Digital Citizenship
Cyberbullying and Online Cruelty
Notes

Vocabulary:

Target:
- A person who is the object of an intentional action

Offender:
- A person who had malicious intent to hurt or damage someone

Bystander:
- A person who does nothing when they witness something happening

Upstander:
- A person who supports and stands up for someone else

Escalate
- To increase or make more intense

De-escalate:
- To decrease or make less intense

Online cruelty, also called Cyberbullying, can escalate quickly online because people are often anonymous and posts spread quickly. Cyberbullying occurs whenever someone uses digital media tools such as the Internet or cell phones to deliberately upset or harass someone else, often repeatedly. Information generally travels faster and reaches more people on the internet than offline, potentially making the impact of the Cyberbullying harsher. Often people may Cyberbully online because they do not have to face their target and can "hide" behind their computers. Conflicts that start online often go offline at some point.

Targets of online cruelty may feel they can be bombarded with negative comments at anytime, anywhere. When more offenders join in the online cruelty, the situation gets even worse.

How Targets Can De-escalate Onlne Cruelty:

1. **Ignore and Block the Bully:**
   - Offenders often want attention. Take it away and they may give up.
2. **Save the Evidence:**
   - You may need it later for documentation
3. **Change Your Privacy Settings:**
   - Allow only people you trust to see or comment on your pages
4. **Tell Trusted Friends and Adults:**
   - Create a support network

How Upstanders Can De-escalate Online Cruelty:

1. **Stand Up to the Offender When Appropriate:**
   - If you see something negative, say something. Make it clear that you think online cruelty is wrong, and tell the offender to back off
2. **Point Out the Bully's Motivation to the Target:**
   - Comfort the target by explaining that many offenders act cruelly just to gain control, power, or status
3. **Help the Target Advocate:**
   - Help the target find friends and school leaders who can help de-escalate the situation. It's easier to stand up to cruelty when you are not alone.

Bystanders may hesitate to get involved in a Cyberbullying situation because they don't want to become targets themselves. Encourage bystanders to put themselves in the target's shoes. What would it feel like if nobody wanted to help them out when they needed it the most? You can show support in many ways, even simply by listening to a target about his or her experience.

Online cruelty and Cyberbullying has the potential to lead to teen suicides, attempted suicides, and teens stating that they want to take their own lives.

Additional Videos:

ABC News, "Cruel Kids, Tragic Ends"
        http://abcnews.go.com/Primetime/video?id=2443795

CBS News, "Officials: Suicidal Teen Was Cyberbullied"
        http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-502303_162-6146385.html

The Westport Patch, "Westport Student Issues YouTube Plea to Bullies – Words Do Hurt"
        http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=37_ncv79fLA