

HAS IT...

This incident prompted the creation of a “Teens and Technology” workshop for parents as well as a program for students to emphasize that bullying or harassment committed off-campus using private digital devices is still subject to the school’s disciplinary policy.

“When you threaten somebody who goes to this school on Instagram, it becomes my business,” Brooks says.

Brooks is referring to the policy that Wake County, Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Guilford County school systems all have in place that permits school officials to get involved in on-line, off-campus harassment if it has the potential to interfere with a student’s ability to learn or be safe in school.

Since most online rumor-spreading or harassment is perpetuated using personal digital devices, it behooves parents to monitor their child’s phone, computer, tablet or iPod. This is easier said than done, however, as more than 200 apps allow young people to hide their text records and social media accounts from parents.

Set social media limits

One way to reduce the likelihood of your child becoming an online rumor victim is to ensure that she limits Facebook friends and Twitter followers to people she knows well, and to advise her not to friend or follow anyone she doesn’t know. She should also block Snapchat requests from unfamiliar user names, since this site can be an avenue for contact from predators and bullies.

“You can set an example by not gossiping or spreading rumors at home.”

— Crystal Reardon, Wake County Public School System director of counseling

Younger, more vulnerable kids should steer clear of ask.fm, a site where anonymous users can post questions to any account holder’s page. Often these “questions” are really statements, most of which are rude, inappropriate or downright vicious. You can even go a step further.

“If the digital environment is unhealthy, take them off,” says Brenda Elliott, executive director of Student Services for Guilford County Schools. “Be sure that (social media) isn’t the only way they are being affirmed as a good person,” she says. “Every child should feel valued, so help them find a group or club that interests them as a way to make friends and build self-worth.”

If you’re dealing with an older teen, cutting the digital cord may be harder and sometimes impractical. Your teen daughter might need a cellphone in case her car breaks down or she experiences other emergencies.

Parents can, and should, keep communication lines open, know the names of their kids’ friends and maintain a discreet online presence. For example, you can ask to friend or follow your son on Facebook, but “lurk” instead of make comments or retweet his tweets. Also know your child’s login and passwords for social media accounts.

Encourage transparency and accountability

One of the best ways to reduce social-media fueled rumors and harassment is to create a zero-tolerance policy in schools and at home. For example, students at Community House Middle School and other schools that have

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