BACKGROUND INFORMATION

SECTION II.

II.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

OVERVIEW

This section of the *Program Activity Guide: Helping Youth Resist Bias and Hate,* 2nd edition provides parents, educators, youth service professionals, and others working with youth background information on hate crimes and bias incidents; hate on the Internet; recent findings on school violence; and bullying. A working knowledge of each of these topics can help adults understand the vast and increasing array of challenges that young people face and help them to develop effective strategies and practices in order to successfully negotiate an environment that is often potentially harmful, both to them and to others. This material also reaffirms the need to stop hateful attitudes before they begin, in that such thinking, if left unchecked and unchallenged, can develop into an entrenched belief system that ultimately leads to the acceptance of hate-motivated speech and activity as an acceptable way of dealing with differences and conflicts.

DEFINITION OF A HATE CRIME

While many definitions of hate crime exist, they all encompass the same central idea – the criminality of an act of violence against a person, property, or group of people where the motivation for the act is race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, or another characteristic over which an individual or group has no control.

> The United States Congress defines a hate crime as "a crime in which the defendant intentionally selects a victim, or in the case of a property crime, the property that is the object of the crime, because of the actual or perceived race, color, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation of any person."
>
> *Section 280003(a) of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (28 U.S.C. 994 note).*
>
> The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) defines a hate crime as "a criminal offense committed against persons, property or society that is motivated, in whole or in part, by an offender's bias against individuals or a group's race, religion, ethnic/national origin, gender, age, disability or sexual orientation."
>
> *Developed at the 1998 IACP Summit on Hate Crime in America*

Today, the Federal government, over forty States, and the District of Columbia have hate crime statutes in effect. Although these statutes vary in a number of ways, most statutes define hate crimes by addressing violence, property damage, or threat motivated, in whole or in part, by an offender's bias based upon race, religion, ethnicity, national origin, gender, physical or mental disability, or sexual orientation. While most jurisdictions have hate crime laws that cover bias based on race, religion, ethnicity, and national origin, a smaller number of States cover gender, disability, and sexual orientation.

In addition to criminal statutes, many States have civil statutes that authorize the State Attorney General to seek restraining orders against persons who engage in bias-motivated violence, threats, or property damage. Educators, parents, and others are urged to know the exact wording of the hate crime statutes applicable in their States. This information is available on the Partners Against Hate Web site, www.partnersagainsthate.org, in the State Hate Crimes Database.

> ▸ *Suggested Resource*
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> Barbara Perry's *In the Name of Hate: Understanding Hate Crimes* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001) provides a historical understanding of hate crimes and explains why they are a by-product of a society grappling with inequality, fear, and hate.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT HATE VIOLENCE

What is a hate crime?

These are crimes committed against individuals or groups or property based on the real or perceived race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, national origin, or ethnicity of the victims. The role played by these personal characteristics in motivating the offender is the key difference between hate crimes and other crimes.

What is the difference between a hate crime and a bias or hate incident?

Bias or hate incidents involve behavior that is motivated by bias based on personal attributes such as race, religion, ethnicity, national origin, gender, disability, or sexual orientation but which do not involve criminal conduct. Bias-motivated and degrading comments are examples of bias incidents. They are not considered to be hate crimes because the speaker of those comments has not engaged in criminal activity. Hate crimes, which are also motivated by bias based on characteristics like race or religion, do involve criminal activity (e.g., arson, physical assault, murder). While bias incidents are not considered criminal acts, they do nonetheless create tension that can lead to more serious problems if left unchecked. The task of parents, teachers, youth service professionals, community residents, and adults, in general, is to ensure that young people understand the harmful impact of such behaviors and keep them from escalating.

Why do hate crimes occur?

Hate crimes often occur as a result of prejudice and ignorance. A lack of understanding about differences among people and their traditions contributes to fear and intolerance. Left unaddressed, these sentiments may lead to acts of intimidation and ultimately hate-motivated violence.

How often do hate crimes occur?

According to the FBI, in 2002 over 3,600 incidents of hate crimes based on race were committed and nearly 2,490 of those race-based incidents were directed at African-Americans. There were also over 1,420 hate crimes incidents based on religion, and over 1,000 of those were perpetrated against individuals of the Jewish faith. During the same year, there were some 1,250 hate-related incidents based on sexual orientation, with also 850 of those were directed against gay men or men thought to be gay. Additionally, there were more than 1,102 hate crimes based on ethnicity, and nearly 500 of those incidents were directed against Hispanic-Americans. Finally, there were 45 disability- related hate crimes, and 25 of those were directed against persons with a mental disability.

