



The decision to give young adolescents access to these forms of communication should be discussed between the parents and the child. With these forms of instant communication comes a great deal of freedom to text or write statements or information that an adolescent may not verbalize by phone.

Parents need to understand that it's a privilege for young adolescents to have cell phones and computer access. Just because your adolescent's peers have cell phones and computer access does not mean your child needs or is mature enough to communicate by these forms.

Bullying by text messaging and computer is very common and extremely hurtful. Adolescents will choose to target one or several of their peers by text messaging statements that are hurtful and incorrect.

I have counseled 13 and 14-year-olds who have bullied or been bullied, had photos of them sent and been involved in relationships with the opposite sex where their text messaging stated "I love you," "You are hot," "I want to kiss you all over," etc.

If your 13 or 14-year-old has to actually speak on the phone to their peers, they are less likely to say these types of things.

Statements of love, or of a sexual nature are easier for an adolescent to text or Facebook rather than verbalize. This can lead to adolescents engaging in relationships for which they aren't emotionally prepared.

Phones with photo capabilities are also used for sending photos of peers in bathing suits, pajamas or other states of undress. I counseled a 14-year-old female adolescent that had a photo of her in a bikini sent to all the boys in her class. This young adolescent was embarrassed and hurt that a peer would choose to exploit her in this way.

I have also witnessed groups of adolescents gathering at a home and sending text messages or Facebook messages to an adolescent that is targeted by them. These messages are written in a manner that lets the receiving peer know that they are not liked and not thought to be a part of the "group."

An adolescent's sense of self is very fragile. When their peers write statements that are hurtful and excluding, the damage is deep and not easily forgettable.

As we all know, the feelings and thoughts of adolescents are intense and impulsive. Engaging in text messaging and Facebook can lead to dangerous repercussions.

We now live in a time where our adolescents have access to many forms of communication, which can be a blessing or a curse. It all depends on how you, as the parent, choose to let your adolescents engage in these forms of communication.

Remember, each parent knows their child and the child's emotional maturity and ability to lead or follow their peers. Don't get caught up in the fact that your adolescent's peers all have cell phones, Face Book, etc.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this information please feel free to contact Doreen Quinn: Email: dqf50@yahoo.com or telephone: 508-688-4982

Proposed anti-bullying legislation in Massachusetts

In January, 15-year-old Phoebe Prince killed herself after allegedly being bullied by a group of South Hadley, Massachusetts classmates.

The television and print media reported that she had been bullied by her peers with a barrage of both Facebook and text messages.

Last year, 11-year-old Carl Walker-Hoover of Springfield, Massachusetts hung himself in his family's home. His mother said at the time that her son was bullied relentlessly by his charter school classmates both at school and on-line.

A bill before the Massachusetts legislature this spring would attempt to prohibit bullying in schools.

This bill would crack down on "cyberbullying" by:

- Banning the use of emails, text messages, Internet postings and other electronic means that create a hostile school environment for others.
- School administrators would be required to publish an anti-bullying policy and create an anti-bullying curriculum for their students.
- Requiring that every adult working in a school would have to report bullying incidents and principals would have to investigate and take disciplinary action if they determine bullying has occurred.

Representative Marty Walz, the bill's author, said the legislation's goal is to create learning environments where students know they can't harass one another. A key to that is convincing teachers, staff and other school workers to enforce the message that bullying won't be tolerated.

One of the bill's sponsors in the state Senate is Barnstable Democrat Robert O'Leary.

"We've always had bullying but it's taken on a new dimension with this cyberbullying," said the Senator in a Boston Globe interview. "It's more all-encompassing. You can't get away from it and it's so easy to do it anonymously."

Whether or not the state is able to legislate against bullying text messages remains to be seen, but parents should be aware of this serious and growing problem, and try to talk to their children if they suspect they are being bullied.

Doreen Quinn resides on Cape Cod with her family. She is actively involved in her community and specializes in helping individuals find their core self.

She earned her masters degree in social work from Boston College and has been counseling groups, individuals, families, couples and adolescents for over ten years on Cape Cod.

Doreen deals extensively with issues of substance abuse, parenting, bullying and social skills.

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