**iSAFE**

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## Beware of the Cyber Bully

The i-SAFE America research team has discovered a disturbing trend—cyber bullying has affected more than half the students surveyed, on both sides of the issue. Their latest assessments surveyed more than 1500 students ranging from fourth to eighth grade across the country.
They found out:

- 58% of kids admit someone has said mean or hurtful things to them online
- 53% of kids admit having said something mean or hurtful things to another online
- 42% of kids have been bullied while online

The tradition of home as a refuge from bullies on the school playground is over. The Internet is the new playground, and there are no off hours. The popularity of instant messaging, e-mail, webpages, and blogging means kids are a target 24 hours per day, seven days a week. Even worse, i-SAFE found out 58 percent of kids have not told their parents or any adult about something mean or hurtful that had happened to them online.

Teachers and school officials need to be aware of the rising trend of cyber bullying as incidents online are brought onto school grounds.

i-SAFE offers these tips to share with students who are being cyber bullied:

- Tell a trusted adult and keep telling them until they take action.
- Never open, read or respond to messages from cyber bullies.
- If it is school related, tell your school. All schools have bullying solutions.
- Do not erase the messages. They may be needed to take action.
- If bullied through chat or IM, the bully can often be blocked.
- If you are threatened with harm, call the police.

Above all, students are the cure to the cyber bullying epidemic. By speaking out and telling adults they can stop bullying online and make the Internet experience a more positive one.

## Cyber Bullying: Breaking It Down

*Cyber Bullying is verbal harassment that occurs during online activities.*

*Cyber Bullying can take many forms.  These are a few:*

- *A threatening e-mail*
- *Nasty instant messaging session*
- *Repeated notes sent to the cell phone*
- *A website set up to mock others*
- *"Borrowing" someone's screen name and pretending to be them while posting a message.*
- *Forwarding supposedly private messages, pictures, or video to others.*

# The Effects of Cyber Bullying: Teen Takes His Own Life

Awhile ago our 13-year-old son Ryan took his own life. For the first few days we were nearly immobilized by shock and grief. It made absolutely no sense.

Ryan was an outwardly happy-go-lucky kid with two loving and supportive parents. He did not leave a note and his peers at school did not give the counselors and police any logical reasons for his action. It turned out the computer in Ryan's bedroom would be the key to unlocking most of the mystery.

I was very proud of the fact that my children grew up with computers from a very early age. To be safe, we often discussed the dangers of the Internet with them. They knew not to divulge any personal information or IM with anyone they did not know in person. Periodic inspection of Ryan's computer and frequent discussions had assured me that Ryan was continuing to use the PC responsibly. Another rule was no online accounts with passwords kept secret from his parents. We felt this was a good deterrent to any inappropriate e-mailing or instant messaging.

A week after his death, I logged onto Ryan's AOL IM account. I was quickly instant messaged from many of his startled peers. I immediately identified myself as Ryan's dad and that I was, on his account, trying to find clues to explain his death. It was during this first session that two children told me the details of what happened at school in regards to bullying.

Another child also tipped me off that there might be logged IM conversations on Ryan's computer if he had installed a program called "DeadAIM." I found the folder of conversations. Reading them was almost as difficult as losing my son. I found three months of IM conversations right up to just a few days before his death.

One very disturbing IM exchange was with another boy who was harassing Ryan in a very disgusting, sexual way. There were many other conversations that revealed Ryan's view of life had taken a dramatic negative turn over the summer.

And there was one particular boy whose online advice and encouragement was anything but helpful to Ryan's state of mind. This one IM exchange, just a few nights before his death, sums up the nature of this very unhealthy relationship:

My son: "Tonight's the night. You are going to read about in the paper tomorrow."

Other boy: "It's about time."

Ryan never mentioned this boy's name. We learned later that Ryan hung out with him a few times in person but mostly online since he lives a few hours away. Had we met this child in person or had the chance to ask other parents about the boy, we would have never allowed him to associate with this kid.

Do I blame the computer and the Internet for my son's death? No. Did I feel the computer in his room exacerbated a very unhealthy situation that started with schoolyard bullying? Yes.

The computer in his room provided an environment that reinforced his bad feelings. He continued to get harassed and tried to harass back online throughout the summer, which only made things much worse when he had to face the same kids at the start of the new school year.

Instead of turning to an adult, the computer made it too easy for him to turn to another peer who ended up being more harmful to Ryan's state of mind. Behind closed doors, Ryan was also able to more easily explore the option of suicide and find a website that showed him ways to do it.

I'll never know for certain if he would still be alive today had the computer not been in his room, but I hope by sharing this, another parent pauses and reflects on our family's tragedy. To learn more about Ryan and ways to prevent teenage suicide, visit: www.RyanPatrickHalligan.com.

**By John Halligan, Ryan's father**

# Prevention Techniques: Avoiding Bullies Online

- *Don't give out private information such as passwords, pins, name, address, phone number, school name, or family and friends' names. This information can be used by bullies and other harmful people on the Internet. Don't even reveal your password to your friends. They might reveal it or use it against you in a fight.*

- *Don't exchange pictures or give out e-mail addresses to people you meet on the Internet. Ask permission from parents when it is necessary to give such information.*

- *Don't send a message when you are angry—it's hard to undo things that are said in anger.*

- *Delete messages from people you don't know, or those from people who seem angry or mean.*

- *When something doesn't seem right, it probably isn't. Get out of the site, chat, etc.*

- *Realize that online conversations are not private. Others can copy, print, and share what you say or any pictures you send. Be careful!*