Who commits hate crimes?

FBI data for 2002 identifies hate crime offenders by race and by their association with the commission of other crimes. In 2002, 61.8% of hate crime offenders were White, 21.8% were Black, 4.8% were multiracial, and 9.8% unknown. In terms of other crimes committed, 68% of the reported hate crime offenses were crimes against people; the most frequent of those crimes was intimidation. Another 26.5% of hate crime offenders were associated with crimes against property such as destruction, damage, or vandalism. In general, most hate crimes are committed by previously law abiding young people harboring some form of disdain or hatred for a member of a particular group. (Source: FBI's *Hate Crime Statistics, 2002;* complete report available at www.fbi.gov/ucr/hatecrime2002.pdf.)

Where do hate crimes usually occur?

According to the FBI, in 2002, the highest percentage of reported hate crimes (29.5%) occurred on or near residential properties. The FBI also reports that 20% of hate crimes committed took place on highways, roads, alleys, or streets. More than 10% of those crimes took place at schools and colleges, while 21.6% were widely distributed across different locations.

Are hate crimes decreasing or increasing?

It is difficult to tell if hate crimes are on the rise or on the decline. On the one hand, reporting hate crimes is a voluntary action taken by States and localities. Some States with clear histories of racial prejudice and intolerance have reported zero incidents of hate crimes. At the same time, many victims of hate crimes are often reluctant to come forward – a direct result of the trauma caused by the crime. Although the Hate Crime Statistics Act was passed in 1990, States have only been collecting and reporting information about these crimes to the FBI since 1991. It appears that for those States and localities that have reported hate crimes, the number of incidences nationwide has continued to hover annually somewhere between 6,000 and 8,500. Again, this may be indicative simply of the reporting or nonreporting trends of different localities. In fact, seven States either did not report or reported fewer than 10 hate crime incidents in 2002.

Is there an increase in hate crimes following a national crisis or during other difficult times?

While direct correlations are always difficult to establish, there is strong evidence that when the country is faced with traumatic events, such as the tragic events at the World Trade Center, Pentagon, and in Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001, hate crimes escalate. In the weeks following the events of September 11th, for example, the FBI initiated numerous hate crime investigations involving reported attacks on Arab-American citizens and institutions.   These attacks ranged from verbal harassment to physical assaults.   There were also reports of mosques being firebombed or vandalized. Attacks on people with no cultural, political, or ethnic affinity with any Middle Eastern group, but who "looked Arab" or "looked Muslim" also became common following the emotional upheaval that followed the attack. In the wake of the overwhelming response to the toll-free hotline established to document claims of discrimination, harassment, and hate crimes following the September 11th terrorist attacks, the United States Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR) expanded its capacity to collect information by initiating a second toll-free hotline.   During one 12-hour period following the attacks, the volume of calls peaked at approximately 70 calls per hour.

> ▸ For more information on hate crimes following the acts of terrorism on September 11, 2001, visit the USCCR Web site at www.usccr.gov.

How do hate crimes affect local communities?

Hate crimes are committed with the intent not only of sending a message to the targeted victim, but also to the community as a whole. The damage done to victims and to communities through hate crimes cannot be qualified adequately if one only considers physical injury. The damage to the very fabric of a community where a hate crime has occurred must also be taken into account. Hate crimes, in effect, create a kind of public injury because they rapidly erode public confidence in being kept free and safe from these crimes. To that extent, crimes of this nature can traumatize entire communities.

Why is it important to report hate incidents and hate crimes?

It is critical that citizens help their local police departments prevent and prosecute hate crimes by reporting hate-motivated activity, particularly when it involves criminal behavior.   Law enforcement agencies, government officials, school administrators, and other members of the community should encourage citizens to report all bias-related incidents so that high-risk situations can be tracked and appropriate problem-solving actions can be taken as quickly as possible.

Experts believe that hate crimes are significantly underreported in both schools and in the larger community, which hinders efforts to intervene in a meaningful way or to develop long-term prevention initiatives. For example, in a study released by the Massachusetts Governor's Task Force on Hate Crimes (*The Boston Globe,* January 28, 2002) of 4,059 students polled at 30 public schools across Massachusetts in 2000, 400 students said they were victims of hate offenses but only 30 percent reported the incidents. When students did tell someone about the hate crimes, the study found that 60 percent told a friend, 29 percent told a family member, and 15 percent informed school personnel. Only 3 percent reported the offense to law enforcement.

