

POINTERS FOR PARENTS

Cyber-Bullying: What Parents Should Know

(NAPSA)—One of the most frustrating—and even frightening—experiences a child can face is a schoolyard bully. Today, there is a new high-tech form of bullying that uses computers instead of fists: cyber-bullying.

Cyber-bullying is a serious offense that can have harmful, long-lasting effects on kids. It includes such actions as:

- Sending someone an e-mail, instant message (IM) or cell-phone text message that threatens or makes fun of that person

- Posting cruel or vulgar information about people or making fun of them on a Web site, chat room or message board

- Tricking someone into revealing personal or private information, then posting that information online or sending it to other people through e-mails or IMs

- Taking a picture of someone undressing in a school locker room, then uploading that photo to the Internet

- Creating Internet or e-mail polls for the purpose of rating/ranking people or voting on whom you don't like.

In rare instances, children have become so distraught by cyber-bullying that they have considered (or attempted) suicide. Parents should be aware of the personal dangers for their children and look for warning signs of cyber-bullying, such as sudden behavior/mood changes, fear of going to school and withdrawing socially.

Unfortunately, the tried-and-true method of dealing with schoolyard bullies—standing up to



Cyber-bullies use the Internet and instant messages to be hurtful toward others.

them—doesn't work with cyber-bullies, because they are protected (and empowered) by the anonymity of cyberspace. Here are some tips for protecting your children from such people:

- Never reply to a cyber-bully's messages. Doing so will only make matters worse.

- If the cyber-bullying comes from a rude or vulgar IM, block the sender.

- Save and print IMs or e-mails so you can show them to the police (if the need arises). Don't be afraid to contact the authorities if the "attacks" escalate.

These tips come from the free publication "A Parents' Guide to Internet Safety" developed by Geeks On Call—a national company providing on-site computer services. The Parents' Guide is part of an educational program called "Kids Club" created by Geeks On Call to teach children and parents about Internet safety and to donate money to local schools. To download the free Parents' Guide or to learn more about Kids Club, visit www.geeksoncall.com/kidsclub.