STOP cyberbullying

www.stopcyberbullying.org

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Take 5!

Put down the mouse and step away from the computer…and no one will get hurt!

The Internet and mobile technology are very powerful. But if misused, they can also be dangerous to yourself and others. Most of the time we make sure that people are old enough and pass special tests before they drive cars, operate heavy machinery or otherwise use potentially powerful technology. This is for their safety and the safety of others.

But the Internet is different. It's kids who show the adults how to use it. And kids who learn quickly how to abuse it as well. Unfortunately, the abuses are limited only by their limitless imaginations and tech skills.

Our kids use the Internet the way we used the phone when we were young. They "talk" using text-messaging and instant messaging, often at the same time they are chatting on the phone with the same people. It may be hard for parents to conceive of the ways our kids use technologies as part of their everyday lives.

I was talking to some middle school students recently, and asked them how they would feel if they didn't have the Internet anymore. They told me that the Internet is their "life!" It's how the learn, how they communicate, how they socialize and how they share information.

But the casual nature of the way they use the technology leads to abuse and mistakes. The typed word doesn't clarify tone. It doesn't, without more (like an emoticon :oP or an acronym like "jk" which is the short form for "just kidding"), convey the kind of information we obtain when we hear the person's voice or watch their body-language or eye-contact. We make judgments based on how the words appear to us. And those judgments are often wrong. They are often taken out of context and misunderstood.

That results in hurt feelings, anger, frustration and feeling threatened. And when people, especially kids, act out of anger, frustration or fear things get out-of-hand quickly. Like drinking and driving, emotions and the Internet should never be mixed. Emotions create a situation where we click before thinking. We don't think about how the person on the other end may misunderstand our message or our intentions. We don't think at all.

The best way to counter this problem is by teaching our children (and ourselves) to Take 5! - put down the mouse and step away from the computer. By not reacting and taking the time to calm down, we can avoid becoming a cyberbullying ourselves. What can we do for 5 minutes to help us calm down? Kids have suggested: throwing a baseball or shooting hoops, baking cookies, reading, napping, taking a walk or a run, watching TV, talking to a friend and hugging a stuffed animal.

What would you do to Take 5!? Think about it. Now. It may be too late later.