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22 May 2017

We need to teach kids how to behave online – Netsafe’s advice for parents on Bullying-Free NZ Week

As the second Bullying-Free NZ Week launches, online safety organisation Netsafe reminds parents about the importance of teaching kids positive online behaviours.

Bullying-Free NZ Week runs from 22 May – 26 May this year, and Netsafe wants to remind parents that they have the power to prevent the harm of online bullying.

Over the last six months, Netsafe has received hundreds of complaints of online bullying, abuse and harassment from people aged 21 and under. They expect complaints of online bullying from young people to increase as the service becomes more widely known, to reflect research showing one in five young people in New Zealand have been the target of online bullying.

Director of Outreach, Sean Lyons says many parents feel out of their depth in a digital world. “We teach our kids how to behave offline, but with technology changing so rapidly over the last few years many of us don’t feel equipped to teach them how to behave online,” says Lyons.

“Just talk to them about it’, says Lyons. “Do they see it? Do they worry about it? Have their friends faced it? The answers to these questions will tell you a lot.”

“As a society, we can’t think about the online world as something that isn’t “real life”. How we behave online can have a huge effect on others. There aren’t two different sets of rules - just because you’re not face to face, it doesn’t mean that you can or should be bullying another person,” says Lyons.

One of the reasons disputes often escalate online is because each person is physically removed from the situation says Lyons. “It is easier to do, hiding behind a screen, because you don’t see how it’s affecting the other person first hand. Teaching kids to be empathetic and to think about the person on the other side of the dispute is really important. That is a conversation parents were having long before the internet.”

Bullying-Free NZ Week, an awareness week organised by the Bullying Prevention Advisory Group, is an opportunity for schools and their communities to raise awareness and promote a safe and inclusive learning environment. Netsafe, a member of the Bullying Prevention Advisory Group, says that Bullying-Free Week is a chance to raise awareness about how to help prevent bullying and the help available for those dealing with it.

Five things parents should do this Bullying-Free NZ Week from Netsafe

1. Talk to your kids about how you expect them to behave online
2. Let them know that if it’s not acceptable offline, it’s not acceptable online
3. Ask your kids to think about the person on the “other side” of the screen
4. Lead by example – think about how you’re behaving toward others online
5. Ask your kids what advice they would give to a friend who was being bullied online

Tips from Netsafe for parents dealing with online bullying

- **Stay calm:** Your child needs to be able to talk to you and know that you'll be level headed, thoughtful and helpful in your response.
- **Evaluate the situation:** It's important to know exactly what's going on before you can work out what to do next. Is it just a few off hand remarks, or is it something more serious?
- **Understand how your child is being affected:** Every child is different, and behaviour that deeply affects one child may be water off a duck's back to another. If your child is upset about a situation, let them know that you understand and it's OK to be upset.
- **Don't take away the technology:** Taking away your child's laptop or mobile phone can alienate them from their most important support network - their peers.
- **Teach your child how to use the features available on most social networking sites:** For example, blocking and unfriending people. You can also show them how to update privacy settings on social media.
- **Work through a plan together:** If you need help about what you can do next contact Netsafe for advice on 0508 NETAFE or by emailing queries@netsafe.org.nz

Netsafe runs a free and confidential helpline for people in New Zealand dealing with online bullying, abuse and harassment. Contact Netsafe seven days a week on 0508 NETSAFE or by emailing queries@netsafe.org.nz

Parents can find online safety advice by visiting netsafe.org.nz

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About Netsafe

Netsafe is an independent not for profit focused on online safety. We're committed to helping everyone in New Zealand take advantage of digital opportunities by providing support with managing and resolving online safety challenges.