

Cyberbullying

Among its many consequences, the diffusion of new forms of electronic communication has given bullies new means for ridicule, harassment and belittlement. Cyberbullying is a serious concern for school administrators and is mainly seen when students are cruel to others by sending or posting harmful material, engaging in other forms of social aggression online, or by using other technology. Liability concerns arise when cyberbullying takes place through the use of a district internet system, school-owned computers or other school property. To avoid negligence, schools must ensure that they exercise a reasonable standard of care such as adopting and proactively enforcing an official bullying policy using specific strategies. While officials should always contact legal counsel to discuss the extent of their liability, adequate precautions might include the following steps:

Establish Firm Policies

Students should know the right and wrong way to use social media and should be aware of your schools policies before a cyberbullying incident occurs. This will help students understand that cyberbullying is an unacceptable behavior and will not be tolerated. Policies should hold students accountable for their online behavior and should focus on making amends to help avoid further incidents. InformED says that "teaching students about healthy relationships, responsibility, and empathy is vital to create opportunities for forgiveness and reintegration to occur. This type of restoration aims to acknowledge the behavior, understand the harm that was caused to the person, repair or amend the harm in some way, and commit to change so it does not happen again." This helps create a zero tolerance policy for students to understand the impact of cyberbullying and the importance of reporting.

Teach Students to Report Abuse

Providing students with the resources to break the silence surrounding cyber abuse is essential. The Columbine Commission report states that in 81% of violent incidents, someone other than the attacker knew what was going to happen but did not report the incident. Most victims do not report these attacks out of fear because of their peers, a school technology ban, and distrust in adults not handling the situation properly. It's important to take all cyberbullying reports seriously, and let students know that teachers, administration, and counselors are here to help and will be an advocate for them. Some students can be embarrassed by the content of cyberbullying which results in them deleting all evidence as it happens. A good way to encourage students to stand up against cyberbullying when they see it is to have them screenshot, report, and share the information with an adult. Also, most students affected by cyberbullying might be too stressed with their situation which may lead to difficulty in reporting. As a school it's best to make reporting resources available for all students.

Encourage Education for Teachers, Administrators, and Counselors

School educators with proper training can help put cyberbullying to an end by recognizing the bullying before it becomes a more developed issue. Teachers that see student's everyday have an advantage since they know what their student's normal behavior is like. Teachers should recognize students that seem to be withdrawn, depressed, or have dropping grades and report immediately. OSIG offers training and resources about cyberbullying to help equip your teachers, administrators, and counselors. OSIG has partnered with STOPit to provide all of our member districts with a proven solution that deters inappropriate behaviors in schools.

To learn more about this partnership please visit: <http://stopitsolutions.com/osig>

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