



**ELECTRONIC MEDIA AND YOUTH VIOLENCE:
A CDC ISSUE BRIEF
FOR EDUCATORS AND CAREGIVERS**



**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION**



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OVERVIEW

Technology and adolescents seem destined for each other; both are young, fast paced, and ever changing. In previous generations teens readily embraced new technologies, such as record players, TVs, cassette players, computers, and VCRs, but the past two decades have witnessed a virtual explosion in new technology, including cell phones, iPods, MP-3s, DVDs, and PDAs (personal digital assistants). This new technology has been eagerly embraced by adolescents and has led to an expanded vocabulary, including instant messaging (“IMing”), blogging, and text messaging. New technology has many social and educational benefits, but caregivers and educators have expressed concern about the dangers young people can be exposed to through these technologies. To respond to this concern, some states and school districts have, for example, established policies about the use of cell phones on school grounds and developed policies to block access to certain websites on school computers. Many teachers and caregivers have taken action individually by spot-checking websites used by young people, such as MySpace. This brief focuses on the phenomena of *electronic aggression*: any kind of aggression perpetrated through technology—any type of harassment or bullying (teasing, telling lies, making fun of someone, making rude or mean comments, spreading rumors, or making threatening or aggressive comments) that occurs through email, a chat room, instant messaging, a website (including blogs), or text messaging.

Caregivers, educators, and other adults who work with young people know that children and adolescents spend a lot of time using electronic media (blogs, instant messaging, chat rooms, email, text messaging). What is not known is exactly *how* and *how often* they use different types of technology. Could use of technology increase the likelihood that a young person is the victim of aggression? If the answer is yes, what should caregivers and educators do to help young people protect themselves? To help answer these questions, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health and Division of Violence Prevention, held an expert panel on September 20–21, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia, entitled “*Electronic Media and Youth Violence*.” There were 13 panelists (see addendum for listing), who came from academic institutions, federal agencies, a school system, and nonprofit organizations who were already engaged in work focusing on electronic media and youth violence. The panelists presented information about if, how, and how often technology is used by young people to behave aggressively. They also presented information about the qualities that make a young person more or less likely to be victimized or to behave aggressively toward someone else electronically.

Two issue briefs were developed to summarize the presentations and the discussion that followed. One of the briefs was developed for researchers to summarize the data, to highlight the research gaps, and to suggest future topics for research to better understand the growing problem of electronic media and youth violence. The other brief (this document) was developed for educators and caregivers and summarizes what is known about young people and electronic aggression and discusses the implications of these findings for school staff, educational policy makers, and caregivers.

Electronic Aggression:

Any type of harassment or bullying (teasing, telling lies, making fun of someone, making rude or mean comments, spreading rumors, or making threatening or aggressive comments) that occurs through email, a chat room, instant messaging, a website (including blogs), or text messaging.

The expert panel highlighted the fact that a variety of terms are being used to describe and measure this new form of aggression including: internet bullying, internet harassment, and cyber-bullying. Accordingly, when specific results from any study or group of studies are discussed, this brief uses the wording the researcher used. So, for example, if a researcher surveyed young people and asked about “cyber-bullying,” when that information is discussed, the term “cyber-bullying” is used. In general discussion sections, the phrase “electronic aggression” is used to refer to any kind of aggression perpetrated through technology. Each panelist also expanded upon his or her panel presentation in individual articles. These articles are compiled in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Volume 41, Issue 6 and contain more detailed information than what is provided below.



The information presented in this brief is based upon what is currently known; we still have a lot to learn about electronic aggression. The research findings described here need to be repeated and validated by other researchers and the possible action steps for educators, educational policy makers, and caregivers need to be evaluated for effectiveness.

9% to 35% of young people say they have been the victim of electronic aggression.

HOW COMMON IS ELECTRONIC AGGRESSION?

Because electronic aggression is fairly new, limited information is available, and those researching the topic have asked different questions about it. Thus, information cannot be readily compared or combined across studies, which limits our ability to make definitive conclusions about the prevalence and impact of electronic aggression.

