

Social Networking Sites and Cyber Bullying

According to the website Cyberbullyinalert, social networking sites are growing fast, and so are the cyber bullying incidents originating from them. Experts believe that they will soon overtake chat rooms as the top source of cyber bullying problems worldwide. Bullying is an enormous concern in schools, the workplace, even in households as the consequences of bullying can be very severe even fatal. Bullying can be in the shape of physical, emotional and psychological abusive behaviour. The only difference with social networking is that this act of behaviour can be publicly viewed by others and can be posted anonymously. This could consist of spreading rumours, humiliating someone, or embarrassing them. All of this can be observed by huge audiences on the web in the matter of seconds. News websites have many stories about the dangers of social networking and cyber abuse. Here is just one of the tragic stories.

Carney Bonner aged 14 years old was a victim of cyber bullying. He explained how after a person had created a Facebook account under a false name, had started emailing him negative emails such as “Your nothing” and “No-one cares about you”. The fact that a person could send anonymous abuse, with no recognition to who sent it, is a concern of the works of social networking. In addition, profiles can be made at the click of a button with no proof of the profile being genuine or not.

Carney went on to say, “It started eating into my self-confidence, it all started going downhill”. Then if things couldn’t get any worse, he continues to say “I started to cut my wrists. It got to the point where it was from my wrists up to most of my arm”. This is an extreme case of how social networking can cause such distress to a person if abused. Although some cases have been so extreme that the result had led to a number of deaths. For example one of the most well-known cases of internet bullying, Missouri teenager, 13 year old Megan Meier. Young Megan was a poor victim of internet abuse after having a distorted relationship between herself and the alleged “Josh Evans” a so called 16 year old boy. The two kids joked and chatted on the online social networking site Myspace until things





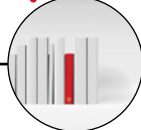
turned for the worse. The boy started emailing Megan saying “I don’t know if I want to be friends with you anymore because I’ve heard that you are not very nice to your friends”. Later on the mails got worse and eventually there were bulletins posted online saying “Megan Meier is a slut. Megan Meier is fat”. As a result of all this abuse – Megan Meier was found by her mother Tina hanging from her daughter’s bedroom cupboard. A few days later, the parents of Megan were informed that in fact this so called “Josh Evans” never existed and was fabricated by adults. These adults were the parents of Megan’s former friend.

There are many organisations, websites and helplines which offer help to those who are victims of cyber bullying. These websites explain how to keep safe on the internet and how to use social networking sites properly. They touch on many other types of bullying which a person may experience too such as bullying at school or at the work place.

How can such cyber attacks be prevented? First of all, you should not respond to anonymous email messages. Then, you should always think how something might be used against you before you post information online or talk to anyone you don’t know. Finally, you can block e-mail from cyber bullies, delete messages without reading them, and report the problem to an Internet service provider.

(Adapted from www.ucajournalism.com)

activities



↓ READING COMPREHENSION

Answer the following questions.

- 1 What is cyber bullying?
- 2 What is the difference between bullying and cyber bullying?
- 3 Explain the meaning of “profiles can be made at the click of a button with no proof of the profile being genuine or not”.
- 4 What happened to Carney Bonner?
- 5 Who bullied Megan Meier on the social network MySpace?
- 6 Who helps victims of cyber bullying?
- 7 How can you defend yourself from cyber bullies?