Cyberbullying Awareness

According to the Pew Research Center, nearly half of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 (46%) report they have experienced some form of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is willful and repeated harm that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets.   According to stopbullying.gov, a website managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, cyberbullying includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation and in some incidents, cyberbullying can have legal implications. The most common places where cyberbullying occurs are on social media apps like Snapchat or TikTok, text messaging or messaging apps, online forums or chat rooms, email, and online gaming communities.

As a means to prevent and stop cyberbullying, it is important to understand how kids and teens may experience cyberbullying. Common tactics may include:
- Posting comments or rumors about someone online that are mean, hurtful, or embarrassing.
- Threatening to hurt someone or telling them to kill themselves.
- Posting a mean or hurtful picture or video.
- Pretending to be someone else online in order to solicit or post personal or false information about someone else.
- Creating a mean or hurtful webpage or social media profile about someone.

Some cyberbullying activities cross the line into criminal behavior and should be reported to law enforcement. Below are some examples:
- Threats of violence
- Child pornography or sending sexually explicit messages or photos
- Taking a photo or video of someone in a place where he or she would expect privacy
- Stalking and hate crimes

Our youth have almost constant access to their devices and unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can occur at any time and be perpetrated by anonymous sources. As such, it can feel more persistent, making it challenging for teens and children who experience cyberbullying to escape it and find relief. Effects from cyberbullying may include changes in school performance, peer relationship struggles, low self-esteem, changes in mood, and a decline in mental and emotional health, including thoughts of suicide. Youth may also experience physical effects such as somatic complaints (i.e., headache, stomachache), or changes in eating and sleeping habits.

Support from parents and other caring adults is key to preventing cyberbullying. Parents and caregivers can play a vital role in helping to guide and mentor youth as they learn to navigate the digital world. Experts recommend engaging in regular communication and checking in

frequently with kids and teens about their online experiences to help address any potential risk of cyberbullying or harm. Below are some tips to help protect children and teens from harmful digital behavior:

- Set clear expectations about digital behavior, content, apps, and online reputation.
- Educate about the harmful effects of cyberbullying, posting hateful speech or comments, sexting, and sharing naked photos of themselves or others (including potential legal issues).
- Be clear about what content can be viewed or shared as well as who they can friend and interact with on social media and gaming platforms.
- Model positive, respectful digital behavior on your own devices and accounts.
- Stay up-to-date on the latest apps, social media platforms, and digital slang used by children and teens.

If you are worried a young person in your life is experiencing cyberbullying, there are many helpful resources available to offer further guidance. Check out the links below to learn more.

What To Do when your Child is Cyberbullied: Tips for Parents from the Cyberbullying Research Center: https://cyberbullying.org/tips-for-parents-when-your-child-is-cyberbullied.pdf

How to Prevent Cyberbullying: A Guide for Parents, Caregivers and Youth from stopbullying.gov: https://www.stopbullying.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Cyberbullying%20Guide%20Final%20508.pdf

Family Digital Wellness Guide from the Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children's Hospital and Harvard Medical School: https://digitalwellnesslab.org/parents/family-digital-wellness-guide/

References: American Psychological Association; Commonsense Media; Cyberbullying Research Center; Pew Research Center; Stopbullying.gov