What we know about electronic aggression is based upon a few studies that measure similar but not exactly the same behaviors. For example, in their studies, some of the panelists use a narrow definition of electronic aggression (e.g., aggression perpetrated through email or instant messaging),¹ while others use a broader definition (e.g., aggression perpetrated through email, instant messaging, on a website, or through text messaging).² In addition to different definitions, in their research the panelists also asked young people to report about their experiences over different time periods (e.g., over the past several months, since the beginning of school, in the past year), and surveyed youth of different ages (e.g., 6th-8th-graders, 10-15-year-olds, 10-17-year-olds). As a result, the most accurate way to describe the information we have is to give ranges that include the findings from all of the studies.

We know that most youth (65-91%) report little or no involvement in electronic aggression.^{1,2,3} However, 9% to 35% of young people say they have been the victim of electronic aggression.^{2,3} As with face-to-face bullying, estimates of electronic aggression perpetration are lower than victimization, ranging from 4% to 21%.¹ In some cases, the higher end of the range (e.g., 21% and 35%) reflects studies that asked about electronic aggression over a longer time period (e.g., a year as opposed to 2 months). In other cases, the higher percentages reflect studies that defined electronic aggression more broadly (e.g., spreading rumors, telling lies, or making threats as opposed to just telling lies).



When we look at data across all of the panelists' studies, the percentage of young people who report being electronic aggression victims has a fairly wide range (9-35%). However, if we look at victimization over a similar time frame, such as "monthly or more often" or "at least once in the past 2 months," the range is much narrower, from 8% to 11%.^{1,2}

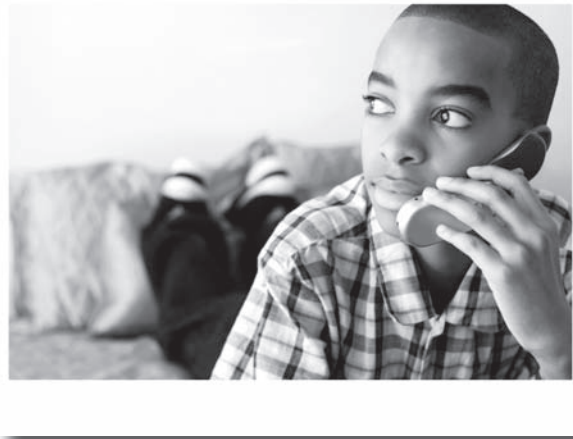
Similarly, although the percentage of young people who admit they perpetrate electronic aggression varies considerably across studies (4-21%),⁵ the range narrows if we look at similar time periods. Approximately 4% of surveyed youth report behaving aggressively electronically "monthly or more often" or "at least once in the past 2 months."^{3,5}

We currently know little about whether certain types of electronic aggression are more common than other forms. A study that looked at electronic aggression victimization "over the past year," found that making rude or nasty comments was the type of electronic aggression most frequently experienced by victims (32%), followed by rumor spreading (13%), and then by threatening or aggressive comments (14%).²

WHO IS AT RISK?

Whether the rates of electronic aggression perpetration and victimization differ for boys and girls is unknown. Research examining differences by sex is limited, and findings are conflicting. Some studies have not found any differences, while others have found that girls perpetrate electronic aggression more frequently than do boys.^{1,3}

There is also little information about whether electronic aggression decreases or increases as young people age. As with other forms of aggression, there is some evidence that electronic aggression is less common in 5th grade than in 8th grade, but is higher in 8th grade than 11th grade, suggesting that electronic aggression may peak around the end of middle school/beginning of high school.^{1,3}



In 2000, 6% of internet users said they had been the victim of on-line harassment. By 2005, this percentage had increased by 50% to 9%.

Current studies on electronic aggression have focused primarily on white populations. We have no information on how electronic aggression varies by race or ethnicity.

It is important to note that there is an overlap between victims and perpetrators of electronic aggression. As with many types of violence, those who are victims are also at increased risk for being perpetrators. Across the studies conducted by our panelists, between 7% and 14% of surveyed youth reported being both a victim and a perpetrator of electronic aggression.^{3,5}

Although the news media has recently devoted a lot of attention to the potential dangers of technology, face-to-face verbal and physical aggression are still far more common than electronic aggression. Verbal bullying is the type of bullying most often experienced by young people, followed by physical bullying, and then by electronic aggression.¹ However, electronic aggression is becoming more common. In 2000, 6% of internet users ages 10-17 said they had been the victim of “on-line harassment,” defined as threats or other offensive behavior [not sexual solicitation] sent on-line to someone or posted on-line. By 2005, this percentage had increased by 50%, to 9%.⁴ As technology becomes more affordable and sophisticated, rates of electronic aggression are likely to continue to increase, especially if appropriate prevention and intervention policies and practices are not put into place.



WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF ELECTRONIC AGGRESSION?

Electronic technology allows adolescents to hide their identity, either by sending or posting messages anonymously, by using a false name, or by assuming someone else's on-screen identity. So, unlike the aggression or bullying that occurs in the school-yard, victims and perpetrators of elec-

Between 13% and 46% of young people who were victims of electronic aggression report not knowing their harasser's identity.

tronic aggression may not know the person with whom they are interacting. Between 13% and 46% of young people who were victims of electronic aggression report not knowing their harasser's identity.^{3,4} Similarly, 22% of young people who admit they perpetrate electronic aggression report they do not know the identity of their victim. In the school-yard, the victim can respond to the bully or try to get a teacher or peer to help. In contrast, in the electronic world a victim is often alone when responding to aggressive emails or text messages, and his or her only defense may be to turn off the computer, cell phone, or PDA. If the electronic aggression takes the form of posting of a message or an embarrassing picture of the victim on a public website, the victim may have no defense.

As for the victims and perpetrators who are not anonymous, in one study, almost half of the victims (47%) said the perpetrator was another student at school.³ In addition, aggression between siblings is no longer limited to the backseat of the car: 12% of victims reported their brother or sister was the perpetrator, and 10% of perpetrators reported being electronically aggressive toward a sibling.³

DO CERTAIN TYPES OF ELECTRONIC TECHNOLOGY POSE A GREATER RISK FOR VICTIMIZATION?

The news media often carry stories about young people victimized on social networking websites. Young people do experience electronic aggression in chat rooms: 25% of victims of electronic aggression said the victimization happened in a chat room and 23% said it happened on a website. However, instant messaging appears to be the most common way electronic aggression is perpetrated.³ Fifty-six percent of perpetrators of electronic aggression and 67% of victims said the aggression they experienced or perpetrated was through instant messaging. Victims also report experiencing electronic aggression through email (25%) and text messages (16%).³

The way electronic aggression is perpetrated (e.g., through instant messaging, the posting of pictures on a website, sending an email) is also related to the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. Victims are significantly more likely to report receiving an aggressive instant message when they know the perpetrator from in-person situations (64% of victims), than they are if they only know the perpetrator on-line (34%).⁴ Young people who are victimized by people they only know on-line are significantly more likely than those victimized by people they know from in-person situations to be victimized through email (18% vs. 5%), chat rooms (18% vs. 4%), and on-line gaming websites (14% vs. 0%).⁴

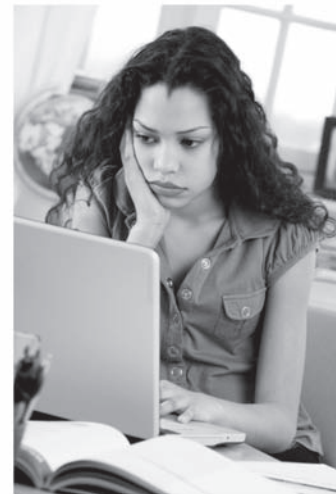
In terms of frequency, electronic aggression perpetrated by young people who know each other in-person appears to be more similar to face-to-face bullying than does aggression perpetrated by young people who only know each other on-line. For example, like in-person bullying, electronic aggression between young people who know each other in-person is more likely to consist of a series of incidents. Fifty-nine percent of the incidents perpetrated by young people who knew each other in-person involved a series of incidents by the same harasser, compared to 27% of incidents perpetrated by on-line-only contacts. In addition, 59% of the incidents perpetrated by young people who knew each other in-person involved sending or posting messages for others to see, versus 18% of those perpetrated by young people the victims only knew on-line.⁴

Young people who are victims of internet harassment are significantly more likely than those who have not been victimized to use alcohol and other drugs, receive school detention or suspension, skip school, or experience in-person victimization.

WHAT PROBLEMS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH BEING A VICTIM OF ELECTRONIC AGGRESSION?

We are just beginning to look at the impact of being a victim of electronic aggression. At this point, we do not have information that shows that being a victim of electronic aggression causes a young person to have problems. However, the information we do have suggests that, as with young people who experience face-to-face aggression, those who are victims of electronic aggression are more likely to have some difficulties than those who are not victimized.

