Practicing Good Digital Citizenship

A good digital citizen protects their personal information, uses good judgement and treats others with respect online. The Internet and social media provide us with so many opportunities to connect, but also present new challenges about how we interact with others in the digital world; including cyberbullying.

In this role-playing exercise, parent and child will act out an exchange from social media to help children learn about how online interactions and behavior are as important as in-person ones.

Teach your kids that whether you’re posting on social media, sending an email or commenting on an online discussion practicing good digital citizenship makes our online world a more welcoming place for everyone. Also help them identify warning signs that an interaction may be inappropriate, threatening or bullying.

This activity is based on materials from the 4-H Tech Changemakers’ Guidebook. Visit 4-H.org/TechChangemakers to access more free materials that teach youth and adults digital skills. Note: Some of the language and content that will be read in this cyberbulling role-playing exercise is intended to hurt the feelings of others, be sure to read the full activity ahead of time to determine its appropriateness for your child and explain the activity fully.

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

PANTRY STAPLES:
• Two printouts of the attached social media conversations

STEPS

1. Introduce your child to what a good digital citizen is. Share examples with them of how you have practiced this and ask your child to share some of their examples.

2. Explain to your child that you will now be doing a roleplaying exercise. The words that you will exchange do not represent in any way how you think or feel. They are only to help them identify inappropriate behavior and learn how to combat it.

3. Give your child a copy of the Social Media Conversations sheet and have them read it to themselves.

4. Start by having your child read the part for “person 2” and you read the part for “person 1”. With this arrangement the parent will play the role of the victim and the child the bully.

5. Sit or stand facing one another and read the respective lines to one another.

6. Once done, switch roles so your child becomes the victim and you become the bully. Read the lines again.

7. Once complete, discuss the experience. If necessary, reassure them that what you said is not a reflection of your actual feelings about each other.

8. Walk them through the questions below to start a discussion about digital citizenship and cyberbullying.

9. Following the completion of the exercise, highlight a positive attribute about your child so that the interaction ends on a positive note.
Questions to Engage Youth:

1. How did it feel to read that post before we started the role-play? Were you surprised by what was said? Have you experienced anything like this before on social media? (Emphasize that this is a safe space; if they have sent something like that before, let them know that it is okay for the sake of this exercise.)

2. Did it feel different to hear those words out loud?

3. Do you think writing something on your phone or posting something on social media is different from saying something face-to-face? If so, why?

4. When you see something like this happening online, do you know what to do to try and stop it from happening to someone else or to yourself?

5. If you feel angry toward someone, before posting a message to them do you think it would help if you imagined their reaction if you said those words to their face?

Explanation:

About cyberbullying: The explosion of mobile technology, digital technology and online communication platforms have enabled people to connect with each other instantly and to share information like never before. While this has huge social benefits, it also has risks and pitfalls, especially for kids, including cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is the repeated use of digital communication tools like cellphones, computers and social media platforms to make another person feel sad, angry or intimidated. This behavior includes sending hurtful or threatening texts, posting similar messages on social media platforms, posting embarrassing photos or videos online or using online tools to spread misinformation or hurtful gossip about someone.

If you think your child may be getting cyberbullied, consider whether the communication directed at them is intentional and repeated. If it is not, they may need to learn how to more responsibly communicate online. If it does meet these criteria, you should take it seriously and consider the following intervention and prevention steps recommended by the National Association of School Psychologists (nasponline.org/x33032.xml):

- Calmly and strongly tell the cyberbully to stop the harassing behavior and remove any offensive material from future communications.
- Ignore or block the communications.
- Make a hard copy of the material the cyberbully has posted and send it to the cyberbully’s parents to solicit their help in ending this problematic behavior.
- Clean up your child’s instant messaging buddy list to help reduce the number of other people who have access to the victim’s e-mail location.
- File a complaint with the website, Internet Service Provider (ISP), or cell phone company.
- Enlist the help of the school psychologist, school counselor, principal, school/police liaison officer or clinical psychologist.
- Contact an attorney if less drastic steps are ineffective.
- Contact the police if the cyberbullying includes threats of harm.

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Social Media Conversations:

Note: Some of the language and content below is intended to hurt the feelings of others and is used only for this role-play activity to help you learn to identify inappropriate behavior and learn how to combat it.

Conversation 1:
• Person 1: Great volleyball game today! We worked hard as a team, even though we didn’t win.
• Person 2: I guess the game was ok. You could have done better.
• Person 1: Yeah, I was a bit disappointed in myself.
• Person 2: Disappointed? You should be embarrassed! You were terrible.
• Person 1: I did my best.
• Person 2: Well, your best wasn’t good enough.
• Person 1: Ok. :-/
• Person 2: You’ve got to do better. I want to play volleyball in college, but I won’t get a scholarship if our team keeps this up.
• Person 1: I’m sorry. I’m doing my best.
• Person 2: That doesn’t matter. You played terribly, and I wish the coach would just cut you from the team

Conversation 2
• Person 2: What are you up to this weekend?
• Person 2: Were you invited to Carson’s party?
• Person 1: No. 😞
• Person 2: Too bad. All the popular people will be there. I guess you aren’t popular.
• Person 1: Yeah I’m upset about it.
• Person 2: You’re obviously not as cool as us. You should try harder.

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