

1 of 3 Teens and 1 of 6 Preteens are Victims of Cyber Bullying; Teenager Recounts Harrowing Tale of Online Death Threats

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WASHINGTON, Aug 17, 2006 (U.S. Newswire via COMTEX) -- As America's kids prepare to go back to school, national law enforcement leaders released a poll showing that one in three teens and one in six preteens have been victims of cyber bullying. The leaders estimate that more than 13 million children aged 6 to 17 were victims of cyber bullying. More than 2 million of those victims told no one about the attacks.

Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff and Charlotte Chief of Police Darryl Stephens released the poll and called on every school in America to have a proven bullying prevention program.

Key findings of the poll of 1,000 kids nationwide were:

-- One-third of all teens (12-17) and one-sixth of children ages 6-11 have had mean, threatening or embarrassing things said about them online.

-- 10 percent of the teens and four percent of the younger children were threatened online with physical harm.

-- 16 percent of the teens and preteens who were victims told no one about it. About half of children ages 6-11 told their parents. Only 30 percent of older kids told their parents.

-- Preteens were as likely to receive harmful messages at school (45 percent) as at home (44 percent). Older children received 30 percent of harmful messages at school and 70 percent at home.

-- 17 percent of preteens and seven percent of teens said they are worried about bullying as they start a new school year.

The poll was conducted by Opinion Research Corporation for Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a national, nonprofit, bipartisan organization of more than 3,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, other law enforcement leaders and violence survivors. Fight Crime: Invest in Kids takes a hard look at the research to find out what works to prevent kids from turning to a life of crime.

At the news conference, 15-year-old cyber bullying victim Kylie Kenney from Vermont described a website that called for her death and the years of threatening and embarrassing phone calls and e-mails that she received from classmates. She was forced to transfer schools twice as well as be home schooled for a semester due to the cyber bullying.

"No child should have to endure the cyber bullying I endured. I was scared, hurt and confused. I didn't know why it was happening to me. I had nowhere to turn except to my Mom. I am speaking out now because I want other kids who are bullied online or on their cell phones to know that they should tell their parents or other adults. You don't have to put up with it. Something can be done," said Kenney.

Cyber bullying is the use of electronic devices and information, such as e-mail, instant messaging (IM), text messages, mobile phones, pagers and web sites, to send or post cruel or harmful messages or images about an individual or a group. This is a freer form of bullying than traditional physical or name-calling attacks as the individual responsible can be anonymous. Also, unlike standard bullying, there is no respite or refuge for the victims since cyber bullying can go on 24 hours a day and invade a victim's home.

"While millions of America's kids are being attacked by email, phone, text message or on web sites, cyber bullying must be arrested," said Shurtleff. He called on every school to adopt a comprehensive anti-bullying program.

Research has found that the Olweus Bullying Prevention program started in Norway and now implemented in South Carolina and other states has the strongest results on reducing bullying. The Olweus program can cut bullying in half. More information on this program can be found at <http://www.fightcrime.org>

Stephens said that cyber bullying can be a crime and research shows that bullying can lead to later crime.

Stephens released 10 steps on how to prevent cyber bullying. Key steps include:

- Teach your kids to tell adults if they're bullied
- Every school must have a proven anti-bullying program
- Watch for signs that your child may be a victim
- Keep computers in common areas of homes

"America's law enforcement leaders are providing families with 10 practical steps to delete cyber bullying from the current favorites list. Congress can take one step by passing bullying prevention legislation so every school in the country will establish a proven anti-bullying program," Stephens said.

Rep. John Shimkus (R-Ill.) has introduced a bill to help schools to establish proven bullying prevention programs.

David Kass, executive director of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, said "In the coming school year, 13 million kids will be victims of cyber bullying. Law enforcement leaders across the country urge that every school in America should have an Olweus Bullying Prevention program to keep kids safe."

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