For example, young people who are victims of internet harassment are significantly more likely than those who have not been victimized to use alcohol and other drugs, receive school detention or suspension, skip school, or experience in-person victimization.² Victims of internet harassment are also more likely than non-victims to have poor parental monitoring and to have weak emotional bonds with their caregiver.² Although these difficulties could be the result of electronic victimization, they could also be factors that increase the risk of electronic victimization (but do not result from it), or they could be related to something else entirely. At this point, the risk factors for victimization through technology and the impact of victimization need further study.



Some research does show that the level of emotional distress experienced by a victim is related to the relationship between the victim and perpetrator and the frequency of the aggression. Young people who were bullied by the same person both on-line and off-line were more likely to report being distressed by the incident (46%) than were those who reported being bullied by different people on-line and off-line (15%), and those who did not know who was harassing them on-line (18%).² Victims who were harassed by on-line peers and did not know their perpetrator in off-line settings also experienced distress, but they were more likely to experience distress if the harassment was perpetrated by the same person repeatedly (as opposed to a single incident), if the harasser was aged 18 or older, or if the harasser asked for a picture.⁴

Finally, distress may not be limited to the young person who is victimized. Caregivers who are aware that their adolescent has been a victim of electronic aggression can also experience distress. Caregivers report that sometimes they are even more fearful, frustrated, and angry about the incidents of electronic aggression than are the young victims.⁶

WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH BEING A PERPETRATOR OF ELECTRONIC AGGRESSION?

Consistent with the discussion of victimization, we have limited information about what increases or decreases the chance that an adolescent will become a perpetrator of electronic aggression. One study suggests that young people who say they are connected to their school, perceive their school as trusting, fair and pleasant, and believe their friends are trustworthy, caring, and helpful are less likely to report being perpetrators of electronic, physical, and verbal aggression.¹ We also have some evidence that perpetrators of electronic aggression are more likely to engage in other risky behaviors. For example, like perpetrators of other forms of aggression, perpetrators of electronic aggression are more likely to believe that bullying peers and encouraging others to bully peers are acceptable behaviors. Additionally, young people who report perpetrating electronic aggression are more likely to also report perpetrating face-to-face aggression.¹

Young people who report perpetrating electronic aggression are more likely to also report perpetrating face-to-face aggression.



IS ELECTRONIC AGGRESSION JUST AN EXTENSION OF SCHOOL-YARD BULLYING?

Are the kids who are victims of electronic aggression the same kids who are victims of face-to-face aggression at school? Is electronic aggression just an extension of school-yard bullying? The information we currently have suggests that the answer to the first question is maybe, and the answer to the second question is no. One study found that 65% of young people who reported being a victim of electronic aggression were not victimized at school.² Conversely, another study found considerable overlap between electronic aggression and in-person bullying, either as victims or perpetrators.³ The study found few young people (6%) who were victims or perpetrators of electronic bullying were not bullied in-person.³

Evidence that electronic aggression is not just an extension of school-yard bullying comes from information from young people who are home-schooled. If electronic aggression was just an extension of school-yard bullying, the rates of electronic aggression would be lower for those who are home-schooled than for those who attend public or private school. However, the rates of internet harassment for young people who are home-schooled and the rates for those who attend public and private schools are fairly similar.²

Whether electronic aggression occurs at home or at school, it has implications for the school and needs further exploration. Young people who were harassed on-line were more likely to get a detention or be suspended, to skip school, and to experience emotional distress than those who were not harassed.

The vast majority of electronic aggression appears to be experienced and perpetrated away from school grounds. Discussions with middle and high school students suggest that most electronic aggression occurs away from school property and during off-school hours, with the exception of electronic aggression perpetrated by text messaging using cell phones. Schools appear to be a less common setting because of the amount of structured activities during the school day and because of the limited access to technology during the school day for activities other than school work. Additionally, because other teens are less likely to be, for instance, on social-networking websites during school hours, the draw to such websites during the day is limited. Even when electronic aggression does occur at school, victimized students report that they are very reluctant to seek help because, in many cases, they would have to disclose that they violated school policies that often prohibit specific types of technology use (e.g., cell phones, social networking websites) during the school day.⁶

Whether electronic aggression occurs at home or at school, it has implications for the school and needs further exploration. As was previously mentioned, young people who were harassed on-line were more likely to get a detention or be suspended, to skip school, and to experience emotional distress than those who were not harassed.² In addition, young people who receive rude or nasty comments via text messaging are significantly more likely to report feeling unsafe at school.²

WHAT CAN WE DO?

