

Educator's Guide to Cyberbullying, Cyberthreats & Sexting

Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D.
Center for Safe and Responsible Use of the Internet

Young people have fully embraced the Internet and mobile technologies as both an environment and a tool for socializing. Via the Internet and cell phones, they send messages, create their own online profile, post personal news, send text messages and images, interact through instant messaging, and interact in online groups and on gaming sites.

Unfortunately, there are increasing reports of children and teens using these technologies to post damaging text or images to bully their peers or engage in other aggressive behavior. There are also reports of teens posting material that raises concerns that they are considering an act of violence against others or themselves. More recently, concerns of sending provocative nude or semi-nude images, a practice called “sexting” have emerged.

This guide provides educators with insight into these concerns and guidelines to prevent and respond. This guide provides only a brief overview. More information, as well as implementation documents, is available in *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Online Social Aggression, Threats, and Distress* (Research Press). CSRIU also conducts in-person and online workshops on these issues.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying, or electronic aggression, is being cruel to others by sending or posting harmful material or engaging in other forms of social aggression using the Internet or other digital technologies. Cyberbullying can take different forms:

- **Flaming.** Online fights using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language. *Joe and Alec's online exchange got angrier and angrier. Insults were flying. Joe warned Alec to watch his back in school the next day.*
- **Harassment.** Repeatedly sending nasty, mean, and insulting messages. *Sara reported to the principal that Kayla was bullying another student. When Sara got home, she had 35 angry messages on her social networking profile. Some from complete strangers.*
- **Denigration.** “Dissing” someone online. Sending or posting gossip or rumors about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships. *Some students created a “We Hate Joe” group where they posted jokes, cartoons, gossip, and rumors, all dissing Joe.*
- **Impersonation.** Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material to get that person in trouble or danger or to damage that person's reputation or friendships. *Laura watched closely as Emma logged on to her account and discovered her password. Later, Laura logged on to Emma's account and sent a hurtful message to Emma's boyfriend, Adam.*
- **Outing.** Sharing someone's secrets or embarrassing information or images online. *Greg, an obese high school student, was changing in the locker room after gym class. Matt took a picture of him with his cell phone camera. Within seconds, the picture was flying around the phones at school.*
- **Trickery.** Talking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information, then sharing it online. *John sent a message to Jessica pretending to be interested in her. Over a few days, Jessica responded, ultimately sharing intimate personal information and a very provocative image. John then sent this image to many other people.*
- **Exclusion.** Intentionally and cruelly excluding someone from an online group. *Millie tries hard to fit in with a group of girls at school. She recently got on the “outs” with a leader in this group. All of the girls have now deleted their friendship links to her social networking profile.*
- **Cyberstalking.** Repeated, intense harassment and denigration that includes threats or creates significant fear. *When Annie broke up with Sam, he sent her many angry, threatening, pleading messages. He spread nasty rumors about her to her friends and posted a sexually suggestive picture she had given him in a sex-oriented discussion group, along with her e-mail address and cell phone number.*

Cyberthreats

Cyberthreats are either direct threats or “distressing material”—general statements that make it sound like the writer is emotionally distraught and may be considering harming someone else, harming himself or herself, or committing suicide.

Jeff wrote in his blog: “I’m a retarded [expletive] for ever believing that things would change. I’m starting to regret sticking around. It takes courage to turn the gun on your self, takes courage to face death.”

Celia met Andrew in a chat room. Andrew wrote: “bring a gun to school, ur on the front of every . . . i cant imagine going through life without killing a few people . . . if i dont like the way u look at me, u die . . . i choose who lives and who dies”

Greg set up an anonymous IM account and sent a threatening message to his older sister suggesting that she would be killed the next day at school.

These are true stories. Jeff killed nine people and then killed himself. Celia reported her online conversation to her father, who contacted the police. The police found that Andrew had many weapons. He was arrested and convicted. Greg’s sister told her parents, her parents told the school, and the school went into “lockdown.” Greg was identified easily—and arrested for making a threat. But other students protested this arrest because they knew it was a joke.

