

# TIPS FOR PARENTS:

## WHEN YOU SUSPECT YOUR CHILD IS BEING *CYBER-BULLIED*

### Look for Warning Signs

#### *Anxiety-Related Symptoms*

- Excessive worry; biting finger nails; picking at skin
- Sense of panic

#### *Depressive Symptoms*

- Irregular patterns of mood (ups and downs); self-doubt, self-blame, feelings of hopelessness
- Decline in motivation and grades at school; refusal to go to school; social withdrawal
- Diminished interest in everyday activities; changes in eating and sleeping habits

#### *Attention-Related Symptoms*

- Difficulty concentrating; disorganization
- Impulsivity

#### *Acting-Out Symptoms*

- Excessive time on computer and cell phone; being overly-secretive
- Excessive anger; disruptive and oppositional behavior
- Risky behavior (including any indications of substance use, self-injury, promiscuity)

### Discuss with Your Child

#### *Facts of Cyber-Bullying*

- Messages generally involve relational aggression (e.g., gossip, social ostracism).
- Messages are aimed intentionally and unambiguously at damaging someone's self esteem.
- Reasons why cyber-bullying is especially insidious:
  - permanence (the message stays out in cyberspace and can't be taken back)
  - instantaneous speed of messaging
  - messaging can occur 24 hours/day and 7 days/week
  - popularity of email, texting, and social media sites such as Facebook
  - sense that "everyone in the world is against me" and "there's no escape"
  - anonymity of the bully; difficulty tracing the source
  - ease of attaching pictures and photos (e.g., with embarrassing sexual content)
  - tendency to copy-cat other instances of cyber-bullying (as seen in popular media)
- High incidence of self-injury (including suicide), especially among adolescent girls
- Absolute need for parents to have rules for time allowed on computer and phone, in particular, behind closed bedroom doors
- Absolute need for parents to monitor and intervene with cyber-bullying

#### *Children's Coping Strategies*

- Distance one's self from kids known to be overly aggressive, mean, and vindictive.
- Prior to retaliating, stop to reflect and formulate a plan of what to do.
- Be assertive (*Note: assertiveness is different from aggressiveness*); don't overreact!
- Having friends is one of the best safeguards against bullying!
- Seek help from a teacher, parent, or friend.

### When Necessary, Get Professional Help

- From your child's pediatrician
- From a psychologist
- From police