Cyberconduct Cyberbullying

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Students and teachers are becoming the targets of cyberbullying more frequently than ever. According to the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF)/Vector Research + Development Inc. public opinion survey around the issue of cyberbullying, 96 per cent of Canadians recognize cyberbullying and inappropriate use of communication technologies as a problem. It also shows that 74 per cent of teachers know of more than one case of cyberbullying. As a result of our members expressing concern for themselves, colleagues and students, the NSTU adopted a strong position on cyberbullying at Council 2008 when it adopted the Appropriate Use of Internet and Communications Technology policy.

We believe very strongly that information and communications technologies can be extremely important tools to assist and promote learning for teachers and students as part of the school/campus experience, off campus learning, and independent personal education. As technologies emerge that facilitate communication we must constantly reflect on how they can and should be used and what use must be recognized as inappropriate. We play a major role ensuring appropriate guidance is provided to colleagues and students.

It is a poor option to attempt to ban and prohibit these technologies from school or campus. If we succeed in such a prohibition but fail to teach appropriate cyberconduct, we know that some students, parents and teachers will engage in inappropriate on-line conduct outside the reach of school or campus.

There are four critical parts to this policy.

The first sets out the relevant definitions. Cyberbullying is the use of information and communication technology to bully, embarrass, threaten or harass another. It also includes the use of these technologies to engage in conduct or behaviour that is derogatory, defamatory, degrading, illegal and/or abusive.

In addition, this section defines appropriate cyberconduct, the safe school environment and an open-ended definition of information and communication technology that is not limited to what is currently available.

The second section presents the guiding principles that must be reflected in any approach to encouraging appropriate behaviour. Here, the importance of the school or campus as a safe, supportive and inviting place of work and learning is stressed. The use of Internet or communications technology in ways that is counter to this, regardless of where the inappropriate use comes from, must be addressed in a timely manner and regarded as a part of the Occupational Health and Safety environment of the school or campus. This last point is extremely important. Information and communication technologies enable communication *to anywhere from anywhere*. This means that it makes no difference whether the communication actually originated on school grounds or a campus and the school board or the NSCC must recognize and deal with any behaviour that has a negative impact on the school or campus climate.

The third section expands on the principle that education is *"the essential pillar upon which the appropriate use of the Internet and communications technologies can be realized."* All members of the education community must be included in an educational process that helps everyone understand the responsibilities and consequences, both social and personal, of the use to which these technologies are put.

Finally, the policy outlines what we believe are the roles and responsibilities of all participants: students, parents and guardians, teachers, schools and school boards, the Department of Education, the Nova Scotia government, and the website and Internet Service Providers.

The policy is available on-line on the NSTU website. Select the "Resources" menu item and then select "Pamphlets/Guides" from the list that drops down. A link to the policy is provided on the page that will appear.

Although the new policy establishes a framework, teachers need to be proactive and understand how they can turn this policy into practical steps for their security and the safety of their students. Teachers protect themselves by ensuring their on-line presence is professional. In this regard, teachers must ensure that all communication with colleagues, administration, parents and students meets the highest standard. Never use a home or personal email account to communicate with parents or students. Use your EDNET or NSCC account for any such communication. Make sure it's your "teacher voice" that comes through in your messages, blogs or social networking site postings. Never post images or criticism of or information about students, parents, colleagues, administration, board policy, or board members without explicit permission and conscious consideration of privacy—yours and that of others. Never post personal or confidential information about yourself on-line.
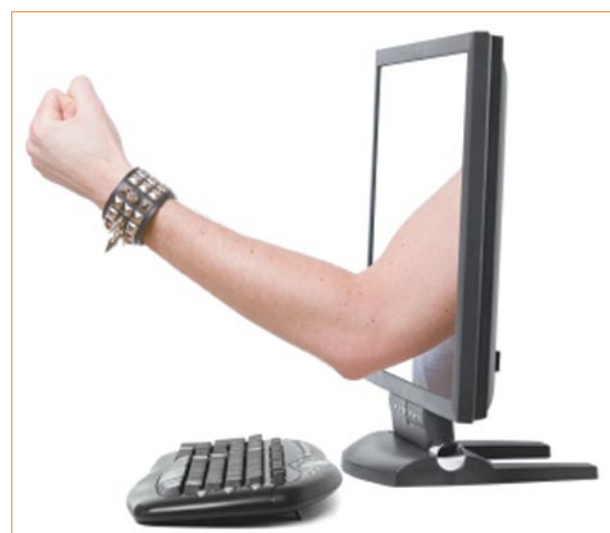
What should you do if you are the victims of cyberbullying?

First, never ignore or try to resolve the problem on your own. If you are the target of cyberbullying you should:

1. Make copies of all questionable messages, web postings, information, images, etc.
   a. Include the URL
   b. Take a screen shot of the material or print it in case the author of the inappropriate content removes it in an effort to hide their actions.
2. Demand the sender or author stop sending or posting the material. Indicate the conduct violates the NSTU policy (and employer's policy if applicable). Save and print a copy of this communication to demonstrate to administration that you have acted professionally.

3. **Never** engage with the person generating the inappropriate cyber-behaviour. Doing so will never resolve the situation and will only provide encouragement to the person doing the cyberbullying.
4. Advise school or campus administration about the inappropriate communication. Be sure to show all the offensive material to the administration.
5. Access appropriate support and guidance in accordance with school board or NSCC policy. The NSTU counsellors are available to provide support. These kinds of attacks hurt no matter how strong you think you are. You need and deserve effective and sympathetic support.
6. Contact the parents of the student engaged in cyberbullying if applicable.
7. Inform and involve OHS. These attacks undermine a healthy and safe working environment and should be recognized as doing so.
8. Contact the NSTU if the situation is not rectified.

We know that the Internet and the other communications technologies available to us have the potential to expand our students' horizons and to give students, parents and colleagues powerful tools for their own learning. Used effectively and appropriately, these technologies should be embraced. By teaching students about their effective and appropriate use we dramatically reduce the likelihood of their misuse. This must be our goal.
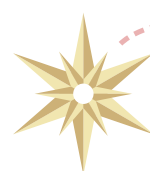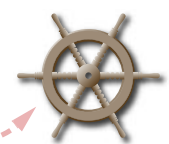

Email your name, home address, and school or campus with PD in the subject line to theteacher@nstu.ca by January 2 to be eligible for the draw.

This month's PD book giveaway is Allen N. Mendler and Richard L. Curwin's *Discipline, with Dignity for Challenging Youth*. This book explores the roots of student alienation and misbehaviour and identifies the goals of effective discipline, and presents ways to avoid confrontations, judgments, and punitive responses that thwart positive outcomes. It provides teachers with effective discipline strategies that preserve the dignity of students, nurtures self-control, caring and a sense of responsibility.

Readers will learn:

The difference between punishment and consequences
The concept of balancing limits and choices
How to integrate discipline with instruction
The importance of reframing success for difficult students
How to create hope and model remorse
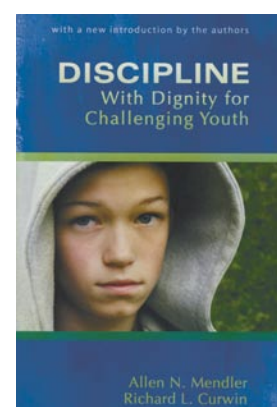
**The winner of the November PD book giveaway
(Lee Canter's Assertive Discipline Teacher's Plan Book #1)
is Darlene Oliver from
St. Agnes Elementary School in New Waterford.**