School officials must recognize that what initially appears to be an online threat could be: A joke, parody, or game. A rumor that got started and has grown and spread. Material posted by a young person who is trying out a fictitious threatening online character. Material posted by someone impersonating another someone else for the purpose of getting that person into trouble. The final salvos of a “flame war” that has gotten out of hand, but will may or may not result in violence. Distressing material posted by a depressed or angry young person that could foretell a violent or suicidal intention, but does not represent an imminent threat. A legitimate imminent threat.

The problem is that when school officials or law enforcement are first appraised of an online threat, it may be difficult to tell which of the above possibilities might be involved. Obviously, the highest priority is doing what is necessary to protect against a possible legitimate threat. But processes also must be in place to rapidly determine the legitimacy of the threat and ensure the appropriateness of the response. Sometimes when teens post what appears to be a threat, they are just joking. If teens are arrested for joking, this could lead other teens to decide not to report the next time they see something threatening for fear of overreaction.

Sexting

Jessica was with a couple of friends. They all took nude sexy images of each other. Jessica sent some to her boy friend. Then they broke up. He was angry and sent her images to other students.

Sexting, sending nude sexy images and messages electronically, is a major new challenge faced by school officials. Sexting appears to be the result of new technologies that foster impulsive behavior that produces “electronic evidence,” changing boundaries of what is public and what should be kept private, raging hormones, and teen’s biological inability to consistently predict potentially harmful consequences.

Most often, images are sent between partners or where there is a desire for a relationship. Sometimes, the images are sent to attract attention or as a form of sexual harassment. Coercion by a partner, prospective partner, or peers to create an image may be involved. An image provided may be used for blackmail or sent widely to others. In rarer situations, teens appear to be sending images as a form of sexual trafficking or sexual exploitation is evident. Sexting can be closely linked to cyberbullying.

Some police officers, prosecutors, and school officials are taking a “tough on crime” approach to these situations. Excessive reactions can cause emotional trauma, especially to the youth depicted.

Because of this range of behaviors, some more harmful than others, a tiered approach to response is obviously necessary. Changes are necessary in criminal statutes to ensure a balanced approach. It is imperative that schools work closely with law enforcement and mental health to develop a protocol for investigation and intervention.

How, Who, Why

Cyberbullying, cyberthreat, or sexting material—text or images—may be posted on personal profiles or transmitted via messaging, discussion groups, chat, IM, or texting.

Students are engaging in this activity outside of school. But because the participants are also together in school, this off-campus activity is also impacting the school climate and could lead to school violence or interfere with the ability of students to learn. Students may also engage in this activity while using the district Internet system or when using personal digital devices while on campus.

A cyberbully may be a person whom the target knows or an online stranger. Or the cyberbully may be anonymous, so it is not possible to tell. A cyberbully may solicit involvement of other people who do not know the target—cyberbullying by proxy.

Cyberbullying, cyberthreats, and sexting may be related to in-school bullying or harassment. Sometimes, the student who is victimized at school is also the target of aggression online. But other times, the person who is victimized at school will retaliate online or will share his or her anger or depression online as threats or distressing material. A nude image of a student can quickly be shared with many students.

Cyberbullying may involve personal relationships. If a relationship breaks up, one person may start to cyberbully the other person and distribute, or threaten the distribution of, images. Other times, teens may get into online fights about relationships. Cyberbullying may be based on hate or bias—bullying others because of race, religion, physical appearance (including obesity), or sexual orientation.

Impact of Cyberbullying

It is widely known that face-to-face bullying can result in long-term psychological harm to targets. This harm includes low self-esteem, depression, anger, school failure and avoidance, and, in some cases, school violence or suicide. Although there is less research on cyberbullying, growing evidence suggests that it too is associated with psychological harm. Some features of electronic communication that can contribute to its harmfulness include:

- Online communications can be extremely vicious due to the disinhibition some people demonstrate when communicating electronically.
- Victimization can be ongoing, 24/7. To escape could require disengaging from the use of technologies, which also can result in disengaging from online friends.
- Cyberbullying material, even that originally sent privately, can be rapidly distributed to many others and is often irretrievable.
- Cyberbullies can be anonymous and can solicit the involvement of unknown “friends.”
- Teens may be reluctant to tell adults what is happening online or through their cell phones because they are emotionally traumatized, think it is their fault, fear greater retribution, or fear online activities or cell phone use will be restricted.

