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Description

Adolescent expert Rosalind Wiseman of Parade Magazine discusses the dangers of cyber bullying by teenagers in middle and high school. Using text messaging and social networking, bullying is brought to a new level, but the experience may also give parents the opportunity to express their values to children.

Keywords


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Transcript

Protecting Kids from Cyber Bullies

MATT LAUER, anchor:
So how do you protect your children? Adolescent expert Rosalind Wiseman has written an article on cyberbullies for the next week's Parade magazine. Hey, Rosalind, good to see you, good morning.
Ms. ROSALIND WISEMAN (Parade Magazine): Hey, hi.
LAUER: Only 15 percent--according to a recent study--only 15 percent of parents even know about this problem.
Ms. WISEMAN: Sure.
LAUER: So to the other 85 percent, good morning, and what do they need to know?
Ms. WISEMAN: Right. Good morning.
LAUER: How do you define this?
Ms. WISEMAN: Well, it's using instant messaging, iPods, cell phones, anything to do with the computer social networking sites, things like MySpace of Facebook to humiliate or degrade yourself or other kids.
LAUER: Humiliate or degrade. And we saw some examples from that young lady where they went even further.
Ms. WISEMAN: Oh, absolutely. Direct threats, yeah.
LAUER: I mean, you know, `Lindsey should die.' And that's crazy. But most of the time they're targeting you and they're making fun of you and it can cross a line.
Ms. WISEMAN: It crosses a line so fast. You go from `Hey, what's up?' to you know, taking a picture in a locker room, you know, of a kid. You know, I want parents to remember what they felt like when they were 13. Did they feel good about their bodies? The kids are taking pictures when kids are changing,
downloading it and then forwarding it to all of their friends.

LAUER: And, apparently, kids in this group are being really mean online because they feel, in some ways, that they can be anonymous.

Ms. WISEMAN: Absolutely.

LAUER: And that they're insulated by the fact that they don't have to walk right up to someone on the playground and do this face to face.

Ms. WISEMAN: Unh-unh. No, they don't. They can get away with it because what it feels like is there's no consequence to your actions. And so what I really want parents to realize, like I'm begging parents to realize, is that this is the opportunity to have your family values put into action so that we can break some of the teen cynicism that adults are completely clueless and they don't get it anyway. So you have got to use this as an opportunity to express your family values.

LAUER: And by the way, if you're sitting at home right now and you're saying, 'Well, my son or my daughter has never talked about this,' don't think that doesn't mean they haven't been the victim of it.

Ms. WISEMAN: Or you say, 'We've got controls on the computers' or 'My child does not have an e-mail address, I don't let them.' They can go over to their friend's house and do it in two seconds.

LAUER: And--but it--a lot of kids, I think something like 90 percent of kids who say they've been bullied online also say they were too embarrassed by it to either tell their friends or their parents.

Ms. WISEMAN: Oh, absolutely. Because the insults are things that are really sexual. They are really--they're humiliating and this really grave, kind of base way. It's the last thing you want do is ask for help.

LAUER: I think the young lady in the piece had just some great advice there at the end.

Ms. WISEMAN: She did. She's very wise.

LAUER: Don't get sucked into this because bullies need targets.

Ms. WISEMAN: Yeah, yeah.

LAUER: And if as soon as it starts to happen, you log off, doesn't that take care of a large part of the problem?

Ms. WISEMAN: It does, but kids are actually almost--they are—actually what we're seeing is kids are physically addicted they are--to this. Where they want to get on and they can't get off because you get a rush. You get a fix on doing it. You feel like if you're not a part of it, then you're not part of this world.

LAUER: I'm probably not as up on this subject as I should be. And in reading the notes about your segment, I said, it's so--it kept saying it's so important for kids not to share their password.

Ms. WISEMAN: Right.

LAUER: Explain that with me.

Ms. WISEMAN: Because if kids share their passwords, which they do as a way of bonding with their friends, girls do this especially. Like, if you're a really good friend, I'm going to share my password. Then what kids do when they get mad is they break into somebody's account using that person's password. And then they can--they can appear as if they are that kid and send horrible things about somebody else, but you never really know who sent it.

LAUER: And so now you're victimizing more than one person at the same time.

Ms. WISEMAN: Absolutely. Absolutely.
LAUER: Here's another startling statistic: 75 percent of middle school students say they have visited a Web site bashing another student. So it's a little bit, that addiction you were just talking about.
Ms. WISEMAN: Absolutely.
LAUER: As much as it might hurt to have it happen to you, a lot of these kids are saying--but they're taking part in it with other kids.
Ms. WISEMAN: Absolutely. It is--so, you know, for kids sometimes, it's not a good day unless you've been a part of this drama. So it's one of those things, also kids are--parents are worried about. You know, kids aren't getting sleep at night. Well, lots of times they're doing their homework, and then at 1:00 to 3:00 in the morning, they're doing this stuff and parents are asleep.
LAUER: But it's not only happening at home, it can happen at school, too. They can do these text messages. Are schools taking on the proper role in this?
Ms. WISEMAN: They're trying and they're getting better. They've got to realize that when things happen in school or outside, it impacts both outside in the home and in the school.
LAUER: Rosalind, thanks very much. Great information. Appreciate it.
Ms. WISEMAN: My pleasure. Thank you for having me.