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HIGH-TECH HARASSMENT: UNDERSTANDING AND PREVENTING CYBERBULLYING

The Internet has given us immediate access to information and has improved the quality of our lives. Unfortunately, it has also provided some people with the means to exploit the innocent, commit crimes, and inflict injury on others. Bullies are now taking advantage of technology to intimidate and harass their victims. As major users of technology, young people are especially at risk of being victims or perpetrators of cyberbullying. Dealing with cyberbullying can be difficult, but there are steps teens can take to prevent it.

TEENS WILL LEARN

- To define cyberbullying and provide examples
- To identify the costs of cyberbullying to the individual, the family, and the community
- To employ key strategies for dealing with and preventing cyberbullying
- To share information about cyberbullying with others through service-learning

TEACHING STRATEGIES

- Whole-group Discussion
- Brainstorming
- Small-group Discussion
- Continuum
- Case Study
- Journal

SUMMARY OF STEPS

PART ONE   45 minutes
Step A. Warm-up
Step B. What Do You Think?
Step C. First-hand Experience

PART TWO   45 minutes
Step D. Exploring the Effects of Cyberbullying
Step E. Rewriting the Script

PART THREE   45 minutes
Step F. Stopping the Cyberbully: Focus on Prevention Strategies
Step G. Reflection

BEFORE THE SESSION

1. Read the entire session plan.

2. Decide how you will involve the teens in the session as helpers, leaders, readers, creators of posters, etc. For more information about facilitating teen involvement, consult the Introduction in Volume One.

3. Make copies of the handouts for each teen.

4. Make copies of the journal for all participants.

5. Prepare flipcharts with questions for Step C. (See Step C, #3.)

PART

1

TEACHING STRATEGY

■ Icebreaker

10 MINUTES

Warm-up

1. Review the previous sessions.

   ■ Ask teens to think about the purpose of the *Community Works* program. Ask them to tell what they remember.
   ■ Ask the group members to update newcomers and those who missed earlier sessions. Assign this task to teens on a rotating basis. Explain that it helps build public speaking skills.
   ■ Remind teens that these sessions will help them get information and develop skills to avoid being the victims of crime, as well as develop leadership skills to help others and their communities become safer.

2. Tell teens, or have a teen volunteer explain, that this session will help them examine the negative effects of cyberbullying, understand the costs of cyber-bullying, discover strategies for dealing with it, and learn how to help others deal with it through service.

3. To warm up the group, pick an icebreaker from the introduction or try "Certain Time of Day." In this exercise, participants are asked to say what they were doing at a particular time during the previous day. Form groups of four or less, and ask teens to share their responses with their group. Call out a variety of times, beginning with 5:00 a.m. and ending with midnight. After calling out two or three times, say: "Change time zones," and ask teens to form new groups. Groups should change two or three times during this activity.

TEACHING STRATEGIES

■ Small-group Discussion
■ Whole-group Discussion
■ Brainstorming

10 MINUTES

What Do You Think?

1. Separate participants into small groups of three to five each to define cyber-bullying. Ask them to think about their own experiences as well as what they see on television, hear on the radio, or read in the newspaper. Have them write down a definition.

2. Bring the entire group back together and ask one person from each of the small groups to write their definition on the board or flipchart.

3. Look for common elements in each definition and compare to the following:

   Cyberbullying is using technology including computers, cell phones, PDAs, or video game systems to harass, hurt, intimidate, or embarrass someone via email, instant messaging, web page design, and digital photo sharing.

4. Explain that forms of cyberbullying can range in severity from cruel or embarrassing rumors to threats, harassment, or stalking. It can affect any age group; however, teenagers and young adults are common victims, and cyberbullying is a growing problem in schools. Youth who cyberbully can be classmates, online acquaintances, and even anonymous users, but most often youth who are cyberbullied say they know who is bullying them.

5. Write the words "bully + technology" in the center of the flipchart or chalkboard. Brainstorm with the group about ways that bullies use technology. Write their responses on the flipchart or chalkboard.

