Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is bullying that uses digital technologies, and often happens along with face-to-face bullying. Cyberbullying has serious effects on children, ranging from declining grades to self-harm. Preventing cyberbullying requires a unified stance with school leadership, teachers, students, and families. Students are encouraged to report if they witness cyberbullying and avoid the tendencies to retaliate. Teachers, parents, and students should be knowledgeable of cyberbullying signs and policies. Intervention for victims of cyberbullying should focus on regaining self-respect and mental health. Cyberbullies should also be included in behavior intervention to increase their empathy and addresses mental health concerns. School leadership and teachers should foster a positive and safe online learning environment among students.

1. How can I identify when students are involved in cyberbullying or are being cyberbullied?
2. Why is educating my students about cyberbullying important?
3. How can fostering a positive learning environment prevent cyberbullying?

? to Consider

KEY Elements

Cyberbullying is bullying that uses digital technologies and might include various online behaviors, such as negative comments, explicit images, harassing words, rumor spreading, and physical threats. With cyberbullying, it can be hard to detect who is doing the bullying, as many use pseudonyms when bullying online. Anonymity makes it easy for cyberbullys to hide their real identities, and social media can quickly spread negative information through a community. Cyberbullying can affect both the physical and mental condition of targeted students. Physically, targeted students may suffer from symptoms ranging from sleep disturbances to disordered eating to self-harm. Psychologically, cyberbullying can cause feelings such as anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, or even suicidal thoughts.

Teachers and parents should be aware of the signs of cyberbullying. For example, if a student skips a class, suddenly has changes in appetite, becomes unwilling to go to school, or becomes depressed or remains quiet at home or school, it is possible the student is being bullied. If a child hides his or her device when parents are nearby, seems to use several online accounts, or laughs abnormally when using a device, they may be cyberbullying others. In both cases, parents and teachers should investigate to find out what has happened.

Educators should foster a positive school climate to help reduce cyberbullying. Schools can contribute to a better online environment by setting expectations about appropriate online behavior and instituting appropriate measures for those who violate expectations. Schools can also set up multiple anonymous reporting platforms to offer students secure ways to report cyberbullying. It is important for schools to take action quickly when receiving such reports.

Teachers should educate students about cyberbullying and raise students' awareness about their online behavior. In cyberbullying, there are three kinds of witnesses: bystanders, allies, and upstanders. A bystander sees cyberbullying occurring but does not take helpful action; an ally supports the person being bullied; and an upstander steps up against the bullying person directly or informs a parent, teacher, or another school staff member to help stop the cyberbullying. By educating students, teachers can transform bystanders to upstanders, which can greatly help prevent cyberbullying. It is also helpful for teachers to utilize teachable moments related to cyberbullying to help students recognize problems in online environments, what they can do to help, and how to report the actions to an adult.

Cyberbullying is a social issue. It requires concerted efforts from the whole society, including students, families, teachers, school leadership, and social media companies, to foster a positive online climate and prevent cyberbullying.