

Highlights from Dr. Justin Patchin's Presentation at the SCIP Conference

SCIP held its annual spring conference, "Raising Kids in a Digital World: The Influence of Technology on our Youth", on March 22nd. Dr. Justin Patchin gave an enlightening presentation on teen technology use and misuse. He provided a review of his research on cyberbullying and tips for schools and parents to prevent and respond to cyberbullying.

Dr. Patchin is a professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and co-director of the Cyberbullying Research Center (cyberbullying.org). He is a national speaker, research and author. Two of his most recent books include "Words Wound: Delete Cyberbullying and Make Kindness Go Viral" to help teens navigate online problems and "Bullying Today: Bullet Points and Best Practices".

Dr. Patchin reviewed the definition of bullying and some of the inconsistencies in the definition over time. In 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Education and national experts established the following definition: "Bullying is any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated." The varying definitions of bullying has made it difficult to measure the victimization prevalence rate. The development and utilization of a universal definition will likely aid in future research studies.

Dr. Patchin, along with Dr. Sameer Hinduja and cyberbullying.org partners, have surveyed over 20,000 middle and high school students since 2002. Overall, 27% of the students have reported being cyberbullied in their lifetime. In a 2014 study of middle-school age youth, only 12% reported being cyberbullied in their lifetime. They also reviewed 234 peer-reviewed articles on cyberbullying. Based on the research, traditional bullying and cyberbullying are closely related, though traditional bullying is more common. Cyberbullying is related to low self-esteem, suicidal ideation, anger, frustration and emotional and psychological problems. Cyberbullying affects girls and boys at similar rates, though the methods of bullying differ among boys and girls.

Cyberbullying is creating unique challenges for parents and schools. For one, technology is changing rapidly, which makes it difficult to stay up to date. There are apps that appear to be a calculator, for example, but in reality are tools to hide content. The calculator actually functions like a calculator, but if the user types in a pass code, a vault opens to hidden content. One of the more obvious signs that the calculator is actually a secret app is there will be a percentage sign in the bottom right corner rather than an equal sign. Children are also using technology at younger ages. Young children are able to use tablets or iPods to communicate with friends and access apps. All they need is access to the internet.

Dr. Patchin recommends parents engage in open communication with children about technology use and how to be safe online. Parents should be cautious not to invade the privacy of youth, as it can harm the parent-child relationship. Only about 15% of youth report cyberbullying to a parent and only 5% told their school. It is imperative to maintain a trusting relationship between youth and parents so they will come forward to report any cyberbullying activity. If you do not know how to respond to a child

School Community Intervention and Prevention

April 2018

SCIP is funded in part by: Lincoln Public Schools, United Way of Lincoln/Lancaster County, Region V Systems, Nebraska DHHS: Division of Behavioral Health and Region 4 Behavioral Health System



reporting cyberbullying, make it clear that you are on their side and provide emotional support until you have access to other supports. If a child is bullying others, he emphasized the importance of keeping disciplining private to avoid embarrassment and harm to the parent-youth relationship.

Digital self-harm is a trend that just recently received public attention when a 14-year old completed suicide in England after posting numerous hurtful messages about herself on Ask.fm. (<https://cyberbullying.org/hannah-smith-even-more-tragic-than-originally-thought>). Dr. Patchin and Dr. Hinduja define digital self-harm as “anonymous online posting, sending, or otherwise sharing of hurtful content about oneself”. In 2016 they interviewed over 5,700 middle school and high school students. 6% of the respondents said they posted something mean about themselves online. The students said they wanted attention, they wanted to see how others would respond, or they thought it was funny. More research needs to be done on digital self-harm, but parents and schools should not rule out the possibility that this may be occurring.

Dr. Patchin provided general “dos” and “don’ts” for responding to and preventing cyberbullying.

Don’ts:

- Don’t take away technology
- Be careful of zero-tolerance policies; punishment is not appropriate in all situations. Policies can harm parent-school relationships.
- Shaming can be harmful to the parent-child relationship; parental forgiveness has a greater impact.

Dos:

- Give students reasons to conform
- Promote a positive school climate
- Promote positive coping strategies and resilience; youth with higher resilience do not report being bullied as much and if they are bullied they are more likely to report it to an adult.
- Promote kindness
- Encourage youth to develop positive relationships with adults, which can create “virtual supervision”. Youth are less likely to engage in cyberbullying behaviors if they have a relationship with a respected person who would be disappointed if they found out about any negative behaviors.

Cyberbullying.org has several handouts for parents, schools and teens. Dr. Patchin and Dr. Hinduja both contributed new information to a blog that can be accessed on the website.

Resources:

<https://cyberbullying.org/Cyberbullying-Identification-Prevention-Response.pdf>

<https://cyberbullying.org/developing-a-positive-school-climate-to-prevent-bullying-and-cyberbullying>

References: Patchin, J. (2018, March). *Teen Technology Use and Misuse*. Presentation at “Raising Kids in a Digital World: The Influence of Technology on our Youth” Conference in Lincoln, NE.; cyberbullying.org

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