Pointers For Parents

Protecting Your Kids From Cyber-bullies

(NAPSA)—Whether it's e-mail or schoolwork or just having fun, most kids nowadays spend time online almost every day.

While the Internet is a great place for kids to find information, share ideas and meet new people, parents should talk to their children about how to keep safe online. Kids who talk to their parents about Internet safety are six times less likely to meet an Internet stranger in person.

One threat that kids encounter is cyber-bullying. It may start out as harmless joking but can escalate into insults and rumors—ending in serious harassment.

Cyber-bullies use Web technology to insult, intimidate, extort and embarrass other Web users. One form of online embarrassment is posting someone's private message to a public site, such as MySpace and Facebook, popular hangouts for teens.

Harassment can also take the form of physical threats. If your child receives threats to person or property, experts at the Internet Keep Safe Coalition say they should be reported to the police.

If the bullying involves an adult harassing a minor child, it may be an attempt by a predator to intimidate a child and should be reported both to the police and to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children Cyber-Tipline at www.cybertipline.org.

If the bully is a student, you can contact the school about its policy for intervention, but all harassment should be reported to the service provider of the bully. A detailed tutorial at www.ikeep safe.org shows parents how to
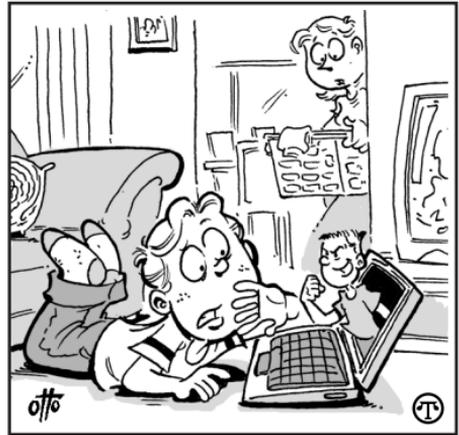
Warn your kids about cyber-bullies. Kids who talk to their parents about Internet safety are six times less likely to meet an Internet stranger in person.

report cyber-bullying.

Teach kids not to respond to insulting or defaming messages. A common tactic among bullies is to incite the victim, then post compromising responses, further abusing the victim by labeling him/her as violent and unstable.

Surprisingly, cyber-bullies tend to be smart kids from affluent families (with incomes greater than $75,000). In many cases, they are kids who have found a way to feel in control when they may not have a physical advantage in the real world.

Many children do not report cyber-bullying because they are afraid their Internet privileges will be taken away. If your child tells you about bullying or harassment, stay calm. Thank him or her for telling you, then take action by reporting.

Learn how to report and get free tools for parents at www.ikeepsafe.org.