Related Online Risky Behavior

Other concerns about online risky behavior that could be implicated include:

- **Disclosing Personal Information.** Young people may disclose personal information in public sites or through personal communications. Some teens seem to be unaware of the public and permanent nature of these disclosures and the ability of others to send the material they place in electronic form to anyone, anywhere.
- **Risky Sexual and Personal Relationships.** Young people may form unrealistic understandings about others if their primary interactions are electronic. Abusive partners appear to be using electronic communications to maintain control. Young people may use the Internet to seek sexual “hook-ups” or be lured into exploitive sexual interactions.
- **Internet Addiction.** Internet addiction is defined as an excessive amount of time spent using the Internet, resulting in lack of healthy engagement in other areas of life.
- **Suicide and Self-harm Communities.** Depressed young people are interacting with sites and groups that provide information on suicide and self-harm methods (for example, cutting, anorexia, fainting) and encouragement for such activities.

- **Hate Group Recruitment and Gangs.** Sites and groups that foster hatred against “others” are actively recruiting angry, disconnected youth. Some youth informally use the Internet to coordinate troublesome and dangerous activities.
- **Violent Gaming.** Violent gaming frequently involves sexual or other bias-based aggression. Young people often engage in online simulation games, which reinforce the perception that all interactions online, including violent ones, are “just a game.”

Youth Risk Online

Young people are not equally at risk in the real world or online.

- **Savvy Teens.** Savvy teens have effective knowledge, skills, and values to make good decisions. They are likely to be older teens, with healthy peer relationships, and attentive parents who have fostered independence and personal responsibility.
- **Naïve Teens.** Naïve teens lack sufficient knowledge and skills to engage in effective decision-making. They are likely to be younger teens, have either over protective or naïve parents, but likely have healthy peer relations and good values.
- **Vulnerable Teens.** Vulnerable teens lack the necessary knowledge and skills and are also are going through a period of “teen angst”—such as parental discord, difficulties in school, break-up of a relationship. They likely to have temporarily impaired relations with parents and/or peers and are currently highly emotionally upset.
- **At Risk Teens.** At risk teens are those who are “at risk” in other areas of life. These are the teens who face major ongoing challenges related to personal mental health and disruptions in relations with parents, school, and/or peers.

Savvy teens are likely making positive choices online. With effective education, naive teens can become savvy. The higher the degree of risk, the greater the probability the young person will be: Searching for acceptance and attention from people online. More vulnerable to manipulative influence techniques used by dangerous individuals and groups. Less likely to make good choices and less resilient in getting out of a difficult situation. Less attentive to safety messages. Less able or willing to rely on parents for assistance. Less likely to report an online dangerous situation to an adult because this will likely reveal evidence of their own unsafe or inappropriate choices.

Which means we must: Educate adults who are likely in the best position to detect and respond to concerns involving higher risk youth. Develop effective “witness strategies” to encourage savvy teens to provide guidance and assistance to peers and report significant online concerns to adults

You Can't See Me ~ I Can't See You

There are some aspects of the online environment that can interfere with safe, respectful, and responsible decision-making. If these aspects are brought to the attention of teens, they may be more attentive to these negative influences. These aspects include:

- **You Can't See Me.** The perception of invisibility or the ability to create an anonymous profile reduces concerns of detection that could result in disapproval or punishment. Social networking sites tend to reduce this concern because people are more visible.
- **I Can't See You.** The lack of tangible feedback online can interfere with student's recognition that their actions have caused harmful consequences, as well as the associated empathy that should lead to remorse. Additionally, the lack of tangible feedback can make it harder to detect deception by others.
- **Didn't Think.** Teens' frontal cortex, which supports rational decision-making, is restructuring. They are biologically unable to consistently think clearly. But teens want to resolve their own problems.
- **Who Am I?** Teen's exploration of identity can result in irresponsible attention-getting choices and measuring their social status by the amount of online activity. It appears that teens with higher levels of social anxiety tend to more routinely post riskier information or images and engage in shallow interactions with a greater number of “friends.”
- **Am I Hot?** Teens are maturing sexually in a culture that promotes provocative sexuality. They can be expected to explore personal relationships with a significant other online. This can lead to sharing of images that should be kept private and relationships that are based on fantasy, not reality.