What can parents, educators, and other adults do to prevent the spread of hate-motivated behavior?

One of the most important things that adults can do to reduce the spread of hate-motivated behavior is to help children and youth learn to respect and celebrate diversity. Parents, teachers, community leaders, and clergy can model appreciation for differences and support cross-class and cross-ethnic friendships. Schools and youth organizations can assist by encouraging youth from diverse backgrounds to work and play together.

Research shows that children between the ages of 5 and 8 begin to place value judgments on similarities and differences among people and by the fourth grade their racial attitudes have begun to harden. It is essential that parents talk openly and honestly with children about diversity, racism, and prejudice and carefully consider how their own stereotypes and prejudices are being passed on to their sons and daughters. In schools, teachers and administrators should engage in educational efforts to dispel myths and stereotypes about particular groups of people and whenever possible work with parents and local law enforcement authorities so that such an effort is supported on many fronts. In addition, establishing intervention programs for preadolescents with low social skills or aggressive tendencies (e.g., bullying) can decrease the chance of these youth joining anti-social peer groups that will reinforce their problem behaviors.

Are there any statistics available on youth-initiated hate crimes?

Research indicates that males under age 20 commit a substantial number of hate crimes. For example, the Bureau of Justice Assistance reported that in 1994, young people under the age of 20 carried out nearly half of all hate crimes committed. According to the Chicago Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, the FBI, and other researchers, hate crime perpetrators are usually under the age of 26. These facts help underscore the importance of working with children and youth on issues of prejudice, bias, and discrimination, and for sending clear and consistent messages to children of all ages that hurtful, negative, and offensive behaviors are not acceptable.

Can a hate crime be committed with words alone?

The use of bigoted and prejudiced language does not in and of itself violate hate crime laws. This type of offense is frequently classified as a bias incident. However, when words threaten violence, or when bias-motivated graffiti damages or destroys property, hate crime laws may apply.

Does bias have to be the only motivation in order to charge someone with a hate crime?

In general, no, although the answer may depend on how courts in a particular jurisdiction or State have interpreted its hate crime laws. It is not uncommon for people to commit crimes for more than one reason. Many hate crimes are successfully prosecuted even when motivations in addition to bias are proven.

HATE ON THE INTERNET

A topic that has become closely associated with hate crimes is hate on the Internet. The Internet today is so diverse and complex that it defies simple definition – it enables intense communication across social, geographical, and political boundaries while educating and entertaining. But it is critical for adults to remember that for all of its advantages, the World Wide Web remains unregulated and unmonitored. Youth, who spend an average of 13 hours a month online, can easily come upon sites and messages that are inappropriate, pornographic, or hateful. Even a casual search on the Internet will reveal a number of sites devoted to racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, and sexism; therefore, young people who explore the Internet, whether visiting Web sites, reading e-mail messages, or conversing in chat rooms, run the risk of encountering this type of information. In fact, many hate groups specifically target children and youth because they know that hateful messages planted early in life can deeply influence and affect young minds. For youth who are isolated, unpopular, alienated or merely curious, this "electronic community" can provide a sense of value, importance, and belonging.

Hate groups around the world have always spread propaganda – this is not new. What is new is that with the advent of the Internet, hate groups can now share their messages with literally millions of people across the globe with the click of a mouse. Prior to the Internet, hate groups remained somewhat isolated and were forced to communicate with others through means that seem somewhat primitive by today's standards. Flyers, anonymous mailings, street demonstrations and the like were the only avenues available to hate groups. Today however, extremists can share their messages easily, inexpensively, and often anonymously with hundreds of fellow extremists and with unsuspecting audiences. Some of the more popular forms of communication used by hate groups on the Internet include encrypted e-mail, newsgroups, listserves, and chat rooms.

> ▸ To learn about hate groups and hate group activity in your region, visit the Southern Poverty Law Center's Intelligence Project at www.tolerance.org/maps/hate/index.html.

Like any tool, the Internet has the potential to help and to harm, depending on how, and who uses it. It is the responsibility of parents, teachers, and other adults to carefully monitor computer use by children of all ages so that their experiences will be both meaningful and safe.

