

Cyber Bullying: Coping with the Electronic Realm; be heard, organize, achieve

Only her big brother knew that she kept a diary, stuffed between her mattresses. He should have made time to listen to what she had to say, to ask about her day, instead of always being so focused trying to balance homework, sports practices, and his busy social life. But now it was too late, she was gone and was never coming back. Her brother was confused, they went to same school and he never saw his sister getting teased in the hallways. However, as he opened diary, her words revealed all the caustic comments made to her Instagram and Facebook accounts, and the endless taunting received in the form of text messages to her cell phone, the same hand-me-down phone he gave her for her tenth birthday. He turned to a page in her diary. It was a mock of a How-To guide his little sister had written:

How-To-Be-a-Bully in 2013:

1. Hide behind an electronic device with made up accounts, because you have no guts to tell me in person.
2. Post it for the public to see so that you can feel really good about yourself when the other jerks "like" your status or comment on it.
3. Be so obsessed with my social media accounts that you have to constantly stalk me and have a clever comment ready to harass, embarrass or torment me. Get a life!
4. Have parents who spoil you so that you have access 24/7 to your smart phone, computer, iPad, etc... (Or, do they dislike your rotten personality too, so they give you these devices to occupy your time so you don't bother them?)

We live in what is called the information age. More and more teens have personal smart phones, and access to the endless information on the Internet. Unfortunately, this great technology can sometimes also bring abuse. People can easily hide behind a device, even using a pseudonym, to get their aggression out on others. Lately, schools are attacking the problem of bullying, but many students who are bullied are still too embarrassed to admit it. Therefore, society has to do more to work with the schools to set an example of how bullying will no longer be tolerated. The first step is to educate the public on the bullying epidemic. Second, the law should include a zero tolerance policy for those who abuse others. Finally, if someone repeatedly bullies, a public example should be made of that person as a deterrent to others.

As a first step, students who attend a school and their parents/guardians should be required to attend an assembly detailing the severe consequences and zero tolerance of cyber

bullying. Hopefully, awareness may deter bullies from ever acting on their bullying instinct. The assembly should remind the audience that we are a community. There is room for everyone to work together, and to either get along, or just stay away from each other. Further, it should also remind students that it is also not acceptable to be a bystander. If everyone would take a positive stance on stamping out bullying by calling a bully out on an inappropriate post or text, it might put the bully in his or her place before irreparable damage is done.

Once students and their parents are educated, the zero tolerance policy should go into effect. Once a cyber bullying comment or text is sent, there is a permanent record of that information in cyber space, and that will be used as proof that abuse has occurred. A defense of "it wasn't me" could only be acceptable if the owner is able to get the real bully to agree that he or she is guilty of the offense and is willing to take the punishment. People will learn to password lock their phones. The punishment could include: For a first offense, a cyber bully and his parents should attend a class on the effect of bullying the victim. Using real victims, or the family members of victims like the big brother mentioned in the story above, to teach the class by telling their stories would be a very effective technique to help bullies realize what their behavior can accomplish. For a second offense, additional classes, and counseling by a psychiatrist should also be required to determine if the bully has issues that need to be discussed with a professional doctor. For a third offense, social networking sites should shut down the bully's accounts, and the offender should have to register with the local police, so the public is aware that the offender is a bully.

Finally, if the bully has a third offense, the local police report should make the public aware of this. This way, others who may bully would now think twice about it. Even if the name cannot be used because the bully is a minor, publishing that a punishment was given to one of their residents will make the community take bullying more seriously. Victims of cyber bullying will no longer have to hide because they know that society will protect them. Instead, the victim (or a witness) could present proof to an authority figure, and the bully would have to pay for his mistake. Public awareness that bullying is taken seriously is the final step to deter bullying.

If the authorities would take bullying more seriously, then we may see a decrease in bullying, teen depression and suicide in our society. There are three steps that need to be done. First, our schools need to educate the public about the problem and the consequences of bullying. Next, our lawmakers need to enact a zero tolerance policy for bullying. Finally, our local police need to make public examples of those who do bully. If these steps are taken into action, fewer teens would be victims of depression and suicide, and bullying can become a problem of the past.

