

The Essential 8 for Schools

1. Take a stand on cyberbullying.

Understand it, define it, and take it seriously. Be proactive about cyberbullying prevention at your school; don't just react when it comes through your door.

Communicate your intention to address cyberbullying to the school community and parents. Recognize that taunting, harassment, or online pranks are NOT 'just what kids do', but hurtful, harmful behaviors that can have lasting consequences.

2. Emphasize that cyberbullying is a problem: everyone's problem.

There is no gray area when it comes to cyberbullying or any kind of aggression. You are either for it or against it. The student holds the power to choose – to keep silent about a degrading Web site OR to speak up and tell a trusted adult; to repost a bulletin and continue spreading a rumor OR to stop the rumor in its tracks.

3. Educate your staff and parent body about cyberbullying.

There is much to learn about the rapidly-changing technologies that children and teens use to connect with each other. Both parents and educators are concerned about cyberbullying, and they should fully understand its potential effects on the physical and emotional health of children. Teachers and parents play vital roles in the prevention of cyberbullying: they have the power to teach and role model the responsible use of information-sharing technologies, such as blogs.

4. Get young people involved from the get-go. They are the experts!

A student task force can be the gateway to educating your students, as in other Ophelia Project programs that use students to mentor younger students about healthy relationships. Select the technology teacher or another adult who related well with the students. Gather a group of students and ask questions about how kids are using the internet. Ask them how kids are using the internet to hurt one another. Then challenge them to brainstorm ways that they can establish safe spaces on line.

5. Hold children accountable when they are aggressive, both on and off-line.

Set and enforce the rules for online behavior in your home or in your school. Watch for signs of cyberbullying, investigate every situation, and when you catch or become aware of your child or student cyberbullying, state what you see and start a dialogue. Be careful not to jump to conclusions or act irrationally. Cyberbullying can be scary, and the consequences for irresponsible postings can be very serious, but overreacting

and taking the computer away may STOP your child from bringing cyberbullying to your attention. The number one problem in combating cyberbullying is kids' unwillingness to discuss it.

6. Identify at least one cyberbullying expert in the school.

One staff person, most likely your technology teacher but possibly a younger 'in-step' teacher, should stay on top of the latest technology information. This person should be consulting with students and know what technologies are popular at your school (i.e. MySpace vs. Facebook, etc). The best case scenario is a teacher who also uses the latest social networking software. This person serves two purposes: to alert and educate the staff of any new technologies that students are using and to serve as a liaison between the school and outside resources for cyberbullying or internet safety issues (i.e. local law enforcement).

7. Know your legal responsibilities and options.

Each school district and state is different in their approach to cyberbullying. Check with the legal council of your school district to find out what the school is legally responsible for. Not only can cyberbullying result in criminal charges if it is severe enough, schools can also be subject to parental civil action.

8. Assert to teens that there is no difference between 'real life' and 'online life.'

The vast expanse of ideas, images, people and opportunities online can help your students explore their own identities. Unfortunately, many adolescents rely on adults' ignorance of the current technologies to keep their 'online life' hidden. Children need to know that their online persona should mirror who they are in their day-to-day lives with friends, parents, and other adults.

Emphasize that there is NO difference between online behavior and in-person behavior. They are one in the same.