- **Everybody Does It.** Sometimes online social norms support risky or harmful behavior. Vulnerable youth often reinforce other vulnerable youth. Teens may also become desensitized and fail to recognize the concerns. Help students learn to resist negative online peer influence.
- **How Far Can I Go?** Teens take risks to test boundaries. This is how they learn about limits. It should be expected that teens will take risks online.
- **Doing What They Say.** Sophisticated techniques are used online by commercial entities, advocacy groups, and dangerous people to influence attitudes and behavior. Frequently, the key indicators are the provision of a “gift”--including complements, opportunities, coupons, and the like--and an effort to establish a “special relationship.”

Legal Issues

There are many legal issues related to cyberbullying, cyberthreats, and sexting. This document should not be construed as giving legal guidance.

When can a school monitor and search student Internet use records and files?

Students have a limited expectation of privacy on the district's Internet system. Routine maintenance and monitoring, technically and by staff, should be expected. An individual search of computer and Internet use records can be conducted if there is reasonable suspicion that the student has violated district policy, including policies against bullying. Schools should determine who has authority to authorize individual search and record-keeping procedures. Clear notice to students can enhance deterrence.

When can a school search electronic records on a student's personal digital device?

The search of a student's personal digital device must be justified in its inception based on reasonable suspicion--and only to the extent warranted under that suspicion. Suspicion that a cell phone was used in class, which may be a violation of policy, does not provide the basis to search all of the records on that device.

When can a school legally respond to cyberbullying by disciplining the student?

School officials can place educationally based restrictions on student speech that appears to be sponsored by the school or that is necessary to maintain an appropriate school climate. This standard probably applies to student speech through the district Internet system used at school.

For off-campus online speech or speech via personal digital devices used on campus, the standard appears to be that school officials can respond to student speech that has caused or threatens a substantial disruption at school or interference with the rights of students to be secure. There are three kinds of situations that commonly meet this standard: violent altercations between students, significant interference with the ability of a student to receive an education and participate in school activities; significant interference with school operations or the delivery of instruction. It is important to have policy provisions that address off-campus hurtful speech and to search diligently for, and document, a school “nexus” and the impact that has been, or is likely to be, caused by the speech.

When must a school respond to cyberbullying?

District liability concerns are raised when these situations occur through district Internet system, when students are using personal digital devices while on campus, or when the combination of off-campus and on-campus altercations is making it impossible for a student to receive an education. Recent decisions in situations involving school liability for bullying have raised the issue of the effectiveness of the school response. Simply having a policy and responding to reported incidents is increasingly recognized as legally insufficient if the bullying and the harm it causes has continued despite these measures.

When should parents of a target or school staff member consider civil litigation?

Civil laws provide the ability for targets to sue the aggressor and his or her parents to recover financial damages for injuries or require actions, such as removal of material and discontinuation of cyberbullying. Some cyberbullying activities meet the standards for what is called an intentional “tort” (wrongdoing). Depending on the facts, the legal actions might be include: Defamation. Invasion of privacy. False light. Intentional inflictions of emotional distress.

When should a school contact, or assist a parent in contacting, law enforcement officials?

Extremely harmful online speech can violate criminal laws including: Making threats of violence to people or their property. Coercion. Making obscene or harassing telephone calls (this includes text messaging).

Harassment or stalking. Hate or bias crimes. Creating or sending sexually explicit images of teens. Sexual exploitation. Taking a photo of someone in place where privacy is expected.

Comprehensive School Approach

The following is a research-guided approach to address cyberbullying, cyberthreats, and sexting is grounded in best practices in bullying, violence, and suicide prevention and research insight, combined with insight into online behavior of youth and an analysis of legal issues.