A common response to the problem of electronic aggression is to use “blocking software” to prevent young people from accessing certain websites. There are several limitations with this type of response, especially when the blocking software is the only option that is pursued. First, young people are also victimized via cell-phone text messaging, and blocking software will not prevent this type of victimization. Second, middle and high school students have indicated that blocking software at school is limited because many students can navigate their way around this software and because most students do not attempt to access social networking websites during the school day.⁶ Students can also access sites that may be blocked on home and school computers from another location. Finally, blocking software may limit some of the benefits young people experience from new technology including social networking websites. For instance, the growth of internet and cellular technology allows young people to have access to greater amounts of information, to stay connected with family and established friends, and to connect and learn from people worldwide. Additionally, some young people report that they feel better about themselves on-line than they do in the real world and feel it is easier to be accepted on-line.⁷ Thus, while blocking software may be one important tool that caregivers and schools choose to use, the panel emphasized the need for comprehensive solutions. For example, a combination of blocking software, educational classes about appropriate electronic behavior for students and parents, and regular communication between adults and young people about their experiences with technology would be preferable to any one of these strategies in isolation.

WHAT ARE THE STEPS FROM HERE?

Areas for further consideration that were developed by the panel for educators, educational policy makers, and parents/caregivers are detailed below. None of these areas has been tested to determine if it is effective in reducing the occurrence or negative impact of electronic aggression. The companion brief (Issue Brief for Researchers) encourages researchers to test these strategies. Regardless, given what is known about other types of youth violence and the information currently available about electronic aggression and other forms of aggression, these are the panel’s suggestions for areas educators and caregivers may want to consider as they address the issue of electronic aggression with young people.



EDUCATORS/EDUCATIONAL POLICY MAKERS:

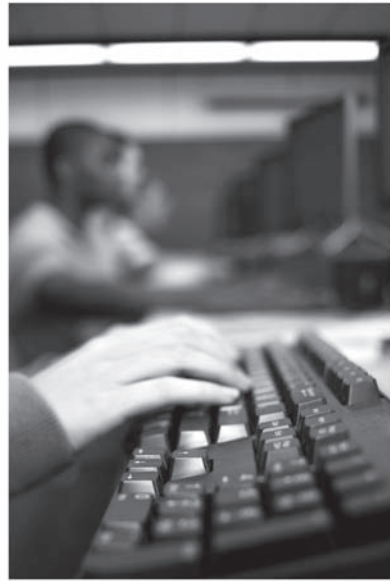
1. Explore current bullying prevention policies. Examine current policies related to bullying and/or youth violence to see whether they need to be modified to reflect electronic aggression. If no policies currently exist, examine examples of other state, district, or school policies to see whether they might meet the needs of your population. For information about existing laws on bullying and on harassment, see <http://www.nasbe.org/index.php/projects-separator/shs/health-policies-database>.

2. Work collaboratively to develop policies. States, school districts, and boards of education must work in conjunction with attorneys to develop policies that protect the rights of all students and also meet the needs of the state or district and those it serves.⁹ In addition, it is also helpful to involve representatives from the student body, students' families, and community members in the development of the policy. The policy should also be based upon evidence from research and on best practices. Developers of policies related to electronic aggression may want to consider following the general outline of steps proposed by the CDC's School Health Guidelines and the expert panelists that are summarized and bulleted below.^{8,9} Although research specifically regarding electronic aggression is limited, the little that exists should be incorporated into policy (see the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Volume 41, Issue 6 for some of the latest work).

Include a strong opening statement on the importance of creating a climate that demonstrates respect, support, and caring and that does not tolerate harassment or bullying.

