STOP cyberbullying

www.stopcyberbullying.org

Take a stand against cyberbullying

Education can help considerably in preventing and dealing with the consequences of cyberbullying. The first place to begin an education campaign is with the kids and teens themselves. We need to address ways they can become inadvertent cyberbullies, how to be accountable for their actions and not to stand by and allow bullying (in any form) to be acceptable. We need to teach them not to ignore the pain of others.

Teaching kids to "Take 5!" before responding to something they encounter online is a good place to start. Jokingly, we tell them to "Drop the Mouse! And step away from the computer and no one will get hurt!" We then encourage them to find ways to help them calm down. This may include doing yoga, or deep-breathing. It may include running, playing catch or shooting hoops. It may involve taking a bath, hugging a stuffed animal or talking on the phone with friends. Each child can find their own way of finding their center again. And if they do, they will often not become a cyberbully, even an inadvertent cyberbully. Teaching them the consequences of their actions, and that the real "Men in Black" may show up at their front door sometimes helps. Since many cyberbullying campaigns include some form of hacking or password or identity theft, serious laws are implicated. Law enforcement, including the FBI, might get involved in these cases.

But we need to recognize that few cyberbullying campaigns can succeed without the complacency and the often help of other kids. If we can help kids understand how much bullying hurts, how in many cases (unlike the children's chant) words can hurt you, fewer may cooperate with the cyberbullies. They will think twice before forwarding a hurtful e-mail, or visiting a cyberbullying "vote for the fat girl" site, or allowing others to take videos or cell phone pictures of personal moments or compromising poses of others. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said that in the end we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends. We need to teach our children not to stand silently by while others are being tormented. While it is crucial that we teach them not to take matters into their own hands (and perhaps become a "vengeful angel" cyberbully themselves) they need to come to us. And if we expect them to trust us, we need to be worthy of that trust. (Read more about this at "Goldilocks and the cyberbullies...not too hot and not too cold," a guide for parents.)

And, in addition to not lending their efforts to continue the cyberbullying, if given an anonymous method of reporting cyberbullying Web sites, profiles and campaigns, kids can help put an end to cyberbullying entirely. School administration, community groups and even school policing staff can receive these anonymous tips and take action quickly when necessary to shut down the site, profile or stop the cyberbullying itself.

They can even let others know that they won't allow cyberbullying, supporting the victim, making it clear that they won't be used to torment others and that they care about the feelings of others is key. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

We need to teach our children that silence, when others are being hurt, is not acceptable. If they don't allow the cyberbullies to use them to embarrass or torment others, cyberbullying will quickly stop. It's a tall task, but a noble goal. And in the end, our children will be safer online and offline. We will have helped create a generation of good cybercitizens, controlling the technology instead of being controlled by it.