Cyberbyllying

Jonny Timms, Deputy Head (Pastoral)

Definitions of cyberbullying vary, but usually, it is defined as some form of intentional, repeated aggression and using electronic forms of contact such as texting and social media.

I am not a big fan of the words "cyberbullying" and "bullying." Pre-teens and teens have heard these words so many times; they roll their eyes when they come up. Do the test - ask them if they feel they have been saturated with stuff about "bullying" and see how they respond. When I talk with them about such topics, I often use the terms "online aggression" and "social cruelty."

No matter what we call it, unkind and stressful human interactions are a part of life, and the sooner we give kids skills to practise working through conflict and cruelty, the better. Research shows that 20% of eight year olds and 40% of 10 year olds have mobile phones (the majority of which are smartphones) and children with phones, not surprisingly, are significantly more likely to be involved in cyberbullying.

Given a common aversion to the topic that teens can have, means that as adults we need to be more skilful in how we approach our conversations. Consider bringing up a news story of a person bad-mouthing another person, and then from there, a good entry is the simple question about why - "Why might a person be acting a certain way?" There are always reasons behind a person's behaviours and talking about this with our boys is a nice way to help build their insight and empathy. For bullying, maybe a person wants to gain power in a social structure because they feel powerless in another setting.

- Screenagers has a great list of anti-bullying campaigns that addresses online cruelty and I hope it fosters many types of conversations and solutions around online cruelty.
- MARC (Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center) provides terrific resources for parents, educators, and students.
- Elizabeth Englander, PhD has many free handouts for parents to help through some of these kinds of issues including information about what bystanders can do.