



FEDERATION OF PARENTS AND CITIZENS' ASSOCIATIONS OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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MEDIA RELEASE

P&C welcomes the forum on Cyberbullying with key stakeholders

The Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW applauds the Rees government's decision to hold a forum on Cyberbullying in November and invite key stakeholders including academics, teachers and parents, to participate.

Cyberbullying has become recognized as a major concern for parents and school staff. There have been ongoing studies and numerous publications on the topic in the form of pamphlets, magazine articles and website items. Presentations at conferences have highlighted the work being done around this issue but there still appears to be problems in the classroom, playground and general community involving students being bullied by others using technology.

It is important to continue to raise awareness of the positive aspects of using the internet and mobile phones. For some students, it provides an opportunity to develop and maintain social networks. They are able to stay in touch with friends, post information about themselves, show photos and generally 'hang out'. They link with each other and interact in a way that appears foreign to their parents but, to the modern day teenager, is a way of life.

Unfortunately, the anonymous aspects of the links established using modern technology leaves people, and especially young children and adolescents, vulnerable to being exploited and bullied. There are scams, advertising opportunities, access to inappropriate adult material and the chance of identity theft as personal information is shared.

Parents need to remain aware of the materials their children are accessing. They need to learn about mobile phones and what services mobile phone carriers offer as part of the package sold to young users. This is especially important in an age when someone can not only talk on the phone but also send text messages via SMS, pictures, sounds, video via MMS (multi-media messaging), access emails, IM (instant messaging) and chat as well as surf the net. Phones are now cameras, sound recorders and can even be used to track people.

Youtube, Myspace, Facebook, LiveJournal, Twitter and online game sites. Most parents have heard of these sites but quite a few have had limited contact with them. They often do not have any awareness of the nature of the material available and accessed by their child. Or, in fact, how to protect their child from what is accessible at the flick of a switch.

Add to the mix, the 24 hour availability nature of modern technology. Sometimes, the best forms of protection such as supervising and guiding, teaching netiquette and appropriate use of mobiles and computers, are not enough. Parents can't always be there, it is important to teach children how to protect themselves and report concerns.

Education is only one answer to the issue. It is also important to give 'teeth' to the authorities who are responsible for investigating extreme cases of cyberbullying. Legislation is needed to address a technology which is transforming almost on a daily basis, often faster than the laws which monitor it.

The Federation hopes that many of the issues raised will be addressed at the forum.

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