

Put an End to Cyberbullying

By Michael Vizena, Executive Director, Michigan Association of CMH Boards

Recently, the news has been flooded with stories of the tragic impact cyberbullying has had on school-aged youth in Michigan and throughout the country. Although most cyberbullying happens outside of school, it is a powerful form of bullying that affects what happens in school---contributing to poor school performance, depression and even suicide.

A Consumer Reports Survey conducted in the US in early 2011 showed that one million children were harassed, threatened, or subjected to other forms of cyberbullying on social networking sites such as Facebook in the past year.

Bullying impacts a person's mental health just as much as their physical health, and many students who are bullied make a plan to commit suicide. The Michigan Department of Community Health reports that teen suicide is the third leading cause of death for 15-to 24-year-olds. In fact, the average rate of suicide in Michigan for teens ages 15-19 was 6.98 per 100,000 in 2007 as compared to the national average rate of 6.91.

According to the Cyber Bullying Research Center, there are signs to watch for that may indicate your child is experiencing cyberbullying. Your child may be a victim if he or she:

- unexpectedly stops using the computer
- appears nervous or jumpy when an Instant Message, text message, or Email appears
- appears uneasy about going to school or outside in general
- appears to be angry, depressed, or frustrated after using the computer
- avoids discussions about what they are doing on the computer
- becomes abnormally withdrawn from usual friends and family members

This year, our state legislators have joined the fight to end cyberbullying. Rep. Sean McCann (D-Kalamazoo) sponsored House Bill 4391 and Sen. Gretchen Whitmer (D-East Lansing) sponsored Senate Bill 147. Both bills have been referred to education committees and are awaiting action.

October is National Bullying Prevention Awareness Month, and thousands have committed to partake in "Blue Shirt Day" on October 3 to help "STOMP Out bullying." The STOMP Out Bullying program is a national anti-bullying and cyberbullying program for kids and teens. The program focuses on reducing and preventing bullying, cyberbullying sexting and other forms of digital abuse. It teaches effective solutions on how to respond to forms of bullying and provides help for who are at risk of suicide.

The time is long overdue for bullying and cyberbullying to be put to rest. Because Michigan doesn't have a state policy for cyberbullying, we need to come together as a community to raise awareness about the devastating impact bullying has on our youth. By participating in Blue Shirt Day, we can publicly offer hope to students

who experience the harmful effects of bullying. Whether it is by wearing blue shirts or educating our friends, family and children about the dangers of cyberbullying, we should all join the effort to bring bullying to an end.

Social Media Updates

Facebook:

- One million children were harassed, threatened, or subjected to other forms of cyberbullying on social networking sites like Facebook in the past year, according to a Consumer Reports 2011 Survey. Please be careful about your actions online.
- October is National Bullying Prevention Awareness Month, and thousands have committed to partake in "Blue Shirt Day" on October 3 to help "STOMP Out bullying." Read more here. <http://www.stompoutbullying.org/>
- Bullying impacts a person's mental health just as much as their physical health, and many students who are bullied make a plan to commit suicide. Join us on October 3 to help "STOMP Out bullying."

Twitter:

- The #STOMPOutBullying program is a national anti-bullying and cyberbullying program for kids and teens. <http://www.stompoutbullying.org/> #MentalHealth
- October is National Bullying Prevention Awareness Month. Join us on "Blue Shirt Day" on October 3 to help #STOMPOutBullying #MentalHealth
- Today and everyday, we should educate our friends and family about the dangers of cyberbullying. Let's join the effort to bring bullying to an end. #MentalHealth
- The Michigan Department of Community Health reports that teen suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death for 15 to 24-year-olds. #STOMPOutBullying #MentalHealth
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