Facts & Figures

A carefully designed national survey by Grunwald Associates in collaboration with the National School Boards Foundation (2002) reveals that more than **32** million parents and **25** million children ages **2-17** are online in the United States, with the number growing steadily. The number of young people online has tripled since 1997, and for the first time the number of girls on the Internet is equal to or greater than the number of boys.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT HATE ON THE INTERNET

Why can't the government ban use of the Internet to spread hateful and racist ideology in the United States?

The Internet operates across national borders, and efforts by the international community or by any one government to regulate its contents would be virtually impossible, both technologically and legally. In the United States, the First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees the right of freedom of speech to all Americans, even those whose opinions are reprehensible by most people's standards. In a number of recent decisions, the Supreme Court has reaffirmed that the government may not regulate the content of Internet speech to an extent greater than it may regulate speech in more traditional areas of expression such as the print media, the broadcast media, or the public square. While courts may take into account the Internet's vast reach and accessibility, they must still approach attempts to censor or regulate speech online from a traditional constitutional framework.

Is there any kind of hate speech on the Internet that is not protected by the First Amendment?

The U.S. Constitution protects Internet speech that is considered critical, annoying, offensive, or demeaning. However, the First Amendment does not provide a shield for libelous speech or copyright infringement, nor does it protect certain speech that threatens or harasses other people. For example, an e-mail or a posting on a Web site that expresses a clear intention or threat by its author to commit an unlawful act against another specific person is likely to be actionable under criminal law. Persistent or pernicious harassment aimed at a specific individual is not protected if it inflicts or intends to inflict emotional or physical harm. To rise to this level, harassment on the Internet would have to consist of a "course of conduct" rather than a single isolated instance. A difficulty in enforcing laws against harassment is the ease of anonymous communication on the Internet. Using a service that provides almost complete anonymity, a bigot may repeatedly e-mail his or her victim without being readily identified.

Has anyone ever been successfully prosecuted in the United States for sending racist threats via e-mail?

There is legal precedent for such a prosecution. In 1998, a former student was sentenced to one year in prison for sending e-mail death threats to 60 Asian-American students at the University of California, Irvine. His e-mail was signed "Asian hater" and threatened that he would "make it my life career [sic] to find and kill everyone one [sic] of you personally." That same year, another California man pled guilty to Federal civil rights charges after he sent racist e-mail threats to dozens of Latinos throughout the country.

Has anyone ever been held liable in the United States for encouraging acts of violence on the World Wide Web?

Yes. In 1999, a coalition of groups opposed to abortion was ordered to pay over $100 million in damages for providing information for a Web site called "Nuremberg Files," a site which posed a threat to the safety of a number of doctors and clinic workers who perform abortions. The site posted photos of abortion providers, their home addresses, license plate numbers, and the names of their spouses and children. In three instances, after a doctor listed on the site was murdered, a line was drawn through his name. Although the site fell short of explicitly calling for an assault on doctors, the jury found that the information it contained amounted to a real threat of bodily harm.

Can hate crimes laws be used against hate on the Internet?

If a person's use of the Internet rises to the level of criminal conduct, it may subject the perpetrator to an enhanced sentence under a State's hate crime laws. Currently, 45 States and the District of Columbia have such laws in place. The criminal's sentence may be more severe if the prosecution can prove that he or she intentionally selected the victim based on his or her race, nationality, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. However, these laws do not apply to conduct or speech protected by the First Amendment.

Are there specific cases where the Internet has been known to influence people who commit hate crimes?

In 1999, White supremacist Internet materials were implicated in two horrifying hate crime sprees. Though the extremists charged with these crimes were technically not youth, they were young and impressionable at the point when the Internet helped draw them into the hate movement.

In the first case, Matthew Williams and his brother were charged with murdering a gay couple and helping set fire to three Sacramento-area synagogues. In his first year at the University of Idaho, Matthew Williams had joined a charismatic Christian church. Two years later he left that church. Searching for a new spiritual path and relatively isolated because he did not own a functional car, Williams turned to the Internet. Described as a "fanatic" by acquaintances, Williams reportedly adopted nearly every radical-right philosophy he came across online, from the anti-government views of militias to the racist and anti-Semitic beliefs of the Identity movement. He regularly downloaded pages from extremist sites and used printouts of these pages to convince his friends to adopt his beliefs.