Comprehensive Planning Through Safe Schools Committee

Addressing these concerns will require a systemic change. Members of the safe school committee have insight into youth risk behavior but may lack understanding of the technologies and activities. Education technology professionals understand the digital culture, but may lack an understanding of youth risk. To develop an effective comprehensive approach will require a combination of these professional insights.

With respect to sexting, it is essential that a protocol be developed in conjunction with local law enforcement and mental health professionals for investigation and intervention of these situations. An extensive report providing guidance on this is on the CSRIU site.

Needs Assessment—Bringing “Sunlight” to the Problem

A student survey or student focus groups can identify the scope of the concerns in the district and to provide insight into underlying issues. The insight can be increased through an assessment that involves obtaining input from school principals, counselors, and school resource officers.

Policy and Practice Review

All policies and practices related to Internet use, use of personal digital devices while on campus, and bullying, violence, and suicide prevention processes for reporting, assessment, and intervention should be reviewed in the context of these concerns. This specifically includes adding language in the district bullying policy that ensures students and they parents have notice that the school will also intervene in situations where off-campus speech has or could cause a substantial disruption at school or interference with the rights of students to be secure.

Professional Development

It is recommended that a “triage” approach be implemented to accomplish the necessary professional development. Several key people in the district (or region) need high level of expertise in the area of these concerns. All “first responders” (disciplinary administrators, counselors, school resource officers, librarians, and computer lab coordinators) need insight into problem and ways to detect, investigate, and intervene. These individuals will be able to gain necessary guidance on specific incidents from district level personnel. Teachers who are instructing students about cyberbullying need insight into the concerns and how to motivate safe and responsible behavior. All other staff likely require only general awareness.

Parent and Community Outreach

Schools can help to facilitate parent and community outreach and education. Information can be provided to parents through newsletters and parent workshops and “just-in-time” resources. Information can also be provided to community mental health professionals, faith-based organizations, youth organizations, the public library, and the media.

Student Education

These concerns are occurring in online environments where there are generally no responsible adults present. Empowerment of youth to independently prevent and respond to these concerns, including knowing when and how to access adult assistance, is the goal of the student education. The prerequisite to address these issues is effective social skills education. Social skills instruction should enhance predictive empathy skills and teaching ethical decision-making and conflict resolution skills.

To prevent being targeted, it is very important not to post material that can be used against you. Issues related to reputation and friendships are associated with posting hurtful material that targets others. Provide opportunity for students to express the idea that people do not want to be friends with someone who is hurtful to others.

The first response to electronic aggression is very important: Talk with someone they trust, a friend or an adult. Also make sure the hurtful material is saved for evidence. After the target has taken the time to calm down and regain strength, the following are some options for response:

- Say “stop.” If targets decide to say “stop,” it is important they do so in a manner that is calm and strong—and does not involve retaliation. Saying “stop” does not mean, “getting back at.” Say “stop” once and if this does not work, move to another strategy. Saying “stop” is also a strategy that can be used very effectively by witnesses in some situations. Witnesses must determine whether this is safe. Enlisting the involvement of a group of witnesses to say “stop” can be an effective strategy.
- Walk away. The electronic approach to walking away is to terminate the friendship link, block the person from communicating, or leave an unfriendly group. Walk away does not work if someone has posted nasty material on their profile or is forwarding embarrassing material. Witnesses can help a target walk away by providing emotional support.
- Get help from an adult. This includes filing an abuse report on the site or telling a trusted adult who can intervene. Both targets and helpful witnesses should know how and when to tell an adult. Targets or witnesses should always immediately tell an adult if the situation is serious, especially if there is any threat of violence or self-violence.

Important messages to communicate to students related to cyberthreats are:

- Don’t make threats online. If you post a threat online, adults may not be able to tell whether the threat is real. There are criminal laws against making threats. If you make a cyberthreat, even if you are just joking, you could be suspended, expelled, or even arrested.
- Report threats or distressing material. If you see a threat or distressing material posted online, it could be very real. It is extremely important to report this to an adult. If the threat is real, someone could be seriously injured.

