging, and text messaging.

Electronic Aggression is any type of harassment or bullying that occurs through e-mail, a chat room, instant messaging, a website (including blogs), or text messaging.

New technology has many potential benefits for youth. With the help of new technology, young people can interact with others across the United States and throughout the world on a regular basis. Social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace also allow youth to develop new relationships with others, some of whom they have never even met in person. New technology also provides opportunities to make rewarding social connections for those youth who have difficulty developing friendships in traditional social settings or because of limited contact with same-aged peers. In addition, regular Internet access allows teens and pre-teens to quickly increase their knowledge on a wide variety of topics.

However, the recent explosion in technology does not come without possible risks. Youth can use electronic media to embarrass, harass, or threaten their peers. Increasing numbers of adolescents are becoming victims of this new form of violence—electronic aggression. Research suggests that 9% to 35% of young people report being victims of this type of violence. Like traditional forms of youth violence, electronic aggression is associated with emotional distress and conduct problems at school.

Examples of Electronic Aggression

- Disclosing someone else’s personal information in a public area (e.g., website) in order to cause embarrassment.
- Posting rumors or lies about someone in a public area (e.g., discussion board).
- Distributing embarrassing pictures of someone by posting them in a public area (e.g., website) or sending them via e-mail.
- Assuming another person’s electronic identity to post or send messages about others with the intent of causing the other person harm.
- Sending mean, embarrassing, or threatening text messages, instant messages, or e-mails.



Tips for Parents and Caregivers

Talk to your child.

Parents and caregivers often ask children where they are going and who they are going with when they leave the house. You should ask these same questions when your child goes on the Internet. Because children are reluctant to disclose victimization for fear of having their Internet and cellular phone privileges revoked; develop solutions to prevent or address victimization that do not punish the child.

Develop rules.

Together with your child, develop rules about acceptable and safe behaviors for all electronic media. Make plans for what they should do if they become a victim of electronic aggression or know someone who is being victimized. The rules should focus on ways to maximize the benefits of technology and decrease its risks.

Explore the Internet.

Visit the websites your child frequents, and assess the pros and cons. Remember, most websites and on-line activities are beneficial. They help young people learn new information, interact with others, and connect with people who have similar interests.



Talk with other parents and caregivers.

Talk to other parents and caregivers about how they have discussed technology use with their children. Ask about the rules they have developed and how they stay informed about their child's technology use.

Connect with the school.

Parents and caregivers are encouraged to work with their child's school and school district to develop a class for parents and caregivers that educates them about school policies on electronic aggression, recent incidents in the community involving electronic aggression, and resources available to parents and caregivers who have concerns. Work with the school and other partners to develop a collaborative approach to preventing electronic aggression.

Educate yourself.

Stay informed about the new devices and websites your child is using. Technology changes rapidly, and many developers offer information to keep people aware of advances. Continually talk with your child about "where they are going" and explore the technology yourself.

Technology is not going away, and forbidding young people to access electronic media may not be a good long-term solution. Together, parents and children can come up with ways to maximize the benefits of technology and decrease its risks.

For more information, please contact:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion • Division of Adolescent and School Health
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control • Division of Violence Prevention
• Adolescent Health Goal Team

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