6. Distribute Handout 1: *Cyberbullies at Work*

7. Compare the list that teens have created with Handout 1. Note and discuss any differences.

8. Ask teens whether they think boys and girls bully differently online. Discuss how, just as in face-to-face bullying, they tend to take a different approach. Boys more commonly bully by sending messages of a sexual or demeaning nature or by threatening to fight or hurt someone. Girls more often bully by spreading rumors, making fun of people, telling secrets, or excluding others.

9. Encourage teens to begin thinking about strategies for dealing with cyberbullying and whether different strategies might be more effective for boys and girls.

| STEP C | **First-hand Experience** |

TEACHING STRATEGY

■ Whole-group Discussion

🕰 25 MINUTES

1. This step gives teens the opportunity to share observed or personal experiences with cyberbullying. Remind students about *Community Works* guidelines for respecting privacy—what is discussed in the group stays in the group.

2. Ask teens whether they think that cyberbullying is a problem. Explain that the problem is widespread (assuming that they regularly use the technology involved); most students in the room have probably experienced or know someone who has experienced some form of cyberbullying.

3. Continue the discussion by asking teens the following questions. (Encourage them to share examples of the action and the impact that action may have had on the individual victim.)

   ■ How many of you know someone who has received angry or rude messages or was made fun of online? How many of you know someone who was sent these messages on their cell phone (either text or voicemail)? How did that experience affect that person? Write the responses on a flipchart or chalkboard.
   ■ How many of you have received embarrassing or inappropriate photographs or ugly rumors about someone else? How many of you know someone who has posted such messages about others on a message board or website? Ask for volunteers to share how they felt or responded after receiving the messages.

- How many of you know someone who has posed or pretended to be another person online, to trick people into saying negative things about others? How do you think that experience affected the person who was bullied? Write their responses on a flipchart or chalkboard.
- How many of you know someone who has been intentionally excluded from an online group, buddy list, or chat room? How do you think that experience affected that person? Why do you think youth cyberbully? Write their responses on a flipchart or chalkboard.

Debrief the responses of the teens. Summarize the discussion by telling teens that many of them know someone who has been victimized using technology and it is important for teens who witness or experience this type of victimization to take steps to help prevent and end cyberbullying.

To encourage thinking about service-learning projects, ask teens how they might help others learn more about cyberbullying (e.g., by conducting a survey of their peers and sharing the results in order to create awareness about the problem).

PART

2

| STEP D | **Exploring the Effects of Cyberbullying** |

TEACHING STRATEGIES

- Whole-group Discussion
- Brainstorming

25 MINUTES

1. Explain that during the next part of this session, students will continue to explore the effects of cyberbullying and how it impacts individuals and communities.

2. Explain that victims of cyberbullying may experience many of the same effects as young people who are bullied in person, such as a drop in grades, low self-esteem, a change in interests, or depression.

   Ask teens to describe ways cyberbullying is different and often more disturbing and destructive than bullying in person. Answers may include:

   - Cyberbullying occurs in the victim's home. Being bullied at home can rob someone of a sense of personal safety.
   - Cyberbullying can be cruel, as it intends to emotionally harm or embarrass its victims.
   - Often kids say things online that they wouldn't say in person, mainly because they can't see the other person's reaction.
   - Cyberbullying is far-reaching. Teens can post messages on a website or send instant messages or emails making fun of someone to their entire class or school with a few clicks.

- Cyberbullying provides the bully with anonymity. Youth who cyberbully often hide behind screen names and email addresses that don't identify who they are. Not knowing who is responsible for bullying messages can add to a victim's fear and anxiety.
- Cyberbullying may seem inescapable. True, the victim could stop using technology to avoid the bullying, but they are giving up a personal freedom and a social arena when they do.

3. Distribute copies of Handout 2: *Jessica's Story*. Ask for volunteers to take turns reading the story aloud.

4. Using *Jessica's Story* as an example, ask teens to think about who else may be impacted by what happened to Jessica. Record the students' answers on a flipchart or chalkboard. Possible answers include parents, peers, or the school community.