Evaluation and Assessment

Use a “continuous improvement” approach. Cyberbullying is an emerging concern in a new environment that is not fully understood. Insight from emerging research will need to be incorporated. Evaluation and assessment should be used to modify and improve implementation efforts.

Investigation and Intervention

When school officials respond it is exceptionally important to take the time to fully investigate the situation—through an analysis of online, as well as in-person interactions. Students should be held accountable for harmful material posted online, but punishing the student who is being victimized at school for responding to this victimization online will only increase the potential for additional harm.

Recent research, as well as litigation, is raising questions about the effectiveness of school responses to bullying, which likely relates to cyberbullying. Suspensions are frequently not effective responses for situations involving student aggression. Suspension often leads to retaliation, which can be more easily accomplished online. Teens especially are at a developmental age where they want to take responsibility for conflict resolution. Restorative justice approaches hold significant promise.

One of the most important things school administrators can do after intervening in any bullying or cyberbullying situation is to contact the target, the aggressor, and possibly also the parents a short time after the incident to assess the effectiveness of the school’s intervention response.

Recommended Protocols for investigation and Intervention are attached.

About the Writer

Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D. is the director of the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use. She has degrees in special education and law. She taught “at risk” children, practiced computer law, and was an educational technology consultant before focusing her professional attention, since 1995, on issues of youth risk online and effective management of student Internet use. Please visit the Center’s web site at <http://csrui.org> for additional resources and information about professional development opportunities, including online workshops. Books: *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Online Social Aggression, Threats, and Distress* (Research Press) *Cyber-Safe Kids, Cyber-Savvy Teens: Helping Young People Learn to Use the Internet Safely and Responsibly* (Jossey-Bass) Coming Soon: *Cyber Savvy: Empowering Students to be Safe and Responsible Online*. Corwin Press, 2011).

Web site: <http://csrui.org> E-mail: nwillard@csrui.org

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Cyberbullying Investigation and Intervention

Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D.
Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use

Set the Stage

- Have a team in place - principal, counselor/psychologist, technology coordinator, and school resource officer.
- Make sure students know they can report anonymously or confidentially - and that you need the URL. Consider an online report feature on the school home page.
- Make sure every member of team can achieve an immediate override of the filter to investigate a report.

Investigate

Gather Evidence

- Preserve **all** evidence. Your technology coordinator can assist with this.
- Determine the identity of cyberbully(ies).
- Search for additional harmful material or interactions.
 - It might be appropriate to conduct analysis of all involved students through District Internet system.
 - Ask about related on-campus actions.

Review the Situation

- Review the material looking for insight into the harmful relationships. Determine:
 - Who is causing harm to whom at school and online?
 - Determine what roles different students are playing?
 - Determine whether this is continuation or retaliation.
- Ask: Does evidence gathered raise concerns that any student(s) may pose a risk of harm to others or self?
 - Recognize that the threat of harm may come from student(s) who posted material or from student(s) who were victimized.

Intervene

Imminent Threat

- If the speech appears to present an imminent threat, contact law enforcement and initiate a protective response.
 - Continue with evidence gathering and look for possible alternatives.

Take-Down

- Get the harmful materials taken down as rapidly as possible. Look on home page or page material is on for "complaint," "abuse," or "contact."

Formal Discipline Considerations

- Impose a formal disciplinary response only if speech has or could cause:
 - Hostile environment for student - subjective and objective perspective.
 - Violent physical or verbal altercations.
 - Substantial interference with instruction/operations. (If speech has targeted staff, formal discipline is only justified if there is a negative impact on students - interference with instruction/operations.)
- Avoid suspensions unless there are school safety concerns.
 - Focus on a Restorative Justice response. Consider community service.
- Fully document the evidence, decision-making process, and rationale for formal discipline response. Retain documentation.

Discussions with Target(s)/Parents

- Discuss relationship issues at school to develop a plan of action to resolve. Make sure you ask about on-campus negative interactions.
 - The plan may include the need to address issues caused by the target.
- If "hostile environment" for which you are going to impose discipline make sure the environment ~ and responses ~ are documented.
 - Written reports by a counselor or psychologist, target and parents, school records. Retain all materials so they can be reviewed for a professional opinion. Document your ongoing protection responses.
- Make sure plan to proceed is something the target agrees with.
- Consider possibility of providing "invisible" assistance.
- Help target plan an approach to address emotional trauma.
- Assist parents to assist and support their child.
 - Explain Restorative Justice approach you will take with aggressor.

