

## FAST FACTS

Not everything can be put into statistical form. But the following "fast facts" are germane to any discussion of sexting and cyber bullying and will be helpful when using the lessons included.

- Girls are more likely than boys to be the target of cyber bullying.
- Girls and boys equally send and receive "sexts."
- Currently, the most common virtual locations for cyber bullying are chat rooms, social networking web sites, e-mail and instant message systems.
- Social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace 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.
- Boys tend to boast about drinking and their "manhood." Girls tend to mimic adult behaviors they see on TV or read about in magazines and then flaunt that behavior.
- Most kids who have a social networking account will post a provocative picture, meaning scantily clad, semi-naked or completely naked. These often are the all-important "profile pictures."
- Digital abuse has nothing to do with the way one is raised or who he is as a person. Too often, kids think of it as nothing more than a new way to make out, a prank, or "just what kids do nowadays."
- Unless computers are actively blocked from porn sites, estimates are that one in ten of all websites are pornographic. According to one U.S. software producer, 25 percent of daily search engine hits are for pornographic material. These materials can fuel the fire surrounding sexting.
- Many people think sexting and cyber bullying are harmless. Yet, research is being done to see what links exist between these behaviors and sexual abuse and violence.
- Kids needing to be cool, to gossip, to be bigger than someone else, or just to feel as if they are connected to others often are abusers of today's technology. Marilou Johanek in a recent *Toledo Blade* column writes, "When they're not tapping out a barrage of texts, they're on their home computer talking to each other on social networking sites. They feel brave, in control, able to say whatever they please with no face-to-face contact to fear. It's a lot easier to fight with text messages or be as mean as you want on Facebook and hide your prints. Plus, kids relish the challenge to post and create and provoke."
- Online bullying is often aggressive in content, is repeated over time, involves an

imbalance of strength or power between kids, and often leaves the victim bullied by more than one bully. Calling another person mean names or making fun of him or teasing him in a hurtful way is the most common form of online bullying. Telling lies or spreading false rumors or receiving upsetting messages from someone the victim knows are also common forms of bullying. (Cyber Bullying Research Center)

- Online bullying is often persistent, editable and alterable, and speedily distributable to many people. Bullies can also hack into websites to steal information, damage websites and profiles, impersonate the victim, and cause harm that makes it almost impossible for the victim to defend himself.
- Traditional bullying and cyber bullying are two sides of the same coin. If someone is a bully at school, he is also a bully online and vice versa.
- Apps like Formspring exist and are easy to access 24/7. Kids use these apps anonymously to post mean messages about others. Often these apps are not blocked by school filters.
- Some cyber bullying starts spontaneously online. Most incidents, however, are reactions to what is happening at school among peers.
- A kid's main defense is to act as if cyber bullying doesn't bother him even though it does. Getting friends not to respond to attacks is also a defensive strategy. But once the victim or his friends respond, then they look bad too. They can't prove that the bullying is one-sided and by reacting, the situation just escalates. Because everyone can be blamed, kids don't tell adults what's going on. Kids don't want parents to know what they are up to.
- Kids will continue to fall prey to online bullies unless they are taught how to handle this meaner type of conflict, how to handle and disengage from peer drama, and how to avoid making matters worse.
- Bullied kids, and often bullies themselves, are closely linked to low self-esteem, depression and other psychological problems, anger, frustration, drug and alcohol abuse, delinquency and school avoidance, poor relationships with caregivers/parents, weapon-carrying, and offline verbal, sexual, or physical abuse. (Pew Research Center: Cyber Bullying 2010: What the Research Tells Us)
- Cyber bullying can contribute to a teen's suicide. Even though a young person who commits suicide has many other emotional and social issues going on in his life, cyber bullying can and will contribute to this life-ending action. Cyber bullying is never a harmless prank without consequences. Interestingly, cyber bullying victims and offenders are more likely to have attempted suicide than those who are not victims or offenders.
- Teens are three times as likely to consider dropping out of school if they have been digitally abused.

- Ohio is considering legislation to include student behavior away from school in school conduct codes. Thus, schools can intervene even if sexting and cyber bullying are not technically occurring during school hours.
- A sext or inappropriate message is never just between two people. Materials are easily forwarded to others. Nothing sent through a computer or cell phone is ever truly private, taken back, or deleted. Once posted the sender loses complete control of where the message will end up for all time.
- No law, no school policy, no moral pronouncement can shut down sexting and cyber bullying. Teens only can make the **B4U**Send program obsolete. It's all in their thumbs.