- Include a strong opening statement on the importance of creating a climate that demonstrates respect, support, and caring and that does not tolerate harassment or bullying.
- Be comprehensive and recognize the responsibilities of educators, law enforcement, caregivers, students, and the technology and entertainment industries in preventing electronic aggression from affecting students and the school climate.
- Focus on increasing positive behaviors and skills, such as problem-solving and social competence by students.
- Emphasize that socially appropriate electronic behaviors should be exemplified by faculty and staff members.
- Identify specific people and organizations responsible for implementing, enforcing, and evaluating the impact of the policy. Without accountability, a policy is likely to have a limited impact. For the policy to serve as a deterrent for aggression, it should be clearly communicated to young people, and the consequences of violating it should be clear and concise. These guidelines also serve to provide a framework for the enforcing agency.
- Explicitly describe codes of electronic conduct for all members of the school community, focusing on acceptable behaviors but also including rules prohibiting unsafe or aggressive behavior.
- Explain the consequences for breaking rules and provide for due process for those identified as breaking the rules.

Unfortunately, the work does not end when the policy is approved by policy makers. In order for the policy to be effective, widespread dissemination is critical. Dissemination plans should be developed and include specific strategies to educate students, families, and community members (including law enforcement) about the school policy. In addition, policies should be re-evaluated and modified as more research becomes available. A mechanism for evaluating the impact of the policy should be included in the policy language. Many educational policies have been implemented throughout the years, but only a few have been rigorously evaluated. Districts may be paying a high cost to implement policies that may not be effective. Evaluation is critical because it determines whether the policy is actually protecting students and whether it is cost-effective. Also, data from evaluations can be very useful in justifying ongoing or expanded funding and for modifying policies to make them more effective.



3. Explore current programs to prevent bullying and youth violence.

From a programming perspective, schools and districts should explore many of the evidence-based programs for the prevention of bullying and youth violence that are currently in the field; see *Best Practices in Youth Violence Prevention*,¹⁰ the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center (www.safeyouth.org), and *The Effectiveness of Universal School-Based Programs for the Prevention of Violent and Aggressive Behavior*¹¹ for more information. Many of the programs developed to prevent face-to-face aggression address topics (such as school climate and peer influences) that are likely to be important for preventing electronic aggression.

4. Offer training on electronic aggression for educators and administrators.

The training should include the definition of electronic aggression, characteristics of victims and perpetrators, related school or district policies, information about recent incidents of electronic violence in the district, and resources available to educators and caregivers if they have concerns. The training could also include information about the school's legal responsibility for intervention and investigation.¹² Finally, the training should emphasize to staff that even if they are not technologically savvy, they can have a positive impact on electronic aggression. Students who perceive that teachers are willing to intervene in instances of electronic aggression are less likely to perpetrate¹—so teacher attitude and response matter!

5. Talk to teens. While it may be difficult to have individual conversations with all students, providing young people opportunities to discuss their concerns through, for example, creative writing assignments, is an excellent way to begin a classroom dialogue about using electronic media safely and about the impact and consequences of inappropriate use. In addition, technology safety could easily be integrated into the standard health education curricula (see the National Health Education Standards).¹³ In addition, the fascination and skill of young people with electronic media should not be ignored: educators and researchers should explore with adolescents how electronic media can be used as tools to prevent electronic aggression and other adolescent health problems.

6. Work with IT and support staff. Frequently, classroom teachers are aware of electronic aggression, but this information is not passed on to information technology (IT) services staff. Administrators must create the infrastructure and support necessary for classroom teachers to work with IT staff to keep abreast of issues affecting young people and develop strategies to minimize risk.

7. Create a positive school atmosphere. Research indicates that students who feel connected to their school, who think their teachers care about them and are fair, and who think the school rules are clear and fair are less likely to perpetrate any type of violence or aggression, including electronic aggression.¹ See CDC's *School Health Guidelines to Prevent Unintentional Injuries and Violence*⁸ and the *School Health Index: A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide*¹⁴ to learn more about what a positive school climate is and how to create one in your school.

8. Have a plan in place for what should happen if an incident is brought to the attention of school officials. Rather than waiting for a problem to arise, educators and families need to be proactive in developing a thoughtful plan to address problems and concerns that are brought to their attention. Having a system in place may make young people more likely to come forward with concerns and may support the appropriate handling of a situation when it arises. Educators and families should develop techniques for prevention and intervention that do not punish victims for coming forward but instead create an atmosphere that encourages a dialogue between educators and young people and between families and young people about their electronic experiences.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS.

Young people spend a good portion of their day in school, but the most influential people in their lives are their caregivers; peers are a very close second, but caregivers are still first.

