

LESSON ON INTERNET BULLYING FOR GRADES 4 AND UP

A recent article in the New York Times regarding internet bullying should give all educators and parents cause for concern. While the 'net has wonderful advantages and opportunities, it is no different from any other tool in that it can be used for good or for ill. Our young people need to be made fully aware of how destructive the internet can become in the hands of evil, nasty, or thoughtless people. This lesson can be used in religion or technology classes, or in any other subject area where the topic arises or needs to be confronted.

Procedure:

In previewing the article and discussion questions, mark or highlight those questions that are most appropriate/relevant to your students. Note the activities that might also be most beneficial for your students. You may want to reconsider the selection of activities after the discussion, depending on which aspect of internet bullying generates the most interest, discussion, or confusion.

Give students copies of the article, or read it aloud in sections. Older students might highlight passages or take notes on the parts that particularly strike them, or that they want to discuss.

Bring up the following points if the highlighted passages are not brought out in the students' discussion.

Before discussing the article, ask: Have you or anyone you know ever had nasty things said to you or about you on the internet – in iMessages, emails, or websites? What was that like for you or your friend? Allow students to share these experiences if they have any to recount. Try to bring out the hurt and any problems in relationships, etc., that may have occurred.

Discussion passages 1 and 2:

Would you agree or disagree with the observation that people say worse things to others online than face-to-face? Why might that be so? What does that indicate about the person who is willing to write nasty things, but not say them to someone's face? Is that the type of person you would want to be? Would you want such a person as a friend? Are the girls in the article acting fairly in never saying another word to Amanda? What do students think of the girls' actions?

Discussion passage 3:

Why would a person harass or humiliate someone else? Is it easier to do online than in person? Is it more fair or cowardly to humiliate others online? What does this action tell about the person doing it?

Is it possible that the person being attacked might not even know about the attack? Is that fair?

What is gossip? Is spreading gossip ever justified, even if it is true? How can you know where cyber-gossip will end up, or how much harm it will eventually do?

Discussion passage 4 and 5:

Why might cyber-attack on someone be seen as “an even deeper level of meanness” than a face-to-face confrontation? The author uses the term “brutality” to describe these e-attacks. Is that too harsh a criticism? Are such attacks brutal?

The author also characterizes teenagers as lacking control of their impulses, and of having an underdeveloped sense of empathy. What does she mean by that? How does a cyber-attack show a lack of ability to control one’s impulses, and/or a lack of empathy? Do teens often act like that? What about pre-teens? Is this how a teen or pre-teen would want to be characterized? How might they turn that picture around?

Discussion passage 6, 7, 8 and 9:

What is sexual harassment? What are the laws against sexual harassment? Can a person be charged with sexual harassment for something they say? Why is this kind of cyber bullying especially risky? (It can lead to legal charges or at least to a habit of sexual harassment that could get one in trouble later in life.)

Consider the remarks about a person’s appearance or clothes. Are such remarks ever appropriate? Kind? What if they were made about one of your friends – or about you! How would you feel? Is the saying, “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” true? Have you ever been hurt by words? Can words hurt or affect someone even more than a physical injury? Why do you think as you do?

Discussion passage 10:

How do students feel about these abuses? Is this kind of internet activity right, just, or fair? Is it OK to do something just because you can get away with it? Or is it OK to do something that is harmful because there is no law against it (yet)?

What is ethical conduct? Personal conscience? What is integrity? Part of growing up, of integrity, is the ability to do the right thing when no one is watching or making you do it. What does internet bullying say about the integrity of the person doing it? If someone thinks cyber bullying is OK, what else might they think is OK? (anything harmful to others that they can do without being caught)

How does this kind of harmful behavior on the net hurt others? Hurt the one doing it? Hurt Society?

Activities:

1. Consider a game of cyber-gossip. If someone writes a nasty email about another, how far might it go? How many people might get the message? What harm might it do? **Write a scenario, radio play, or short story showing how internet gossip might affect a person without that person’s even knowing about it.**
2. Since this is a new area, there are no guidelines for instant messaging, blogs, or cyber bullying. Students could be challenged to brainstorm and **compose a Student Code of Cyber Ethics, the Ten Commandments of Personal**

Internet Use, a CyberPledge of Good Conduct, or other set of guidelines for dealing with their personal use of computers and technology. (There is a sample in the Archdiocesan Technology Plan appendix.)

3. Students could decide how they might cyber-police their own net-sharing. What might they do if they find someone being harassed on the internet? (What would they do if they found someone being harassed on the playground? On the way home from school?) How might a person respond to the harasser? To the one being harassed? What might they fear? (retaliation?) *If students are afraid to speak/act out against bullying of any kind for fear of being targeted, they have no assurance that they won't be the next targeted anyway! If they speak up or take action against a bully, they are sending the bully the message that they are not afraid of him/her.* **Create a “Guide for Dealing with Internet Bullies.” Role play or write a play or story to show how someone might handle a cyber bully.**
4. Students could debate whether or not the school should get involved in cases of cyber bullying. (Would the school be involved in bullying on the way home from school, not on school grounds?) **Students might debate the issue of school involvement in cases of cyber bullying that originate in students' homes.**
5. If the school should not be the involved, who or what adults or adult group should step in? If adults should not be involved, how might the kids protect themselves? Each other? (With cyber bullying, who's to say when the bullies will turn the byte on you?!) **Students could develop bookmarks, bumper stickers, posters with tips on fighting internet bullying.**
6. It would be well to remind students that there are laws against libel (writing denigrating things about others). There is also the Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” What other commandments might apply? (“Thou shall not kill.” “Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor.”) How does cyber bullying violate these commandments? Check the Book of Proverbs for sayings that pertain (Chapter 10 is loaded with them!). **Have students find other applicable proverbs. Write them on bookmarks, use with signatures in emails, etc.**
7. There are laws against verbal abuse and sexual harassment. Would cyber bullies really want a taste of their own medicine? Do students really think what is said about others on the net doesn't hurt? After all, **isn't that the whole purpose of cyber bullying – to hurt someone?** Everyone is responsible for his or her own actions. At some point a person could become legally responsible as well. As more and more of this happens on the 'net, it is reasonable to think that it will become penalized by law. **Role play a cyber bullying court case (Judge Judy?)** where plaintiff asks for damages for

harassment, mental anguish, lost business or opportunities (from internet lies), etc. What other charges might be brought against a cyber bully?

8. Wouldn't it be great if students took on the responsibility of regulating it themselves rather than have adults step in and take over? **How might they do this?**