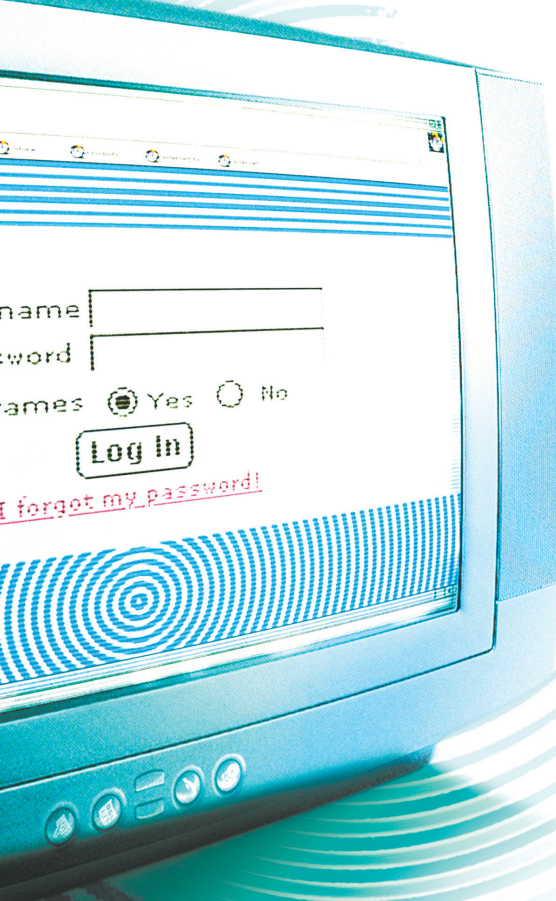# Safety in the virtual world

A national survey reveals the 10 most important issues teachers have on cyber safety, **Natasha Egan** reports.

Cyber bullying is the number one cyber safety concern for teachers, according to a national survey involving over 1000 respondents.

Strategies to assist young people to make good online decisions ranks number two, followed by strategies to assist parents help children make good online decisions.

The study was conducted by Generation Next throughout 2011 at their Mental Health and Wellbeing of Young People seminars. A total of 1124 teachers responded to the 35 item survey, which sought the educators' most common cyber concerns.

Generation Next is an organisation that runs a series of seminars with accompanying resources across the country, focussing on protecting young people and improving their well-being.

Cyber harassment is next in the teachers' list of key concerns, followed by the increasing prevalence of young people with mobile phones and their associated increase of technological power, at number five.

Sexting is number six, then internet addiction, followed by the impact of the internet on sleep, at number eight.

The ninth most important cyber safety concern for teachers is trying to keep up with recent developments in cyber space and online behaviours. Knowing what cyber safety resources are available comes in at number 10.

"The issues are all very linked," says Dr Ramesh Manocha, Generation Next's developer and a medical practitioner and researcher at Sydney University's department of psychiatry.

Rather than being standalone concerns, Manocha says it is important to recognise how the issues were connected. For example, cyber bullying, cyber harassment and sexting often occur together. Just as internet addiction usually leads to insufficient sleep.

The survey results have helped to shape Generation Next's 'Kids in CyberSpace' forum, being held in Sydney on March 16.

The event was developed in conjunction with a number of cyber safety experts and covers around 25 key cyber safety topics, Manocha says.

"The goal is to improve the education of kids to be able to allow them to make good decisions," he tells *Education Review*.

ER spoke with four of the speakers ahead of the event, to further explore the issues.

Cyber bullying, cyber harassment and sexting

SUSAN MCLEAN
Cyber safety consultant

Susan McLean is giving a lecture on cyber bullying, cyber harassment and sexting, as well as an afternoon workshop on cyber bullying.

McLean agrees that cyber bullying was a hot issue in schools and says it was the biggest non-academic issue in any school worldwide.

"The first thing that schools must have is a comprehensive cyber safety policy that includes cyber bullying, harassment and other online behaviours," she tells *Education Review*.

"You've got to have the policy. It's got to be a new document, not something rewritten from years ago, and it needs to be backed up with education."