Discussions with Aggressor(s)/Parents

- The primary objective is to get students to the point of feeling remorse and shame - not anger.
 - Ask about, listen to, and develop a plan to address challenges the aggressor is facing can increase potential of successful resolution.
- Ask questions that can lead to remorse focusing on harmful consequences and damage to reputation.
- Ask the student what actions should be taken to remedy the harm.
- Enlist support of parents.
 - Ask about underlying problems in their child's life.
 - Discuss intervention to ensure their child's success.
 - Ask their opinion on consequences and way to remedy harm.
 - If suspension, seek to ensure it is "profitable."

Evaluate

- After the incident obtain feedback from all parties. Aggregate evaluations at district level to assess patterns and effectiveness of interventions.

Sexting Investigation and Intervention Protocol

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Multidisciplinary Team Investigation Protocol

- It is imperative that schools districts have a protocol to guide reporting and investigation that has been developed in collaboration with and approved by the local district attorney and district counsel.
 - Ensure the involvement of mental health professionals - hopefully through the Multidisciplinary Task Force.
 - Encourage prevention and a balanced, tiered approach to intervention.
 - Reduce the emotional trauma to the involved students. There is no need to haul students out of school in hand-cuffs.
- Establish a multidisciplinary investigation team within the school includes the principal, counselor/psychologist and school resource officer - with back-up from district legal and risk prevention services.
 - Make sure all district personnel know who they should report situations to and how cell phones should be handled.
 - Make sure all principals have a clear understanding of the search and seizure standards that have been approved by the local district attorney and school district legal counsel.
- Once reported, strive to stop further dissemination of the images.
 - Make sure students know that cell phone distribution paths can be traced and if they are found to have distributed an image, this will result in suspension and possible criminal prosecution. Promise confidentiality for student reports about such distribution. Confiscate the cell phones of the students who are suspected to be involved. But do not search beyond call records without first contacting law enforcement.
- Strive to keep these incidents out of the news, if possible. If news coverage does occur, ensure statements made will minimize the emotional harm to the teens depicted. Talk with media about concerns related to such harm.
- Establish parameters for how and when incidents should be reported to the MDT and investigated. Recommendations are as follows:
 - Immediately report situation to MDT and based on what is known at the time, make a decision about who will take the initial lead in conducting an investigation.
 - Recognize that the student(s) depicted could potentially be in a situation of severe emotional distress. Whoever interviews a depicted student must have professional training in working with sex abuse victims.
 - In consultation with the MDT, determine how and when to contact parents. Most district policies require contacting a parent prior to any investigation, unless there are family-related sexual abuse concerns.
 - As names of participants are identified, immediately transmit these to the MDT to determine whether there are any prior records.
 - Discuss findings and propose plan for further investigation or intervention.
- Routinely evaluate the report, investigate, and intervene protocol as applied to situations to determine effectiveness of the protocol and develop better prevention.

Common Kinds of Situations

Developmentally Normative

- Not intended to cause harm - mistake could lead to distribution.
- Romantic relationship.
- Desired relationship - flirting.
- "Show me yours, I'll show you mine."
- Entertainment.
- Attention-getting.

Harassment

- Intended to cause harm.
- Malicious distribution.
- Peer pressure or trickery.
- Taken where privacy expected.
- Image retained privately - but someone gains access to the device and shares.
- Fake image depicting real person.
- Recipient does not want to receive image.

At-Risk

- Teen depicted is engaging in high risk behavior.
- Intentional distribution to advertise sexual availability.
- Soliciting sexual "hook-ups."
- Prostitution.

Exploitation

- Intended to cause harm that is egregious.
- Demand by abusive partner.
- Revenge distribution after a break-up.
- Blackmail threat to disclose to coerce other activity.
- Sexual solicitation of younger teen by older.
- Abusive or coercive acquisition with intent to widely distribute.

