Cyber Safety Holiday News

With the holidays fast approaching it’s important for parents to be vigilant around the issue of cyber safety. Much of the information presented in today’s newsletter is courtesy of an article by Cosimer Marriner which appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald (6/12/15), and is indeed pertinent to our students and school community.

According to research, cyber bullying often spikes during school holiday periods. Children generally spend more time on their devices and may have greater access to technology during this time. Cyber bullying is any information posted online which threatens, intimidates, harasses or humiliates a child. Cyber bullies might set up fake social media accounts in their victim's name, take over their victim's social media accounts, or upload photo-shopped images. They may also send abusive texts and posts, repeatedly send unwanted messages, or circulate images online without the subject's permission. Internet harassment is pervasive and 24/7. It can be very damaging to people's reputations and their sense of social security, impacting on them psychologically and causing them harm. Australian Primary Principals Association president Dennis Yarrington said students often felt freer to cyber bully during the holidays because they didn't have to turn up to school on Monday and face the consequences of their actions. "There is potentially less supervision ... Students feel they can make comments without necessarily being followed up," he said. "In the holidays who do kids go to if they're being bullied?" Mr Yarrington said kids also mix with different groups during the holidays, which can create more opportunities for fallings-out, sharing of online details with strangers and inappropriate use of social media. Bullying escalates far more quickly online than in the physical world.

Important Cyber Safety Facts:

● One in five children aged eight to 17 experiences cyber bullying, according to the Federal Department of Communications.

●Children aged 11 to 14 are the most vulnerable, as they transition from primary to high school. They are being granted more independence, often given their own mobile phone, but may not have the maturity to foresee the consequences of their online actions.

What Can Parents Do?

●Parents who believe their child has been cyber bullied are encouraged to approach the social media company and ask them to take the offending material down. If that doesn't happen within 48 hours, they can then complain to the eSafety Commissioner who has the power to force companies to remove the offending material. The office of the eSafety commissioner can be accessed at the following link https://www.esafety.gov.au/

●Parents can also go to the police with evidence of cyber bullying. Acting Commander Johnson said: "Online bullies think they can be anonymous, but police can track them down."

●Parents are advised to be aware of what their children are doing online during the holidays, and keep computers and tablets in the living room or kitchen where they can be monitored. In this way, parents can see what their kids are doing on social media and the Internet – not looking over their shoulder, but asking how they're going, and is everything OK?

The important 'take-away' from today’s article is that we can all do a little something to protect our students and take action against cyber bullies. I’d like to wish you and your family a safe and happy holiday break and thank you for joining with me to promote positive cyber safety habits within our school community! - By Hayley Cook