Later that same year, Benjamin Nathaniel Smith went on a racially motivated shooting spree in Illinois and Indiana. Targeting Jews, African-Americans, and Asian-Americans, Smith killed two people and wounded eight, before taking his own life to avoid capture. Months before Smith told documentary filmmaker Beverly Peterson, "It wasn't really 'til I got on the Internet, read some literature of these groups that it really all came together."

> ‣ The Identity Church movement is a pseudo-theological manifestation of racism and anti-Semitism that first came to light in the United States in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Identity believers assert that African-Americans and other nonwhites are "mud people," on the same spiritual level as animals, and therefore without souls. Identity organizations include such groups as the Aryan Nation.

Can commercial Internet Service Providers (ISP's) prevent the use of their services by extremists?

Yes. Commercial ISP's, such as America Online (AOL), may voluntarily agree to prohibit users from sending racist or bigoted messages over their services. Such prohibitions do not implicate First Amendment rights because they are entered into through private contracts and do not involve government action in any way. Once an ISP commits to such regulations, it must monitor the use of its service to ensure that the regulations are followed. If a violation does occur, the ISP should, as a contractual matter, take action to prevent it from happening again. For example, if a participant in a chat room engages in racist speech in violation of the "terms of service" of the ISP, his or her account could be cancelled, or the person could be forbidden from using the chat room in the future. ISP's should encourage users to report suspected violations to company representatives. The effectiveness of this remedy is limited, however. Any subscriber to an ISP who loses his or her account for violating that ISP's regulations may resume propagating hate by subsequently signing up with any of the dozens of more permissive ISP's in the marketplace.

How does the law in foreign countries differ from U.S. law regarding hate on the Internet? Can an American citizen be subject to criminal charges abroad for sending or posting material that is illegal in other countries?

In most countries, hate speech does not receive the same constitutional protection as it does in the United States. In Germany, for example, it is illegal to promote Nazi ideology, and in many European countries, it is illegal to deny the reality of the Holocaust. Authorities in Denmark, France, Britain, Germany, and Canada have brought charges for crimes involving hate speech on the Internet. While national borders have little meaning in cyberspace, Internet users who export material that is illegal in some foreign countries may be subject to prosecution under certain circumstances. American citizens who post material on the Internet that is illegal in a foreign country could be prosecuted if they subjected themselves to the jurisdiction of that country or of another country whose extradition laws would allow for arrest and deportation. However, under American law, the United States will not extradite a person for engaging in a constitutionally protected activity even if that activity violates a criminal law elsewhere.

Can universities prevent the use of their computer services for the promotion of extremist views?

Because private universities are not agents of the government, they may forbid users from engaging in offensive speech using university equipment or university services; however, public universities, as agents of the government, must follow the First Amendment's prohibition against speech restrictions based on content or viewpoint. Nonetheless, public universities may promulgate content-neutral regulations that effectively prevent the use of school facilities or services by extremists. For example, a university may limit use of its computers and server to academic activities only. This would likely prevent a student from creating a racist Web site for propaganda purposes or from sending racist e-mail from his or her student e-mail account. One such policy – at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana – stipulates that its computer services are "provided in support

of the educational, research and public service missions of the University and its use must be limited to those purposes." Universities depend on an atmosphere of academic freedom and uninhibited expression. Any decision to limit speech on a university campus – even speech in cyberspace – will inevitably affect this ideal. College administrators should confer with representatives from both the faculty and student body when implementing such policies.

May public schools and public libraries install filters on computer equipment available for public use?

The use of filters by public institutions, such as schools and libraries, has become a hotly contested issue that remains unresolved. At least one Federal court has ruled that a local library board may not require the use of filtering software on all library Internet computer terminals. A possible compromise for public libraries with multiple computers would be to allow unrestricted Internet use for adults, but to provide only supervised access for children. Courts have not ruled on the constitutionality of hate speech filters on public school library computers. However, given the broad free speech rights afforded to students by the First Amendment, it is unlikely that courts would allow school libraries to require filters on all computers available for student use.

Isn't there a law that states that public schools must install filters on school computers?

The Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), enacted in 2000 as part of an education spending bill signed by President Clinton, requires schools using Federal funds for Internet use or connections to have filtering systems in place by July 2002. So far 74 percent of the nation's approximately 15,000 public school districts have installed Internet filters, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. CIPA is not without controversy, however. Some critics contend that the law violates the First Amendment, removes community control, and prevents students from using the Internet effectively. They also believe that money being spent on Internet filtering could be better spent on preparing teachers to deliver responsible Internet instruction and on other curriculum-related materials. For more information about CIPA and its legal challenges, visit the American Library Association's Web site at www.ala.org/cipa.

