MEDIA DANGERS, Part One
CYBERBULLYING

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A wonderful new world has been opened to us with the growing presence of the internet in our lives. Not only can we communicate with friends and family – we can communicate with the world. Smaller and smaller computers and smart phones make it easy to access all kinds of media constantly, and we can be connected to the internet day and night. Research has suggested that the smartphone is never more than 3 feet away from its user and has replaced the alarm clock for many people. Movies, music videos, and games can be played on our phones and televisions, and we can instantly send pictures of ourselves or of events around the world as they happen.

The vast majority of children and adolescents are computer literate and own mobile phones providing them with almost unlimited access to information and the ability to keep in touch and share experiences via texting and social networks.
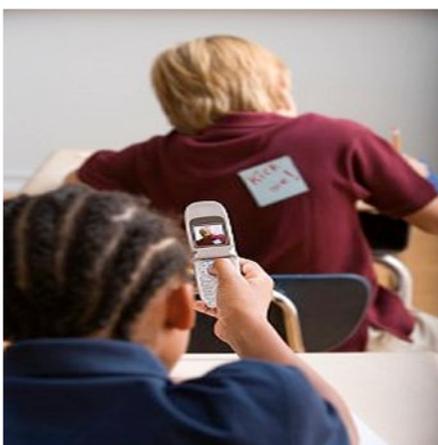
An increasing number of young people were exposed to computers before they were able to walk and talk! In 2009 children between 2 & 11 years were spending more than 11 hours per week online, not counting time on smart phones and hand held computers. At that time the average American teen was receiving 2272 texts per month. What is decreasing is the time spent reading books, magazines, or newspapers. A recent study of university students showed that those spending the most time online (more than 30 minutes per day on Facebook), had the lowest grade point averages.

TIPS for Students If you are looking for a topic for a school project. What about a class survey of time spent on-line and on social networks daily, and time spent in other activities? What about the challenge of NOT using your smartphone for a week to see what happens?

There is a "darker side" to the new digital world and everyone is aware of the need for programs and practices to promote general internet safety, particularly for young people. Two dangers which have not received enough emphasis and attention are **Cyberbullying** (part 1) and the impact of **Violent Video Games** (part 2).

Cyberbullying occurs when the new forms of technology are misused to threaten, harass, humiliate, or embarrass victims. Victims can be targeted with little effort and cost to the bully, so there is a need for more discussion about how children and young people can stay safe while being in constant touch with friends.

Cyberbullying can take the form of repeated abusive text messages sent via internet of phones, and pictures or videos sent via mobile phone camera to embarrass the victim. Cell phones can be also used to send repeated silent calls and abusive text messages, or emails can be sent with a false name or someone else's name. Chatrooms can be used as a forum for threatening others or spreading lies or rumours to damage friendships or reputations. Social networking sites have been used to disclose personal information to cause embarrassment or exclude someone from an online group, or actual threats of violence. Many children try to become popular on social networks by having large numbers of 'friends', and this can lead some children to accept 'strangers' as friends, and unknowingly provide them with personal information which makes them vulnerable.

Cyberbullying can be a temptation for some because it takes place instantaneously and at such a distance that bullies have a perceived sense of security, and can easily 'forget' or minimize harm that they caused. For the victim

the awful part is that the bullying can take place any time and intrudes into places heretofore seen as 'safe'. Technology has also made cyberbullying intergenerational (student to teacher) in a way that does not happen in the real world, and the victims often feel they have no refuge, no one to trust, and can never be safe anywhere.

A study done in 2005 revealed that 9 % of youth who used the internet regularly were targets of online harassment. Of those students 50% reported chronic harassment, 45% knew the harasser in person, and most troubling 38% of those reporting the cyberbullying experienced significant distress as a result of the harassment.

How should we deal with Cyberbullying? Schools should be teaching and discussing appropriate online behaviour and the impact of cyberbullying in its various forms (e.g., posting photos of others that you find funny without the consent of the subject of the photo, sending a compromising photo of yourself to a classmate who then sends it to your whole school, posting very personal information on a social networking site without controlling who can view it, forwarding or encouraging negative or derogatory comments about someone at school). Everyone should use the tools provided by ISP to allow personal profiles to only be viewed by friends, and only accept as 'friends' people they actually know. We all need to be cautious and thoughtful about our own information when communicating with others, and have the courage to speak up when someone we know gets Involved in cyberbullying.

TIPS for parents to avoid or deal with cyberbullying
With younger children parents should:

- Set rules about where kids can go online.
- Keep computer in a public area of the house to be sure that parents are aware of the sites the child is using.
- If there have been problems have children and teens only use the internet when parents are at home.

- Consider checking the browser history to see where young children have been and have the opportunity to discuss any inappropriate sites even if inadvertent.
- Use parental controls on computers and keep passwords safe to avoid inappropriate sites.
- Report bad online behaviour to the service provider or website where the cyberbullying occurred and request that any further communication from the bully be blocked.

TIPS for Parents, Teachers and Students
- Be alert to anyone seeming upset after using internet or phone.
- If a student reports being bullied teachers and parents must take complaints seriously.
- Encourage victims to keep any offending emails or text messages to identify a bully.
- Help young people resist the temptation to retaliate and also break the law when they are angry and upset about being the target of cyberbullying.
- Schools can encourage students to talk about the ways they are using the internet and mobile phone and keep communication open so that victims are able to express any concerns about what happened to them.
- Parents should talk to teens about online harassment, talk about ways to handle situations where they witness online harassment such as supporting the targeted teen and letting others know the behaviour is not acceptable.
- Help students to identify those they can talk to if they become a victim of cyberbullying.
- Report cyberbullying to appropriate person at school, and if there are serious threats contact the police.
- Report online bullying on social network sites to the service provider.
- Encourage all youth to disclose harassment without fears of retaliation or restrictions of their use of the internet.

For further information and suggestions contact the psychology staff at your school or Dr. D. Lean, Chief Psychologist.