That includes education for staff, parents and students as part of the curriculum.

"It should be a taught subject. They need to then make sure the information they share with students and parents is about using the technology safely."

There also needs to reporting mechanisms in place with consequences for misuse of technology, she says. And the policies and consequences must be taken seriously.

McLean says cyber bullying is defined as somebody who is repeatedly mean, nasty, harassing or threatening to another person using any form of technology.

"It could be by mobile phone, it could happen on the internet, social networking, email, text, chat and through playing online games.

"It can take nasty comments, it can take exclusion, it can be someone logging on and pretending to be you and of course it can be sending or receiving a sexy picture or naked images."

That last issue is known as sexting and McLean says the problem is two-fold; because after an image has been exchanged it can then be used to cyber bully.

The hurtful effects of cyber bullying are well-known and include mental illness, depression and in some case to children committing suicide, McLean says.

Rather than scaring children and young people away from technology and the online world, McLean says the virtual world had to be treated the same as the real world.

"It's a fabulous tool we need to embrace for all the wonderful opportunities it gives us but we need to be mindful of the dangers."

Cyber safety education addresses the good, the bad and everything in between, McLean says. And it is important for young people to think about their digital reputation.

Matthew Keeley

Susan McLean

Dr Philip Tam

Dr Wayne Warburton

"You need to think about where you go, who you hang out with and what that might look like. You need to know how to protect yourself, how to you use Facebook safely. You need to understand there are laws in cyberspace, just the same as there are in the real world."

A change in friendship groups, a student not coming to school, non-prescriptive illnesses and not wanting to go to school can be signs a child is being harassed or bullied, McLean says.

Further, a change in online habits, being particularly secretive about using the internet, or not going online as much can be an indication of negative experiences, she says.

"It's usually a breakdown in a social interaction at school that the teacher would notice or it could very well be a child comes to say I'm being bullied at night."

Regardless of a school's financial situation, McLean says there has to be appropriate budget allocation to provide for cyber safety education.

"It has to be something that we need to embrace ... schools cannot continually tell their community it's not their problem.

"It is their problem and the sooner that they jump on board and educate their staff and have really good working policies the easier their life is going to be."

For more, go to: www.cybersafetysolutions.com.au

Problematic internet use and addiction

DR PHILIP TAM
Child Psychiatrist and Lecturer at Sydney University

Problematic internet use (PIU) and addiction is the topic of the lecture and workshop by Dr Philip Tam, a practising child psychiatrist and lecturer with Sydney University.

Tam is also president and co-founder of NiIRA (Network for Internet Investigation and Research Australia), an independent online community of experts in the field of internet-related disorders.

NiIRA's focus is on promoting healthy internet use. Tam says that while the internet is an amazing, practical and empowering tool of benefit when used sensibly and judiciously, there remains a key question for users.

"Am I in charge of my usage and time on the internet, or does the internet control my time on it?" he asks.

It is not known how prevalent PUI is in Australia because no major, representative study has been done yet, Tam tells *ER*.

However, based on his clinical experience, and that of his colleagues, Tam says there is definite concern in the community amongst families and teachers regarding the problem.

"We regularly get calls from often desperate parents from around Australia," he says.

Numerous international population studies show about 2 to 6 per cent of users meet the criteria for addiction and more than 10 per cent exhibit some features of problematic use, Tam says.

There are a whole range of negative behaviours which vary depending on age and the severity of the condition, he says.

"I always look out for social withdrawal, declining school grades or indeed school attendance, staying at home all weekend, and having signs of irritability, anger, or depression. People can even get violent at home if computing time is curtailed."

All of the above issues can lead to a severe outcome, Tam says.

"At worst, children can drop out of school completely; they are often up all night with the computer (often playing multi-user action games), or they can ignore their physical health, or get quite isolated or depressed."

In South Korea and China deaths have occurred due to computer overuse, but Tam says he hasn't heard of that happening here. However, he says there has been numerous suicides of young people linked with social networking sites, which is another important issue.