What exactly are Internet filters?

Filters are software that can be installed along with a Web browser to block access to certain Web sites that include inappropriate or offensive material. For example, parents may choose to install filters on their children's computers in order to prevent them from viewing sites that contain pornography or other problematic material. ADL has developed the HateFilter™, a filter that blocks access to Web sites that advocate hatred, bigotry, or violence towards Jews or other groups on the basis of their religion, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or other immutable characteristics. HateFilter™, which can be downloaded from ADL's Web site, contains a "redirect" feature that offers users who try to access a blocked site the chance to link directly to related ADL educational material. The voluntary use of filtering software in private institutions or by parents in the home does not violate the First Amendment because such use involves no government action. There are also some commercially

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For more information about the ADL HateFilter™, visit www.adl.org.

marketed filters that focus on offensive words and phrases. Such filters, which are not site-based, are designed primarily to screen out obscene and pornographic material.

Have Internet filters been found effective?

In some cases, filters block harmless sites because their software does not consider the context in which a word of phrase is used. Other filters appear to block legitimate sites based on moral or political value judgments. A recent study by the National Coalition Against Censorship examined popular filtering such as N2H2's Bess, CYBERsitter, and SurfWatch and found that while they blocked many pornographic and other inappropriate sites, they also blocked sites on historical documents, Shakespeare's plays, the site for the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and almost all gay and lesbian sites.

Besides filters, what are some other ways that adults, especially parents, can protect youth from the dangerous aspects of the Internet?

Filtering software should never be a substitute for adult supervision. It is important that parents and educators talk to children of all ages about the dangers of the Internet – helping them to understand that online hate exists, and as much as responsible citizens may abhor the fact that hate groups and hateful individuals use this medium to spread messages of bias, hatred, and disharmony, the U.S. Constitution protects their right to do so. This is an important lesson in democratic values. By no means do fair-minded people condone hate behavior, but this must be weighed against the importance of protecting free speech. Help youth develop and practice the critical thinking skills necessary to counter all of the hateful things that they will see and hear – on the Internet as well as in other media – with accurate knowledge and a commitment to respecting all people. Additional recommendations include the following:

■ Talk with youth about the dangers of the Internet on an ongoing basis. While many middle school students may be computer and Internet savvy, it is dangerous to assume that they are knowledgeable about the dangers of the Internet.

■ Remind youth that not all of the information on the World Wide Web is accurate.

■ Encourage youth to look at the header and footer of a Web page. This information will often provide clues to the author and source of information as well as any copyright information.

■ Stress the importance of not revealing personal information to strangers over the Internet.

■ Remind youth to never accept e-mail, files, or URL's from strangers.

■ Place computers in common areas so that what is on the screen can be easily seen by adults.

■ Set clear rules and limits for Internet use.

■ Carefully monitor the use of chat rooms.

■ Talk to youth about their experiences on the Internet; ask them about sites that they are visiting for schoolwork and for personal enjoyment.

■ Encourage youth to ask questions about what they see on the Internet.

■ Participate in your child's Internet explorations by visiting and discussing Web sites together.

■ Expose children and youth to Internet sites that enable them to create, to design, to invent, and to collaborate with others in their age group in other communities in ways that contribute to society in positive ways.

■ Become familiar with basic Internet technologies and keep current on the topic by reading resource publications.

■ Select a family-friendly Internet Service Provider. Many ISP's have built-in filters and family-orientated parameters.

Portions of "Hate on the Internet" adapted from *Poisoning the Web: Hatred Online: An ADL Report on Internet Bigotry, Extremism and Violence.* **© 1999. New York, NY: Anti-Defamation League.**

‣ *Suggested Resources*

The Parent's Guide to the Information Superhighway: Rules and Tools for Families Online, developed by the National PTA and the National Urban League, can be ordered by writing the National Urban League, 500 East 62nd Street, New York, NY 10021-8379 or ordered online at www.childrenspartnership.org. This resource provides a step-by-step introduction to parenting in an online world, and offers some rules and tools to help children navigate the Internet safely.

Hate on the Internet: A Response Guide for Educators and Families, another Partners Against Hate resource, provides a comprehensive review of the problem of hate online as well as guidelines and activities to help parents and educators teach youth how to use the Internet responsibly. For more information on this resource, visit the Partners Against Hate Web site at www.partnersagainsthate.org.

