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Tech Abuse and Your Child: What You Can Do

By Susan Dunn

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New technology brings new ways to stay in touch and guard your child's safety but it also brings new ways to steal, cheat, bully, act irresponsibly, and harm others.

Bullying via camera cell phones and Internet is an international problem and misuse starts younger than you might imagine. BBC reports that one in nine 5–9 year olds has a mobile phone, and over a third of primary school children with mobile phones have received name-calling text messages. 10% have received threats at the level of "bullying".

CAMERA CELLPHONES

Preteens and teens use cell phone cameras to photograph peers and humiliate them over the Internet, such as photographing a student naked in the locker room. Text messages are also used for harassment and cheating on exams.

Legislation is starting about the privacy aspects of such photography, beginning with restrictions on federally-owned land. The private sector is also swinging into action. The YMCA in Australia has forbidden the use of cellphone cameras in their facilities.

IDENTITY THEFT

You should also be aware that someone standing near you at the checkout counter with a cell phone could photograph your credit card and have access to all the information.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

While we all wait to see if social norms will develop regarding the use of cell phones, what do you think? Personally, I wouldn't count on it or it would already have happened. Here are some things you

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can do:

1. Be proactive.

Work with school officials about bullying. Ray Hughes, violence prevention coordinator with the Thames Valley District School says a classroom or seat change can help the bullied, and bullies need consistent non-violent enforcement of consequences for their actions both at home and at school.

2. Work to establish Emotional Intelligence programs at school and at work that teach respect and social norms.

3. Observe good manners with your tech equipment and teach your children that with privilege comes responsibility.

Pay attention, do your job and supervise. One middle schooler given a cell phone quickly racked up a bill over \$1,500.

Establish rules with your child or teenager and enforce them. Don't allow your children to have computers in their bedrooms, teach them respect for others, and educate them in the use of any potentially harmful object (just as do bikes, microwaves, power tools, electric knives, gas grills, guns and cars).

Go over what bullying is and make direct inquiries of your child. Here is a list of symptoms of both bullied and bully – <http://www.canoe.ca/NewsStand/LondonFreePress/News/2003/09/02/174030.html> . It's considered the preferred bullying method of girls, BTW.

4. Get informed.

Know as much as your child does and monitor. For instance, you can check on cheating and bullying by clicking into the phone's text messaging history.

5. Speak up and teach your child to.

School officials say 85% of bullying occurs when there is only a peer present. Both school bullying and work bullying (<http://www.webstrategies.cc/mobbing.htm>) rely on the victim remaining silent.

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RUNNING AWAY

By Joan Bramsch

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Useful Links & Things

Need information? Don't know who to ask or where to turn? Here are some useful links and information sources that will respect YOU and your privacy.

Abuse:

Most of us don't know a lot about Child Abuse – what it is and what the results can be. This information is written for young people like you who want to know more. You may be reading this because you're concerned about yourself or about a friend, or just because you're interested in the subject.

As you get older, you start making important decisions about relationships with family and friends, school, and health.

How you feel, how you get along with others, and what you want out of life are all very important parts of growing up and living a healthy, happy life. But these are also the things that are threatened if you are a victim of child abuse.

You might think, Well, I'm not a child any more. But a person is considered a "child" up to the age of 18 in most states; 17 in others.

Even if you are older or you are no longer being abused, abuse can leave a lot of physical or emotional damage. So it's important to take steps to end the abuse if it is still happening and to begin to heal yourself emotionally so you can get on with your life.

In the pages that follow, we talk about what child abuse is and what it is not. We also talk about some of the reasons that child abuse happens and why it is so important for abused teens to get help for themselves and, hopefully, for their families. Then, we talk about how and where to get that help.

What is child abuse?

What are the different kinds of abuse?

Abuse is a family problem

The abuse is not your fault

What are the signs of abuse?

Dealing with the feelings

Revealing the secret

Getting someone to listen

Where to get help

Take the first step

Need to talk?

One Kid's Story

Running Away

What comes to mind when you think of kids who run away from home? Teenagers off on an adventure, looking for a good time? Kids who can return home when it doesn't work out?

Or maybe you think of the kids who make trouble at school? Who don't want to listen to their parents or anybody? Who just want to do what they want to do?

Or perhaps you think of young people with lots of problems and parents who don't care?

Really, there's no one way to describe young people who run away or who are homeless, or to describe the backgrounds they come from. They are males and females; from rich families and poor families. They may be your daughter or sister, nephew or friend.

Links that might help:

Who runs away?

Why young people run

What parents and friends should look for

Preventing running away

What you need to think about

What happens on the street: meet Mike

Options Mike thought about

If your child has run

A letter from the street

If you need to talk

Suicide

Most young people end up killing themselves because they simply don't know where else to turn. They are in some kind of pain that seems unbearable and they want the pain to stop. They end up stopping their entire lives just because they didn't know what else to do.

Here are some links that might help:

Why do people kill themselves?

Suicide warning signs

What do you know about suicide?

Need to talk?

<http://joanbramsch.com/eens/eenlinks.shtml>

JOAN BRAMSCH is a family person, educator, writer and E-publisher. Her articles appear internationally in print and online. Six of her best-selling adult novels – near one million copies – have worldwide distribution. Her Empowered Parenting Ezine serves 1000 parents around the globe.

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