Teachers should be aware of early warning signs at school, such as falling grades, isolation, irritability and overusing a smartphone in class, Tam says.

"Teachers must be able to address the issue empathically, non-judgementally, but firmly. Counsellors must also be able to look out for associated mental health issues like depression, anxiety, even ADHD and Asperger's, which have some relation to PIU."

Users should also set sensible times to spend on games, online and not ignore real world activities and friendships, he says.

"Families must likewise set sensible times online, especially for younger children whose self-monitoring may not be so good."

Tam has developed a tool to assist with a holistic assessment by counsellors or parents called IMPROVE.

For more, go to: www.niira.org.au

Cyber laws for schools

MATTHEW KEELEY
Director, National Children's and Youth Law Centre

'Some of the behaviours occurring online can potentially be both criminal offences as well as breaches of the civil law," says Matthew Keeley, director of the National Children's and Youth Law Centre.

However, when dealing with children and young people, it is often best if serious legal consequences are avoided, he says.

Keeley was speaking to *ER* ahead of his lecture on cyberspace, young people and the law. He is also delivering a cyber laws for schools workshop at the event.

Keeley gives examples of a number of different cyber acts involving young people that could give rise to criminal offences.

"The creation of a false Facebook profile of a young person and in the profile offensive material about that person and other people is posted," Keely says.

"A teen who instructs us that he and his girlfriend have exchanged nude pictures of each other and who is asking what the law says about that ... The teenager who complains about someone who follows her everywhere and who has taken photos of her and uploaded them onto Facebook without her permission ... And the teen whose photographic image has been photo shopped to make it appear that he is performing a sexual act and this image is transmitted online amongst fellow students," he says.

Cyber bullying can involve the Commonwealth and state/territory criminal offences of stalking, assault (threats), harassment, vilification and misuse of a carriage service, amongst others, Keely says.

The above offences generally apply to people of all ages but others can be dependent on the age of a person involved.

"The practice of sexting can involve both commonwealth and state/territory criminal laws prohibiting the production, possession and dissemination of child abuse material."

The Commonwealth laws relate to images of persons who are or appear to be under 18, he said. While state and territory criminal laws prescribe various age limits of under-16 or under-18.

In addition to considering their school policies and procedures, Keeley says principals and teachers should aim to factor in the best interests of the children and young people involved.

"Victims and their families in these circumstances can be incredibly disempowered and they should be shown that help, advice and even advocacy is available to them," he says.

"Bullies too are in a very vulnerable position when caught and may themselves be in need of advice and help."

It is vitally important that all the young people involved are heard and supported in whatever process teachers and principals implement, he said.

"Advice and advocacy services can assist with this."

Measures to quickly resolve the conflict are preferred to those which may extend and exacerbate the problem, Keeley says.

"Schools can for example assist the victim of bullying to request a website administrator to take down any offending material on the basis that it breaches the service provider's terms of use. Once offending material is offline, a significant amount of heat will fall out of the conflict."

Principals and teachers can look at the Lawstuff website for information on the law as it applies to these issues in their state or territory, Keeley says.

"There is also an email legal advice service called Lawmail which allows young people, or others acting on their behalf, to seek written legal advice from us," he says.

For more, go to: www.lawstuff.org.au

See www.generationnext.com.au/events/kids-in-cyberspace for information about the event.

Safety in the virtual world

Violent video games and aggression

DR WAYNE WARBURTON, lecturer in developmental psychology at Macquarie University and deputy director of the Children and Families Research Centre

Violent video games and aggression is the subject of Dr Wayne Warburton's workshop at the upcoming event.

The popular perception that playing violent video does not lead to an increase in the likelihood of aggressive behaviour is a myth, Warburton says.

The large body of research amassed over the last 10 years shows this. But a few well-funded and loud researchers using questionable methods say otherwise, he says.

"The way the brain works is you are what you eat," Warburton tells *Education Review*.

If you live in a war torn country, a very violent neighbourhood or have very high exposure to a lot of violent media, Warburton says the outcome is the same.