1. Talk to your child. One of the expert panelists insightfully described the challenge facing adults who are trying to communicate with young people about technology: “The problem is that adults view the internet as a mechanism to find information. Young people view the Internet as a place. Caregivers are encouraged to ask their children where they are going and who they are going with whenever they leave the house. They should take the same approach when their child goes on the Internet —where are they going and who are they with?” Young people are sometimes reluctant to disclose victimization for fear of having their internet and cellular phone privileges revoked. Parents/caregivers should talk with their teens to come up with a solution to prevent or address victimization that does not punish the teen for his or her victimization.



2. Develop rules. Together with your child, develop rules about acceptable and safe behavior for all the electronic media they use and what they should do if they become a victim of electronic aggression or they witness or know about another teen being victimized.

3. Explore the internet. Once you have talked to your child and discovered which websites he/she frequents, visit them yourself. This will help you understand where your child has “been” when he/she visits the website and will help you understand the pros and cons of the various websites. Remember that most websites and on-line activities are beneficial. They help young people learn new information, interact with and learn about people from diverse backgrounds, and express themselves to others who may have similar thoughts and experiences. Technology is not going away, so forbidding young people to access electronic media may not be a good long-term solution. Together, parents and youth can come up with ways to maximize the benefits of technology and decrease its risks.

4. Talk with other parents/caregivers. Talk to others about how they have discussed technology use with their teens, the rules they have developed, and how they stay informed about their child’s technology use. Others can comment on strategies they used effectively and those that did not work very well.

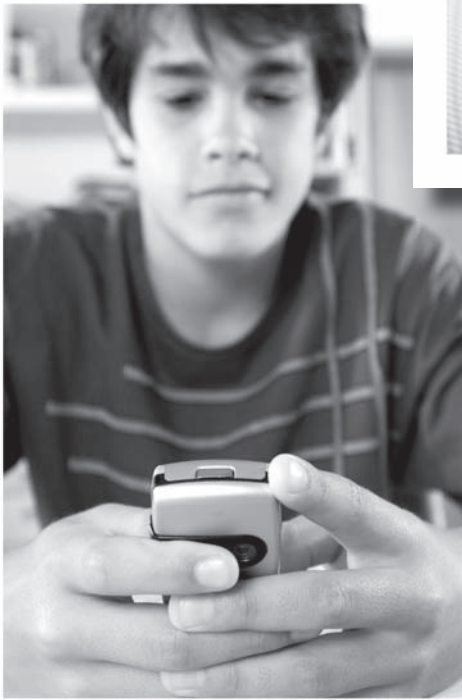
5. Encourage your school or school district to conduct a class for caregivers about electronic aggression. The class should include a review of school or district policies on the topic, recent incidents in the community, and resources available to caregivers who have concerns.

6. Keep current. Technology changes rapidly, and so it is important to keep current on what new devices and features your child is using, and in what ways. Many developers of new products offer information and classes to keep people aware of advances. Additionally, existing internet websites change, and new internet websites develop all the time, so continually talk with your teen about “where they are going” and explore these websites yourself. Your adolescent may also be an important resource for information, and having your teen educate you may help strengthen parent-child communication and bonding, which is important for other adolescent health issues as well.



FINAL THOUGHTS

Educators, teens, and caregivers are far ahead of researchers in identifying trends in electronic aggression and bringing attention to potential causes and solutions. Adolescents, their families, and the school community have known for several years that electronic aggression is a problem, but researchers have only recently begun to examine this issue. Creating a stronger partnership between schools, caregivers, and researchers would strengthen the activities of all invested persons. However, until research catches up with those “on the front lines,” the best advice seems to be: do not rely on just one strategy to prevent your child from becoming a victim or a perpetrator. Although blocking software might be one strategy, especially for younger children, blocking is not likely to be effective without talking—caregivers and young people need to talk to each other on an ongoing basis. We do not discourage young people from going to school because of the potential for in-person bullying.³ Likewise, we should not discourage young people from using technology because of a fear of electronic aggression. We should work together to draw attention to bullying, in all forms, when it does occur, and figure out how to apply the lessons learned from school-yard bullying to electronic aggression. We send our children out into the world every day to explore and learn, and we hope that they will approach a trusted adult if they encounter a challenge; now, we need to apply this message to the virtual world.



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ADDENDUM

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