

Bullying Prevention and Family Expectations

Parents and family members can help prevent bullying and cyberbullying, and help children with their learning, in a number of ways, mostly by being engaged, attentive and loving. But beyond that there are specific actions that parents and family members can take to help children navigate the power of the digital world.

Family Expectations for How We Treat Others

Parents and family members can clearly state and repeat family expectations to children and youth: We treat others with respect. We are not mean to people under any circumstance, face to face or on the Internet. We follow the golden rule: do unto others as you would want others to do unto you. However you say it, say it and say it often.

For resources on family support, check out MNParentsKnow (<http://MNParentsKnow.info>), a website on child development from the Minnesota Department of Education. Another resource for raising teenagers is the ShoulderToShoulderMinnesota website (<http://www.shouldertoshoulderminnesota.org/>). The title comes from the parenting tip that it is easier for everyone to talk with a teen in a non-confrontational manner, “shoulder to shoulder,” side by side, than to talk eye to eye. The website connects parents and caregivers and shares the insights of those who have raised youth.

Know the Law: Sexting and Youth

Sexting is the sending and receiving of sexually explicit messages or photos electronically. Students may see the sending and receiving of “sexy pictures” as a form of flirtation, a gift to a boyfriend or girlfriend, something they need to do to keep a boyfriend or girlfriend, a lark or a means of being mean or having power over someone. The law for such actions may have different words: gross misdemeanor or felony. Sending and receiving sexually explicit pictures of someone under the age of 16 may be illegal; it is a federal crime to produce, distribute and/or possess child pornography. A teen caught with sexually explicit pictures of someone under the age of 16 might have to face time in juvenile detention or be placed on the state sex offender register. In some instances of sexting, the court may direct the youth to an educational, restorative justice or community service program instead of being sentenced.

In addition to legal consequences, there may be social and academic consequences to sexting. Some students may be removed from athletic teams or other extracurricular activities and suspended from school. Students may feel humiliated and harassed when their private pictures are sent around the school, the community, or beyond. College admissions officers, employers and military recruiters, future friends or significant others may find a student’s explicit photos

during Google searches, or the photos may be used by online sexual predators. Once sent, there is no way to remove a photo from the Internet.

Monitoring and Controlling Electronic Media

There are many excellent websites for parents, youth, children and educators regarding bullying, cyber bullying and keeping children safe on-line. Here are a few to review.

The "Stop Bullying Now!" (<http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/>) campaign was developed by the Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The website has resources for educators, health and safety professionals, parents, children, and the general public.

Netsmartz: Keeping Kids and Teens Safer on the Internet

(<http://www.netsmartz.org/netteens.htm>): The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has resources on cyber bullying and internet safety for parents and guardians, law enforcement, children and youth.

PrevNet (<http://prevnet.ca/Home/tabid/36/Default.aspx>): The Prevention Network provides materials for parents including resources and definitions, a stand up to bullying tip sheet, and suggestions for developing formative consequence for children who bully.

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