"You tend to have a neural network where you have lots and lots of concepts encoded for violence and aggressive ideas. You tend to have lots of triggers that would make you think of something to do with aggressive or violent behaviour."

Additionally, a person has more scripts for responding to a provocation of aggression and how that would play out, he says.

"It's not just media. If that's your life that's the way your brain wires up."

Warburton says video games are great learning tools with many positive applications. He cites pilots, laparoscopic surgeons and soldiers as examples of people who use simulators in their training to act out roles and procedures to perfect moves.

"They're really fantastic. They're repetitive and behaviour is rewarded." If it is bad behaviour however, rewarding it sends the wrong signal, he says.

Warburton says the world's leading researcher in the field, Craig Anderson, and his colleagues from Iowa State University conducted meta analyses using 380 studies with a total of 130,000 participants.

"They found very consistent effects where exposure to violent video games led to an increase in the likelihood of aggressive behaviour, an increase in aggressive thoughts, an increase in aggressive feelings, a decrease in empathy and a decrease in pro-social behaviour."

All the same, Warburton says that video games and media per se were not inherently bad, though it is important to find the right balance.

Warburton says he supports guidelines from the American Academy of Paediatrics that suggest children should aim for a maximum of one to two hours per day of reasonably good quality media.

"If you're watching for two hours a day and some of it is educational, some of it is reasonably benign and some of it is pro social in its content, then that would be seen as a healthy media exposure."

In Australia, however, Warburton says the average exposure for young people aged eight to 18 is five hours a day, which he adds is more time than spent in school in terms of face-to-face teaching.

Warburton suggests that just as educators teach students about healthy eating they could cover healthy media habits too. And that education needs to be done early on.

"It's helpful for kids to learn that our brain is part of our body and our brain growth like our body needs healthy nutrition too."

Warburton says it is important to teach children to self regulate early in life so that by the time they are 12 or 13, they are making their own healthy decisions about media.

"Once somebody is a teenager, you have no control," he says. ■

For more, go to:
www.iec.mq.edu.au/research/cfrc/cfrc_home/

Resources

Cybersmart is a national cyber safety and security education resource run by a team of former educators and managed by at the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). It includes a range of activities for parents, teachers, children, young people, librarians and other stakeholders.

Senior education advisor for ACMA's Cybersmart Outreach Section, Philip Knight, says the program was designed to provide educators with the tools and support to engage their students on a range of cyber safety issues and includes strategies to incorporate into the curriculum.

"Digital citizenship is a central theme and issues addressed include cyber bullying, identity theft, privacy and safe social networking," Knight tells *Education Review*.

Knight, a former secondary school principal, describes the website as a one-stop shop for educators, with information and resources including lesson plans, audio-visual material, case studies, policies, tips and hints.

The program also runs professional development workshops and internet safety awareness presentations in metropolitan and regional centres throughout Australia.

Another feature is **Connect.ed**, which is a self-paced online course aimed at empowering primary and secondary schools teachers to help students be safe online.

Additionally there is a pre-service teacher program to equip new recruits with cyber safety skills before they enter the classroom.

According to information supplied by ACMA, between January 2009 and December 2011, there were 427 PD for educators events involving 10,309 teachers. A further 411,320 students, staff and parents attended 4083 internet safety awareness presentations.

Since its launch in May 2011, 3260 teachers have registered to take part in Connect.Ed. While 6210 pre-service teachers in their final year have attended 57 events at 38 different university campuses since that program's launch in June 2010.

"All Cybersmart resources and materials are research-based and available free of charge," Knight said. ■

Go to: www.cybersmart.gov.au

Other resources

● **www.kidshelp.com.au**
A website to accompany the Kids Helpline.

● **www.thinkuknow.org.au**
A portal to ThinkUKnow, an internet safety training site aimed at parents, carers and teachers, and ThinkUKnow Youth, which is aimed at 11 to 17 year-olds.

● **www.esmartschools.org.au**
An initiative of the Alannah and Madeline Foundation which aims to make cyber safety a normal part of everybody's life.