Is your child using Facebook or MySpace?

The dangers of Cyberbullying

Studies show: children/tweens/teens that were exposed to cyberbullying felt:

- Hurt feelings
- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Depression or other more serious mental health problems
- Anger
- Shame
- Fear
- Frustration
- Low self esteem
- Inability to trust in others

When these negative emotions aren’t dealt with properly, victims may resort to the following behaviours:

- Withdrawal, seclusion, avoidance of social relationships
- Poor academic performance
- Bullying others – to feel in control
- In extreme cases – Suicide.

The legal age for children to hold a Facebook or MySpace account is thirteen years or older, yet more and more often Primary Schools are dealing with cyberbullying issues from these social networking sites. Children appear to be socialising in a faceless cyber world unaware of the consequences of their actions.

According to a recent AP-MTV survey of 1,247 12-to-24 year olds, 50% have experienced some form of digital abuse, including spreading lies, violation of trust, and digital disrespect. Another astounding finding of that survey is that 76% say digital abuse is a serious problem for people their age.

So cyberbullying is not some insignificant problem experienced by few. Cyberbullying is widespread, your children are aware of it, they understand how it happens and yet they are not aware of or concerned with the consequences of such actions. Here are some more mind boggling findings from that same survey:

- Just about half (51%) of young people say they have thought about the idea that things they post online could come back to hurt them later
- Just 1 in 4 have given some thought to the idea that things they post online could get them in trouble with the police and only 28% have considered that they could get in trouble at school for those things.

How about you? Do you understand the dangers of cyberbullying?

It is widely known that face-to-face bullying can result in long-term psychological
harm to victims, including **low self-esteem, depression, anger, school failure and avoidance and in some cases, school violence or suicide.**

Cyberbullying is even more harmful to young people than face-to-face bullying for a number of reasons:

- **Permanence:** The insults, comments or images can be preserved by the person who was bullied or by others so that the victim may read or view them over and over again and the harm is re-inflicted with each reading or viewing.
- **Audience size:** The size of the audience that is able to view or access the damaging material increases the victim’s humiliation.
- **Familiarity:** Many young people are friends with or know their cyber bully either through school or other personal connections, increasing the potential for embarrassment and humiliation.
- **Social Networking:** Social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace allow cyber bullies to engage in campaigns against a particular person which may involve many others.
- **Speed:** The speed at which harmful messages can reach large audiences also plays a major part in making cyberbullying so damaging to the targets.

**How can you as a parent help?**

- Ensure that your child does not access social networking sites until they are of the legal age (13 in most cases)
- Supervise your child on the computer at all times (keep the computer in a busy family area, ie the lounge room) and have regular discussions about what he/she is doing online
- When your child is old enough to join a social networking site, create an account of your own and become their ‘online friend’ to maintain online communication