

Cyberbullying in DPS : How to Support Youth Online

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Self-reports from the *Healthy Kids Colorado Survey* (2015) showed 20-25% of DPS middle school students experienced cyberbullying. While as many as 70% of students report seeing cyberbullying, not all report concerns to a trusted adult. For students, the impact of cyberbullying can be detrimental as cyberbullying can decrease self-esteem and academic performance, and is related to increases in depression and anxiety.

Bullying vs. Cyberbullying: Know the Difference

DPS policy classifies bullying as “harassment and may constitute a violation of civil rights when it is based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, veteran status or disability.” Students engaging in bullying face disciplinary action which can extend to suspension, expulsion or referral to law enforcement depending on the severity.

Cyberbullying refers to bullying that occurs electronically. It happens on social media sites such as Facebook, and Snap Chat, on gaming sites, texts and email. Cyberbullying possesses unique challenges; people can create and sustain anonymity. It lasts long periods of time. It transfers across home and school settings. It includes sexting or sending sexually explicit messages or photographs with the intention of shaming another person. It can include threats of harms or practices that exclude another person.

School Prevention and Intervention Programming

Prevention efforts teach students about self-awareness, relationship skills, and decision making. Students practice how to respond if they see a victim of bullying and how to be safe online. Interventions reteach appropriate behavior, paired with supports that include, counseling, and consequences. Each school has a mental health team (school psychologist, social worker, counselor and nurse) that support students dealing with bullying. This year, nine middle schools received a grant from the Colorado Department of Education, to implement bully prevention.

Research demonstrates that bullying coupled with other risk factors may contribute to an increase risk of suicide (Stopbullying.gov, 2013). Suicide-related behavior, is complex and cannot be attributed to bullying alone. The Signs of Suicide (SOS) Program, which has been found to decrease the risk of suicide, is used in DPS and addresses cyberbullying.

Strategies for Parents

- Talk openly and honestly about cyberbullying
- Set the expectation: It's not okay! Discuss consequences of cyberbullying
- Learn about privacy settings, the latest apps and websites, and talk about use of technology by visiting <https://www.common sense media.org/social-media#>

- Contact a member of your school's mental health team to report concerns
- Teach your child to report concerns and access supports at school, home and in the community.
- Use the Safe2Tell app, call Safe2Tell at 1-877-542-7233 or visit <http://safe2tell.org> to report a concern
- Visit www.stopbullying.gov and www.common sense media.org to learn