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Bullying linked to Internet access

Tuesday, January 25, 2011
By SUZANNE McLAUGHLIN
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WILBRAHAM - Parents who give their children cell phones to keep them safe need to be aware that a cell phone with Internet access and text messaging capability is a personal computer as well as a phone, cyber-bullying expert Elizabeth Englander said.

Englander, a psychology professor at Bridgewater State University, spoke to parents last week at Minnechaug Regional High School on preventing bullying and cyber-bullying and how parents can help their children achieve social success.

Englander said the problems children sometimes have with social networking usually disappear after about age 15.

She recommended that children who are given cell phones not be given text messaging and Internet access on the phones until high school.

Before a certain age children feel free to say bold things in print without realizing that what they say has consequences.

Englander said that 25 percent of students questioned say they have bullied someone online.

"Even nice kids will try this out," she said.

Most bullying that children experience is psychological bullying, Englander said. She said students who bully are attempting to raise their status within a group.

Parents with children who struggle socially should voluntarily host fun activities for other children and be willing to host other children at least through seventh grade.

This will help children who struggle to catch up with their peers, she said.

"Don't tolerate serious viciousness between siblings," she added.

She recommended that parents purchase software and tell their children they are going to monitor their conversations online and on their cell phones.

Children should be taught that nothing is private on social networking sites such as Facebook and that they should think before they print anything.

Electronics should be kept out of children's bedrooms so children do not use them when they are supposed to be sleeping, she said.

Englander said that many children have access to the Internet as young as third grade.

School Superintendent M. Martin O'Shea said there is a strong link between a child's social well being, his physical well being and student learning.

Signs that a child is struggling socially may include eating and sleeping disorders and stomach aches, Englander said.

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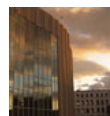
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