

Bullying and Social Media

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Recently, I attended the National Discipline Conference in Chicago, Illinois. Two major topics came up at several sessions: bullying and social media.

In the August 13 edition of the Hutchinson Leader, Jeremy Jones recapped from the August 11 School Board meeting the new bullying statute put into law during the 2014 legislative session, what defines bullying, and what we as a school district are doing to put any new requirements in place. With that information available in the article, I will turn to the second major topic from the discipline conference: social media use.

With social media being a relatively new and ever advancing avenue for all of us to use, how we use it and why we use it will someday be studied by the generations to come. What will they say about how we use social media today? We frequently are introduced to new and supposedly improved ways to communicate—some of which our school-aged children know more about than the adults in their lives. How do we keep up with technological advancements help guide students into using the technology for positive benefits instead of ways to hurt others or potentially themselves?

At the conference, keynote speaker Richard Guerry, Cyber Safety Expert and founder of the Institute for Responsible Online and Cell-Phone Communication (www.IROC2.org) stated one phrase to remember: Do not post anything on social media unless you are fine with it being public and permanent. Pretend that what you post is like publishing it on the front page of a newspaper or billboard sign for all to see. This is a good phrase for everyone to remember, not just our children.

He continued saying many people have a concept that what is posted can be kept private and we believe that because that is how many sites are marketed. They have “privacy” settings, which he described as transparency settings, and long warning statements that few actually read describing potential risks.

According to the IROC website, parents are encouraged to emphasize with their children that everything they post is public and permanent when they use the Internet and social media. Even if someone doesn't intend to send content stored on the electronic devices, what is stored could potentially become public if the item is lost, stolen, or hacked. Discuss only posting and sending pictures, words, and content for positive reasons. Many times, impulsivity takes over and students post hurtful messages to others without thinking about the consequences. This is frustrating, yet somewhat biological, since the part of our brain that controls self-regulation doesn't fully develop until age 23.

If reminders are not enough and you want to have more transparency and control over what your children are doing on their devices, consider some of these options. iOS and Apple devices have parental control capabilities, but Android devices require an app, which can allow parents to filter adult content, restrict app purchases, set limits on usage, monitor calls, texts and web activity. Go to <http://internet-safety.yoursphere.com/2014/04/10-android-parental-control-apps/> for a list of apps and their capabilities and prices.

Currently, we are planning in the fall at HHS to have a presentation for parents and another for students on this topic. More information will come in the next few months if arrangements for a presentation are planned.