Investigation Questions

Initial Questions

- Who are participants? What is the difference in ages? Who is depicted? Who created or facilitated the creation of the image and how? Did person depicted know the image was created and approve? Who sent image? Where and how was it sent, to whom, to how many people? How did it spread after initial distribution? Was the image distributed at school? Is there evidence of a faked image or abuse?

Self-Initiation or Pressure

Creation Initiated by Person Depicted

(May have been facilitated by someone else.)

- Was the image also disseminated by the person depicted? If so, who was the image initially sent to and for what apparent purpose?
 - Romantic partner? Desired romantic partner? What are the actual circumstances? For attention-getting? Peer group “game”? To shock or “gross people out”? Solicitation? Sexual hook-up interest? Equivalent age peers? Solicitation of younger teens? Prostitution? Was recipient known in person or only online?

Creation Initiated in Response to “Pressure”

- What kind and degree of “pressure?” Request, sweet-talking, manipulation, false promise, coercion, threat, invasion of privacy? By someone known or only online?

- Non-malicious pressure from a romantic partner, with no intent to share? Non-malicious pressure in a group “game” that got out of control? Malicious pressure in a group with a malicious leader, with plans to disseminate? Person used coercion, threats, false promises to trick person into creating or allowing creation of image? Was this an abusive partner? Invasion of privacy to create image?

Dissemination

- If image has been disseminated, how widely has it been distributed, who was most actively distributing, and what was the apparent intent of all participants in the dissemination?
 - Self-sharing or non-malicious sharing with small number of friends, not thinking that anyone would further disseminate? Maliciously shared after a break-up of a relationship? Image was not disseminated by person depicted or his/her friend who possessed the image, but was found by someone who gained access to the digital device and disseminated maliciously. Intentional and malicious wide distribution by someone who obtained either from person depicted or from someone else who had obtained it? Disseminated by person depicted for attention-getting or sexual solicitation purposes?
- If image has not been widely disseminated, is image being used for blackmail?

Incident Intervention

Developmentally Normative Activities

- Handle primarily through educational and counseling.
- Implement mild level restorative justice school discipline for any students who violated trust - if there has been a substantial disruption at school or creation of a hostile environment for any student(s) depicted.
- In some situations, consider juvenile court review leading to informal disposition, deferred prosecution, or diversion for anyone violated trust and distributed image outside of relationship or group.

Harassment

- Impose significant restorative justice school discipline for any students who engaged in malicious activities - substantial disruption at school or a hostile environment is probable.
- Implement juvenile court review of circumstances - which could lead to informal disposition, deferred prosecution, diversion, or jurisdiction - depending on egregiousness of situation.
 - Possible charges include: Harassment. Invasion of privacy. Disorderly conduct. Malicious acquisition or distribution. False light.

At-Risk

- School discipline only appropriate if at-risk behavior constituted sexual harassment of other students, creating a hostile environment for those students.
- Implement juvenile court review of circumstances - which could lead to informal disposition, diversion, status offense, or detention - depending on degree/ manner of risky behavior.
 - Possible charges include: Harassment. Indecent exposure. Solicitation. Prostitution.

Exploitation

- Implement juvenile court review of circumstances - which could lead to informal disposition, diversion, status offense, or detention, depending on degree/ manner of harmful behavior.
 - Possible charges include: Harassment. Malicious acquisition or distribution. Stalking. Blackmail. Solicitation or exploitation. Child pornography.

Young Adult Students

- How law enforcement will handle situations of over-18 students is out of the hands of the MDT.
 - Guard against an overreaction. Most often, these are teens in a peer environment who do not understand the implications.
 - Given the degree of normality of these incidents among youth, encourage use of lowest level of criminal charges and avoidance of any charges that could result in required registration as a sex offender.

Prevent Sexual Harassment

- Articulate a plan to stop anticipated sexual harassment of the student(s) depicted.
 - Schools have a legal obligation to prevent sexual harassment of students - regardless of whether the student has engaged in behavior that contributed to this.
- Implement a plan to provide emotional support.
 - The student depicted is likely at risk for severe emotional distress and may need to be on “suicide watch.”