   Now ask teens in what ways Jessica, her family, friends, or school community might be affected. Possible answers include

   - Physically: Jessica may feel ill, lonely, and depressed.
   - Emotionally: Jessica might feel humiliation, depression, resentment; parents might feel anger and fear; friends might feel empathy.
   - Academically: Jessica now has failing grades and does not participate in class.
   - Socially: With Jessica's help, the girls' cheerleading squad might have been more competitive, and services could have been provided to the needy through Jessica's volunteer work.
   - School community: Jessica could have been a good friend to many students, students might be barred from carrying cell phones to school, and locker rooms might require additional monitoring from an already overstretched school staff.
   - Financially: Parents must pay for a high cell phone bill, counseling for Jessica, and take time off work to address the problem.

STEP E

TEACHING STRATEGIES

- Small-group Discussion
- Whole-group Discussion

20 MINUTES

Rewriting the Script

1. Break the group into small groups of three to four teens each. Each group should select a note taker who can present the groups' ideas to the entire class.

2. Ask them to reread *Jessica's Story*. Teens should focus their discussions on two questions:
   - How might things have been different if Jessica had informed her parents of the text messages immediately? How might things have turned out differently if those who received the pictures reported them to a teacher or school principal?
   - What can be done now to address the situation?

3. Bring the groups back together and have the spokesperson for each group report about the things they discussed. They should address steps that Jessica, Heather, other teens, Jessica's parents, and school officials could have taken to change the scenario.

P A R T

3

T EACHING S TRATEGY

■ Brainstorming

30 MINUTES

Stopping the Cyberbully: Focus on Prevention Strategies

1. Explain that cyberbullying can be hard to stop. Because of the nature of the technology involved, cyberbullies can work fast under a cover of anonymity. Many adults are unaware of the extent of the problem and are unprepared to deal with it. The key to prevention is to be informed about steps that you, as an individual, can take to stop the damage. By working together, teens can stop cyberbullies in their tracks.

2. Ask teens to brainstorm possible prevention strategies. Remind them that there are no wrong answers. Write down each response.

3. The list of strategies should include the following (if it doesn't, ask guiding questions to encourage teens to come up with similar ideas):
   ■ Don't give out personal information online, whether in instant message profiles, chat rooms, blogs, or personal websites.
   ■ Never tell anyone except your parent or guardian your password; don't even give it to friends.
   ■ If someone sends a mean or threatening message, don't respond. Save it or print it out and show it to an adult.
   ■ Never open emails from someone you don't know or from someone who you know bullies others.
   ■ Help peers who are harassed online by expressing sympathy. Don't join in the bullying, and let the sender know that you think cyberbullying is wrong.

T EACHING S TRATEGY

■ Journal Writing

15 MINUTES

Reflection

1. Relate the session to teens' lives.

   ■ Ask teens to think of two things they learned about cyberbullying during this session. Use a flipchart or chalkboard to record their answers.
   ■ Ask teens what advice they might give a friend or sibling that would be helpful in their daily lives.

2. Turn learning into action.

   ■ To encourage teens to think about possible service-learning projects related to cyberbullying, ask what information they most want to convey and what format they might use. Suggestions could include holding a parent/teacher workshop on the topic, creating informational brochures to give to younger students, conducting cross-age teaching projects, or holding an assembly.

3. Distribute the journal for this session.

    ■ Explain, remind, or ask teens the purpose of the journals. Be sure they know it is to help them reflect on what they learned, and for you to read and respond to what they write. Be clear that you will not be correcting what they write, just reading and responding.
    ■ Ask teens to write their answers to the journal questions.
    ■ Ask teens if they are willing to share their thoughts with the group.
    ■ Collect their journals and review them after the session, writing short comments. Tell them you will return their journals with your comments at the next session. This provides the teens with something tangible.

Additional Resources

NetSmartz offers several videos for teens that explore the real-life effects of cyberbullying. Go to http://www.netsmartz.org/resources/reallife.htm.

The Ryan Halligan story chronicles the real-life, tragic account of a young teen's struggle with cyberbullying. *Ryan Halligan: A Cyber Bullying Story*, http://www.RyanPatrickHalligan.com.