Facts & Figures

Consistent with trends indicating that parents are keeping a closer watch on their children's media habits, more parents are setting limits with regard to where kids go and what they do online.

According to RoperASW (April 2002):

- **42%** of Internet Kids say their parents have strict rules about what they can do online, up 13 points since 1998.

- Parents are becoming increasingly vigilant of kids' online activities because **97%** with kids **8 to 17** perceive the Internet as a potentially dangerous place for children.

- Technologies to limit children's activities online are in high demand among parents with **97%** agreeing that there should be a device that allow parents to control or filter the Web sites children can access.

For the complete report "Beyond the Digital Divide: Internet Kids Are in a Class by Themselves," contact RoperASW at 212-599-0700 or <u>info@roperasw.com</u>.

SCHOOL VIOLENCE: AN OVERVIEW

Twenty-seven school shootings across the country since the early 1990's have left 50 people dead, most of them students, and countless others physically injured and emotionally scarred. In the aftermath, residents in towns and cities like Jonesboro, AK, Richmond, VA, Littleton, CO, and Santee, CA have been left to wonder how such things could happen in their communities. In addition to highly publicized school shootings, other forms of violence that disrupt the school community take place daily. These behaviors include pushing, shoving, slapping, kicking, hitting with a fist, hitting with an object, threatening with a gun or knife, using a gun or knife, destroying property, and robbery. When students who engage in violent acts are asked to explain their behavior, they often cite retaliation, defending themselves, and as a way to resist an antagonist's demands as their rationale – all excuses that indicate that many youth view violence as a rational, socially acceptable response to conflict.

Violent incidents and threats of violence at school negatively affect students, staff, and the educational process. According to the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, fear and feelings of being unsafe cause an estimated 500,000 students in the United States from going to school at least one day a month. In addition to the physical, psychological, and emotional effects of violence, economic costs are immense. For the most part, youth violence has been viewed and addressed by justice or sociological domains and not viewed as a concern for the public heath system. In recent years, however, a public health approach has received more attention, in that such an approach emphasizes a comprehensive community prevention strategy – a strategy that certainly includes schools.

Of particular importance to educators working with middle school students are

findings from *Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). The report identifies two general onset trajectories for youth violence – an early one, in which violence begins before puberty, and a late one, in which violence begins in adolescence. Youth who become violent before age 13 generally commit more serious crimes for a longer time. These young people exhibit a pattern of escalating violence through childhood, and they sometimes continue their violence into adulthood. Most youth violence, however, ends with the transition into adulthood. Surveys consistently find that 30-40 percent of male youths and 15-30 percent of female youths report having committed a serious offense by age 17. Serious violence is part of a lifestyle that includes drugs, guns, precocious sex, and other risky behaviors. The importance of late-onset violence prevention is not widely recognized or well understood. Substantial numbers of violent offenders emerge in adolescence without warning signs in childhood. While experts all agree that early childhood programs that target "at-risk" students are critical for preventing the onset of violent behavior, it is also critical that programs to address late-onset violence also be developed and implemented. The full Surgeon General's Report is available at www.surgeongeneral.gov.

Another important study undertaken by the Division of School Psychology at Alfred University analyzed the responses of 2,017 students in grades 7-12 to a series of questions about why they think school violence occurs and how it can be stopped. Following are some of the highlights of that analysis:

- Teenagers say revenge is the strongest motivation for school shootings.

- Students recognize that being a victim of abuse at home or witnessing others being abused at home may cause violence in school.

- Students have easy access to guns.

- Only half the students would tell an adult if they overheard someone at school talking about shooting someone.

- Better relationships between teachers and students are one way to stop school violence (i.e., teachers should care more about their students, intervene to stop bullying, and take a more active role in their students' lives)

> ▸ This entire study, *Lethal Violence in Schools: A National Study* (Alfred University, 2001), can be ordered by contacting Alfred University, One Saxon Drive, Alfred, NY 14802. Telephone: 607-871-2170, e-mail: news@alfred.edu. The report is also available in PDF format at www.alfred.edu/teenviolence/lethal_violence_in_schools.pdf.

