Family Tip Sheet
What's Cyberbullying?

In your child's third Digital Citizenship lesson, *What's Cyberbullying*, they learned what constitutes bullying and how cyberbullying is different from physical bullying.

There are many examples of cyberbullying. Sometimes it is as simple as hateful text messages or hurtful posts on someone's social media account. That type of bullying is closer to what older generations experienced as playground taunts and insults. Such words are certainly hurtful and harmful, but they are usually private communication between the perpetrator and victim. The internet offers even more harmful, public methods of bullying, which continue to live on the internet indefinitely, coming up in searches about the victim years after the incident took place. Sometimes such bullying involves editing and reposting an unflattering photo or forwarding an embarrassing picture.

Dr. Jay Giedd at the National Institute of Mental Health in Bethesda, Maryland scanned the brains of 145 normal healthy children at two-year intervals. Giedd found that an area of the brain called the prefrontal cortex appears to be growing before and through puberty and doesn't mature until into a person's mid-twenties. The prefrontal cortex sits just behind the forehead and is responsible for rational thought and decision-making. Research has also discovered that decision making during the teen years, while the prefrontal cortex is still developing, shifts to the limbic system of the brain. The limbic system of the brain is involved in instinctive "gut" reactions, including "fight or flight" responses. These studies suggest that while adults can use rational decision-making processes to navigate through emotional decisions, adolescent brains do not yet have the hardware to think through things in the same way.

Research has also shown that the more a parent talks to their child about making safe choices online, the better their child is at making those choices then they are faced with difficult decisions.

Vocabulary

Bullying: Unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is usually repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.

Cyberbullying: The use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature.

Home Activity

Topics of discussion with your child:

Ask your child, what is the difference between physical bullying and cyberbullying?

Ask your child, do you think cyberbullying is worse than physical bullying? Why or why not?

What makes cyberbullying "easier" to do than physical bullying? This question is meant to explore the idea that communicating with a person on a screen makes it easier to say or do something inappropriate.

Ask, just because it's happening on a screen, are the consequences the same? How?