HANDOUT 1

Cyberbullies at Work

- Cyberbullying was experienced at least one time by 43 percent of teens ages 13–17.[1]
- In 77 percent of the cases, the victim knew the person who was cyberbullying them.[2]
- Girls experience more cyberbullying than boys do — 51 percent to 37 percent.[3]
- Only 10 percent of teens who have experienced cyberbullying have talked to their parents about it.[4]

Teens bully online by

- Sending someone mean or threatening emails, instant messages, or text messages
- Excluding someone from an instant messenger buddy list or blocking his or her email messages
- Tricking someone into revealing personal photographs or embarrassing information and then sending it to others
- Breaking into someone's instant message account or email to send cruel or untrue messages while posing as that person
- Creating websites to make fun of someone, such as a classmate or teacher
- Using websites to rate peers according to their appearance or popularity
- Altering saved instant messages to embarrass or distort a previous online conversation

Putting an End to Cyberbullying

- Teens say the way to prevent the problem is to block communications from the bully (71 percent), to refuse to pass on cyberbully messages (62 percent), and to tell their friends to stop cyberbullying (56 percent).[5]
- If you are cyberbullied or harassed and need help, save all communication with the cyberbully and talk to a parent, teacher, coach, police officer, or other adult you trust.

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[1] *Cyberbullying Research Report* conducted for the National Crime Prevention Council by Harris Interactive, February 2006
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

HANDOUT 2

Jessica's Story

Jessica was both excited and nervous when her parents told her that her father's company was transferring him to a new city. Jessica had been popular at her old school where she was actively involved in afterschool activities, athletics, and the local service club. She was nervous about the move and, at the new school, felt lonely without her close friends nearby. Her parents gave her a new cell phone with text messaging and photo sharing to help her stay in touch with her old friends, and to make contact with teens at her new school.

Jessica did her best to build friendships at her new school. She smiled a lot and tried to start conversations with people whenever she had an opportunity. One day in gym class, she chatted about the upcoming cheerleading tryouts with Heather, a popular girl in her grade. They even talked about getting together to hang out on the weekend and practice. When Heather asked for Jessica's cell number, Jessica didn't hesitate, but she did mention that her calling plan only allowed 50 text messages a month. Jessica was excited and looked forward to getting to know Heather better.

The next day after gym class, while Jessica was changing her clothes, Heather took a picture of her without her knowledge. Later that evening, Jessica picked up her phone to call a friend from her old school and discovered that she had 75 text messages. She didn't recognize any of the names attached to the messages. *What was all this about?* She wondered. She soon learned the awful truth.

Heather had tricked her: she had taken Jessica's photograph, manipulated the picture and added comments about Jessica's body then sent it out to practically everyone she knew. The messages Jessica received went from rude and nasty to vicious and threatening. In a panic, Jessica turned off her phone. She didn't know what to do. That night, she couldn't sleep. The next morning she pretended to be sick,

because she didn't want to face her peers at school. The knot in her stomach was so big that she couldn't eat. She stayed in bed and cried all day. Her parents were worried.

The next day, Jessica's parents forced her to go to school. Jessica could hear kids snickering when she walked through the halls. She kept her head down, not wanting to make eye contact with anyone, and didn't participate in any of her classes. She dropped out of the cheerleading tryouts and went home as quickly as possible after school. When she got home she snacked and watched TV.

After a few weeks, Jessica's parents got the family cell phone bill and were shocked to discover that the charges for Jessica's phone amounted to more than $300. When they asked Jessica about the bill, she broke down in tears and told them about the harassment. Her parents were disappointed that Jessica hadn't told them about what happened sooner. They were worried about their daughter, angry with the kids involved, concerned about the financial hardship this would cause them, and thought that maybe they had made a mistake by giving Jessica a cell phone.

JOURNAL

Supplemental Session 1

NAME_____ DATE_____

The most valuable thing I learned about cyberbullying is:

_____

_____

_____

One piece of information that I want to share with others is:

_____

_____

_____

Two things that I can do stop cyberbullying are:

_____

_____

_____

My ideas for a service-learning project to prevent cyberbullying include:

_____

_____

_____