

Cyberbully Alert: Web Sites Make It Easier to Flag Trouble

• By SUE SHELLNBARGER

Parents worried about cyberbullying and other harmful behavior among children online are getting new help from some of the sites most popular with young people.

YouTube and some social-networking sites are making it easier to report abuses such as cyberbullying, in which kids -- and, appallingly, some adults -- use online postings and emails to hurt others. The trend puts more tools in the hands of parents whose kids are the targets or the perpetrators of bullying.

Help for Parents

- StopCyberbullying.org: prevention and legal information
- Fosi.org: parent-child safety contract; click on "Resources" and "Useful Tools"
- ConnectSafely.org: a forum for parents, teens and experts
- Cyberbully.org: articles and resources

Most teens know someone who has been harassed on-line; 11% of middle schoolers report being bullied on the Web recently, says a study of 3,767 students published last year in the Journal of Adolescent Health. Another 7% said they had been bullied and admitted they had harassed others; an additional 4% said they had played the bullying role.

Web sites' responses to what families regard as crises have often been maddeningly slow. Earlier this year, a California mother says, students at her son's middle school posted on YouTube a video showing a distorted image of his face with a ridiculous singing voice dubbed in. The video, which used her son's full name, prompted even more insulting online comments, and he became a target of derision at school. Although family members contacted YouTube online at least 20 times, she says, the video remained up for eight days.

Victoria Grand, YouTube's head of policy, says she didn't see the video and can't comment on it but has "tremendous sympathy" for the family. YouTube has "a zero-tolerance policy for predatory behavior, stalking, threats and harassment" and reacts to most flags in less than an hour, she says; videos raising "more complicated" issues may take longer.

Last week, YouTube took a major step by unveiling a new "Abuse and Safety Center" tool, including a tab on its home page that leads users through a step-by-step reporting process. Also, citing "the increasing number of videos showing children involved in

violence," YouTube recently changed language on a menu for flagging problems in order to encourage reporting.

Your Questions Answered

Columnist Sue Shellenbarger answers readers' questions about [paid parental leave](#) for independent contractors and [career opportunities for ex-offenders](#). Read [Work & Family Mailbox](#).

MySpace, the biggest social-networking site, is building technology to improve its capacity to delete hate speech and other harmful postings even before users report them, Hemanshu Nigam, chief security officer, told an industry safety conference last week. The site has been expanding e-mail and phone-reporting conduits for parents and generally responds within 24 hours. Parents can flag abuse through either the "Contact MySpace" tab or the "Safety Tips" tab, which links to a "For Parents & Educators" page and a parent guide to MySpace, part of [News Corp.](#), owner of The Wall Street Journal.

Facebook is continuing to refine its reporting and take-down procedures, says chief privacy officer Chris Kelly. The site posts "Report this" tabs and commits to responding within 24 hours to complaints about nudity, pornography or harassment of minors. Its Facebook.com safety page has a link to an auditing firm to provide feedback on its responsiveness. Another site, myYearbook.com, posts a "Report Abuse" icon and usually responds within 24 hours.

While all the sites are staffed 24/7 for complaints, the sheer volume of incoming material (YouTube gets 13 hours of new video every minute) and the fact that most complaints are bogus pose obstacles.

It's best, when possible, to attack cyberbullying at a grassroots level. Several years ago, a teen I know was beaten by fellow high-school students while other students ran videotape, which quickly appeared online. Only after her parents reached out to school officials and the bullies' parents, insisting calmly on fair play, did the offenders take it down.

In addition to talking with kids about Internet conduct, parents can teach them to "stop, block and tell" in response to cyberbullying -- to stop responding to bullies, block communication from them and tell a trusted adult, says Parry Aftab, executive director of [WiredSafety.org](#).

Then, join the sites your child uses and learn log-in information and URLs. This will help you flag problems effectively.

Write to Sue Shellenbarger at sue.shellenbarger@wsj.com