Online exploitation

The internet has become the major socializing force for today's youth, surpassing the telephone and television in influence. 75% or more of U.S. teens use the Internet. Unfortunately, so do sexual predators, pedophiles, hate mongers, and plain old bullies who have expanded their sense of school yard to include cyberspace.

With very young children, proper filtering software and parental supervision can usually shield them from danger, but as children get older their access and interest widens, and their risk of exploitation increases. Thus, knowing how to recognize, avoid, and report exploitation is their best defense.

Online sexual harassment can include lewd comments, badgering for online relationships after they have been declined, and interpreting harmless "emoticons" as sexual come-ons (Emoticons are type fonts used to express comment or feeling, such as :-P (tongue sticking, neener-neener), or ;-) (wink).

Many children are sexually propositioned on the Internet, but social bullying is a faster growing phenomenon. As in live settings, it may not be possible to shield them from all potentially harmful contact, but it is definitely possible to reduce the risk of their being victimized.

As with many kinds of abuse, there are some individual factors that are correlated with increased chance of sexual exploitation in cyberspace. Children who have been sexually abused offline, are more likely to get tricked into sending pictures that can be used to hurt them.

 The Internet has literally thousands of hate sites, and even more blogs and forums, devoted to organized hate. Hate-driven people are getting reinforced online and are looking for new recruits. Children who feel disconnected from the community are more likely than others to respond to hate driven messages.

Ripple Effects' approach to hate and exploitation in cyberspace is to address both the safety issues and the issue of democratic rights.

Goals of intervention

Students will:
• Understand basic personal safety rules that apply to cyberspace
• Understand how to command and show respect online
• Recognize, avoid, and report sexual exploitation
• Recognize and report hate mongering
• Respect civil rights

A suggested scope and sequence

SKILL TRAINING TOPICS

Cybersavvy
Reading people
Expressing yourself
Being respectful
Personal information
Meeting offline

CHALLENGE TOPICS

Sexual exploitation
Threats
Harassment
Hate

Online exploitation "how to" screen shot