Culture Change

Along with the rise of social networks in the lives of youth comes the rise of cyber bullying and online harassment. However, bullying is nothing new to our society and has been around for decades. Bullying doesn't discriminate against children or teenagers; it involves all kinds of human beings. The difficulty that parents and teachers have is to control and limit online bullying when it isn't apparent outside of the computer. How can we, as a society, control the amount of harassment going on without invading someone's privacy? The solution to this problem, as addressed by experts in risk prevention and school safety, is to invoke a culture change. We need to adapt to the changing social customs and move in a different direction regarding the attitude youth and adults have towards social networks.

For this culture change to occur, there has to be new movement in schools across America taking measures to transform the social norms about online harassment. The current standard of ensuring that all bullies are punished by being suspended or expelled only leads these aggressive children to feel more upset and depressed. This standard is where our society needs to change. Instead, there should be a focus on how to support both the victim and the perpetrator in these situations. The bully is always targeted as the violent and harassing child but never receives any help for his or her distress. What the bully should be taught is how social cruelty won't alleviate their pain and how to release their emotions in a healthier way.

There are multiple ways students can step up and become an advocate of this cause to spread the message of a culture change to their own schools. First of all, students can send out an all school survey to find out how prevalent cyber bullying is in their community. This survey could have a major impact on how students perceive online harassment. If students hear, as most student bodies do when surveyed, that bullying is done and experienced by only a minority of students and that most treat one another with civility, their opinion on the social norm regarding this behavior changes. After analyzing the results, students could then make a presentation or a short video to inform and discourage their school from any form of online or cyber bullying. To further this idea of a survey, students could add or send out another survey with this question: How can we change or maintain the culture of respect at our school? Then students can hold an assembly and announce the top 10 most popular responses, videotape it, and put it on Youtube to share with other schools. Surveys are a great way to see where your school stands on the issue of cyber bullying and figure out how much and what needs to change.

Once the level of awareness about online harassment has been established, students and teachers should work together to organize ways to educate the student body about emotional health and to support both bullies and victims. The most significant impact students could have on limiting cyber bullying in their school is by advocating for Social-Emotional Learning. Research has shown that Social-Emotional Learning improves academic performance, critical thinking, creativity, social skills, problem-solving, and emotional wellbeing. There are numerous well-established programs that can help students with the challenges of growing up,

including issues that deal with appropriate online behavior and bullying. If these programs are efficiently established within the classroom, students have more confidence in their social skills and a common ground for addressing social, emotional, and behavioral issues. These Social-Emotional Learning programs can improve individual social awareness, which will consequently improve the community and change their perception about cyber bullying.

Being conscientious of what is appropriate online behavior is only one step of the process towards healing those involved with online harassment. A group of students and teachers should develop a plan on how to respond to tragic or violent incidents in the school community. This group can figure out ways specific to their community to keep such incidents from reoccurring, to support those who are dealing with emotional issues, and to figure out what needs to change and how. Students and teachers can set up a support group for both the victims and the perpetrators of cyber bullying to get to the bottom of the conflict and resolve the issues each student is dealing with. Rather than publicizing "who said what" to the whole school or officially punishing the bullying, the school should focus on fixing whatever problem started the situation in the first place and educate the student body on how to behave in difficult circumstances. A supporting community will send the message that if a student is taking out their pain in an unhealthy manner, they can find help in any of their peers or teachers rather than fear being punished or feeling more upset and depressed.

Starting the movement of this culture change will only be influential if the community learns and remembers to change their behavior. To ensure that students

are not daydreaming through a half-hour presentation about cyber bullying, a group of students should organize and celebrate a "Random Acts of Kindness Day." This celebration might include decorating hallways and classrooms, handing out stickers and pins, sending out kind messages or texts, etc. This project could expand to displaying each random act of kindness from students or teachers on a website, in a yearbook, or in a display case. Student leaders should try to make a competition of by either judging or voting who is the kindest student is and they will receive some kind of prize or award. Combining the awareness of the level of cyber bullying going on and education on how to avoid or deal with issues that lead to cyber bullying, with celebration of being kind to others, will transform a hurtful community into a supporting and upbeat school that values other's happiness.

All of these ideas and processes to communicate with others on how to transform our standards of dealing with bullying will only be effective if students and teachers want them to be. Individuals need to challenge themselves to stand up to social cruelty and to promote social intelligence. All it takes is one member of a community with enough motivation to start this culture change movement within their school, and soon enough it will spread to surrounding schools and even further. If we adjusted to this rise of technology and social networks with such ease then our society should have no difficulty abandoning this cyber bullying behavior. Refuse to give up the fight for this culture change, and it will inevitably occur, saving those who bully and those who are bullied.

Works Cited

Collier, Anne. "From 'Born This Way' to 'Move This Way': A new foundation." *Net Family News*. 12 Mar. 2012. Web. 13 Mar. 2012. <http://www.netfamilynew s.org/>.

Collier, Anne, et al. "Changing the Culture: Ideas for Student Action." *Harvard Cyber Law*. Feb. 2012. Web. 13 Mar. 2012. <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/ cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/IdeasForStudents.pdf>.

"Selecting Programs." *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning*. Aug. 2011. Web. 13 Mar. 2012. <http://casel.org/in-schools/selecting-programs/>.