

Media Release- The Rise of the Cyber Bully

National Day Against Bullying- Friday 15th March 2013.

Today Clinical Psychologist, Miranda Mullins of Psychology Consultants, Morningside unites with schools across the country in the stance against bullying on National Day Against Bullying.

In her 17 year professional career Miranda has seen many cases of bullying and the serious effects that it can have on children, however in more recent years there has been a rise of a more powerful form of online bullying.

"Bullying can trigger anxiety, feelings of loneliness and even anger. It can impact on a child's self-confidence, concentration at school and enjoyment of day-to-day activities. Sometimes it triggers feelings of shame and distress that prevent disclosure to those who can help. Sometimes the impact on a child's beliefs about themselves and their relationships with others can have long-term effects" Miranda says.

In recent years the accessibility of the Internet and social networking has increased the opportunity for bullying, extending its reach beyond the schoolyard into the home.

"New technologies are rapidly changing our social interactions and can result in home no longer being a safe haven for those being bullied" she says.

Online social networks, like Facebook and Twitter and the accessibility of mobile phones can be a key source of emotional distress for a child or teenager who feels excluded or victimised.

Recent research from Kids Helpline suggests that due to the more covert nature of cyber bullying and the ability to reach a wider audience, it may induce a more severe reaction in children and adolescents than traditional bullying.

For example, cyberbullying can involve the public humiliation or embarrassment of a child across a wider audience, plus the bullying behaviour can be more invasive as the bully can infiltrate the victims' home and privacy through the use of the Internet and the mobile phone.

An online survey conducted by Kids Helpline revealed that most cyber bullying occurs in late primary school, focusing on appearance and is experienced slightly more often by girls.

"There are some complex aspects to online interactions that can lead to specific challenges but there are many effective tools to deal with it, which will depend on the specific situation" Miranda says.

Miranda shares some professional advise for parents and teacher dealing with traditional and cyber bullying:

- Encourage open communication about school and social experiences and be aware of changes in your child's behaviour or emotions.
- Supervise internet and phone use where possible, this will be more difficult with older

children and teenagers so developing boundaries and rules surrounding this technology might help

- Be aware of any reluctance to go to school, reports of stomach aches or other physical symptoms and an increase in irritability can all be signs of bullying (but can indicate other worries and sources of stress also).
- In some instances damaged or missing possessions and scrapes and bruises can be indicators.
- Responding calmly will help the child to feel supported and safe. Explain what bullying is and that verbal attack via email, social media or phone is not acceptable.
- Make it clear that any type of bullying is unacceptable, is not their fault, and that you are available to help.
- Help them think of different coping strategies and consider what might work best.
- Encourage and support reporting the bullying.
- The awareness of bullying when it is occurring and the message that it is unacceptable are the best antidotes, so education in the classroom and development of an anti-bullying community is essential

To discuss strategies for dealing with bullying, contact Miranda Mullins on **(07) 3395 8633.**

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