BULLYING IN SCHOOLS

Few topics have received more attention from educators, mental health workers, youth service professionals, and those working in the juvenile justice system in recent years than that of bullying. An investigation into school shootings across the country over the past decade has revealed that in at least some cases there was evidence that the perpetrators had been teased or bullied by classmates and/or felt ostracized by the school community. While a direct correlation between bullying and school violence has not been established, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that an environment of teasing, bullying, harassment, and intimidation can lead victims of such treatment to resort to aggressive or violent behavior as a way to resolve the problem and stop the abuse.

Facts & Figures

A survey of **U.S. teens (ages 12-17)** conducted by Wirthlin Worldwide for *Are We Safe? Focus on Teens* (National Crime Prevention Council, 2002) revealed that:

- **1/2** of teens witness at least **1** bullying or taunting incident in school every day, and a majority of that group see several incidents a day.

- Almost **2** out of **3** teens witness bullying or taunting at school at least once a week.

Download this complete report at www.ncpc.org/cms/cms-upload/ncpc/files/rwesafe2001.pdf.

Bullying, behavior that is intended to harm or disturb another person, involves an imbalance of power – a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one. Bullying may be physical, hitting or otherwise attacking a person; verbal, name-calling or threats; or psychological, spreading rumors or excluding a person from social groups, all of which are intended to harm or humiliate the target. Bullying differs from normal teasing or quarreling in that the later happens between classmates of equal stature or popularity and is usually not prolonged or meant to inflict harm. According to a study by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (April 25, 2001), bullying occurs most frequently in sixth through eighth grade, with little variation between urban, suburban, and rural areas.

Other findings in the study include the following:

- Both bullies and the targets of bullying are likely to have difficulty adjusting to their environments, both socially and psychologically.

- Targets of bullying have greater difficulty making friends than do youth not subjected to bullying and generally report poor relationships with their peers.

- Targets of bullying often suffer humiliation, insecurity, and a loss of self-esteem, and may develop a fear of going to school.

- The impact of frequent bullying can have long-term effects, including adult depression and other mental health problems.

- Bullies are often involved in other problem behaviors, e.g., drinking alcohol, shoplifting, fighting, vandalism, skipping and dropping out of school.

- Youth who identify themselves as both "bullies" and "targets of bullying" report that they are lonely, have trouble making friends, do not see themselves as successful in school, and are involved in risky behaviors, like smoking and drinking.

▶ For more information about the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and its publications, visit the NICHD Web site, www.nichd.nih.gov.

Mental health professionals and educators generally agree that at the earliest age possible, children must understand their role in helping to create a school climate that is safe and inclusive and must be taught nonviolent ways to respond to conflict. Likewise, professionals agree that a change in thinking about bullying must take place in adults. Parents, teachers, and other school personnel who view excessive teasing and bullying as a harmless rite of passage (and who fail to intercede when

they observe such actions) may overlook important signs that such conduct is crossing the line into more aggressive and violent behavior.

Given that bullying is a problem that occurs within the social environment as a whole, not just in school, effective intervention must involve the entire school community. Getting teachers, parents, and local law enforcement to acknowledge that bullying takes place and setting up rules to prohibit it sends youth a powerful message that the problem of bullying is being taken seriously and that their community values them. To be successful, anti-bullying programs that are put into place must include strategies to help young people develop social competence and must be part of a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach that involves everyone with whom youth interact – parents, teachers, counselors, administrators, bus drivers, coaches, etc. Time must be spent developing whole-school bullying policies, integrating anti-bullying themes into the curriculum, improving the school environment, and providing children of all ages with conflict resolution, peer counseling, or peer leadership programs where they can learn strategies to effectively address such behaviors when they occur. Work begun in the elementary school must continue into middle school when bullying behaviors are more frequent and often more aggressive than they had been in earlier years.

‣ *Suggested Resources*

A number of resources on the topic of school violence and bullying are available from the National Resource Center for Safe Schools (NRCSS), 101 SW Main, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204. Telephone: 800-268-2275 or 503-275-0131.   Educators will find the publication *Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools* particularly useful. This publication can be downloaded from the NRCSS Web site at www.safetyzone.org.

Hazelden Publishing & Educational Services offers books, curriculum guides, and training programs to help middle school teachers understand and address the problem of bullying in their classrooms. Many of these resources have been recommended by the American Association of School Administrators and can be ordered by contacting Hazelden Publishing at 15251 Pleasant Valley Road, Center City, MN 55012-0176. Telephone: 1-800-328-9000; Web site: www.hazelden.org.