

Parent Roundtable Highlights November 9, 2010

Kathleen, Dan, Tom and Barb spoke to about 60 Upper School parents about topics ranging from recent teen suicides in Marin to technology and privacy, parent guidelines about technology use at home and student perspectives on technology, how to set boundaries and what issues our parents are facing right now.

Here are highlights from each of the speakers and attachments for future reference.

Part I: Warning Signs of Suicide in Young People (Tom Bekeny)

We have recently passed through a period during which news media focused on suicides of young people, including several local youth and a college student on the East Coast. These events serve as a reminder that we need to remain sensitive to potential signs of distress of young people in our lives. Data shows that about four out of five times youth will give clear warning signs before making a suicide attempt. Girls attempt about twice as many times as boys, but boys are about four times more successful, as they use more lethal means.

There are number of risk factors and warning signs associated with suicide and a summary of these (compiled by Lisa Ingels, MFT) is posted on the [Parent Portal](#) of the MCDS website ("Health Advisories" under the "Forms and Documents" tab). Particular combinations of risk factors and warning signs such as history of prior attempts, current depression, and suicidal ideation with a plan and means to carry out the plan increase the risk. Other variables such as access to firearms also increase risk.

If you suspect that a young person might be suicidal, he or she should be evaluated for suicidal risk by a qualified mental health professional. At times these issues can begin to surface in the context of a relationship that a young person may have with a trusted adult. It can be tremendously relieving for that person to share what is going on with them, provided that the trusted adult is emotionally available to listen.

There are various psychiatric emergency resources available in our communities:

Marin Suicide Hotline: (415) 499-1100

SF Suicide Prevention: (415) 781-0500

Marin County Crisis Unit of Marin General: (415) 499-6666

SF General PES: (415) 206-8125

California Pacific Medical Center: (415) 600-6000

Also, there is a national hotline specifically for LGBTQ youth: 1-866-488-7386 (The Trevor Helpline)

Part II: Technology and Privacy (Barb Cohen)

Education about online privacy, cyberbullying and safety happens in multiple directions:

- The school educates/supports the students
- The parents educate/support the students
- The school educates/supports the parents

Know your way around the privacy settings in your various online tools:

- Locate the Profile/Account/Privacy settings and select the levels of privacy you want for yourself/your student
- Locate the Block/Report feature in each of the various tools and use it if another user is conducting inappropriate/suspicious behavior
- Think about the privacy settings in your online accounts the same you would checking your credit report regularly. Go back from time to time and make sure you still have the appropriate settings turned on. MANY PRIVACY SETTINGS CHANGE WITHOUT YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND YOU NEED TO MANUALLY OPT OUT OF NEW FEATURES.
- Students need to know that if anyone is making them feel uncomfortable online, they need to enlist the help of a trusted adult immediately.
- Most social networking tools have an age minimum of 13, in compliance with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). Most of these tools are not appropriate for younger students.

Here's what we're doing with Upper School Students at MCDS:

- Regular LRC Classes with topics including media literacy, citizenship, safety, privacy
- Ongoing discussions at assemblies, in LRC, and in advisory on various topics related to technology
- Thoughtful selection of student online tools (gmail, Ning, Voicethread, blogs) at each grade level. We use these tools at school to practice skills in a "walled garden" in preparation for using them in the "real world."

Part III: MCDS Students...an Honest Assessment (Dan Rogoff)

Generally, the conduct, behavior and decision making of MCDS students is solid, responsible and admirable. Most students adhere to the core values, are mostly honest and forthright, ambitious and admirable in their efforts. My opinion, as a parent and professional, is that the strong majority of young people at MCDS also use the internet safely and effectively. I also think that many are innocently ignorant about many of the things causing us our gravest concern and worry. Most students seem to use the internet for acquiring information and instruction, for entertainment, and to communicate with others. We can never minimize the trauma and tragedy associated with abuse of the internet and its possibilities, nor can we discount the presence of impostors, con men, stalkers and other threats. Because these people and situations

exist, we have to address the realities with our students, in context, calmly, in balance, with trust and perspective.

As a school, we assume co-responsibility, with parents, in raising awareness and appropriately monitoring youth internet use. I'm encouraged and pleased that we're here today in partnership. We have to choose to invest in conversations about the very topics that seem most daunting: sexuality and pornography, words and their impact, and generally, what is appropriate at various ages.

MCDS is very much a relationship school. Our core values, the idea of kindness, the human touch, apart from all things technological, are encouraged and emphasized. We learn from each other, through talk, and connection over time. It takes time and consistency to make a relationship true, to build trust, and we have the luxury of time.

The issues today are the same as they've been for decades. The medium is very different, and is literally right at our fingertips. But meanness is not new, harassment and stalking is not new, young people pushing the limits and pushing our buttons is not new.

We pass the message to our children and our students that we're there for them; that we'll care for them. Let's walk that talk with courage; let's choose not to abdicate our responsibilities in our role as adults.

My guess is that our investment in our young people will pay off, that we'll be pleased and reassured by what we see, hear and share...

Internet Resources from the MCDS Tech Department

Facebook, YouTube, Google, Myspace and other social networking accounts **require a minimum age of 13**. This is in compliance with the Federal Trade Commission's COPPA (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act) policy. It is very important that adults review the privacy settings and Terms of Service agreements before providing minors with access to these tools. Be aware that privacy settings sometimes can change unbeknownst to the end user, so it is also important to keep checking the settings periodically. Please also know that there is no one checking if your child is not truthful about his or her age as he/she registers for one of these tools online.

General Resources:

- Common Sense Media Articles on Internet Safety:
<http://www.commonsensemedia.org/internet-safety>
- CSM Family Media Agreement - Grades 6-8
<http://www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Common%20Sense%20Family%20Media%20Agreement%206-8.pdf>
- Federal Trade Commission's COPPA (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act) policy:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children%27s_Online_Privacy_Protection_Act

Privacy Settings:

- Facebook Privacy:
<http://www.facebook.com/help/?page=826#!/help/?page=419>
- Facebook Security:
<http://www.facebook.com/help/?page=826#!/help/?page=420>
- Skype Privacy: <http://www.skype.com/intl/en-us/security/safety/staying-safe/>
- Google Account Privacy & Security:
<http://www.google.com/support/accounts/bin/topic.py?hl=en&topic=14146>
- Google Family Safety Center:
<http://www.google.com/familysafety/>
- YouTube Safety Center:
<http://www.google.com/support/youtube/bin/answer.py?answer=126289>

Computer Filtering Software & Parental Controls:

- Filtering and Blocking Software:
[http://www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Common Sense Tip Sheet Internet Filters.pdf](http://www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Common%20Sense%20Tip%20Sheet%20Internet%20Filters.pdf)
- Search for filtering and blocking software:
<http://kids.getnetwise.org/tools/>
- On a Mac:
<http://www.apple.com/findouthow/mac/#parentalcontrols>
- On an iPhone:
<http://www.commonsensemedia.org/how-set-parental-controls-iphone>
- On a Nintendo DS:
<http://www.commonsensemedia.org/how-set-parental-controls-nintendodsi>
- On a Wii:
<http://www.commonsensemedia.org/tech-tip-setting-wiis-parental-controls>
- On Comcast:
<http://www.comcast.com/Corporate/Customers/ParentalControls.html/>
- On DirecTV:
<http://www.directv.com/DTVAPP/global/article.jsp?assetId=P5980021>
- Google Safesearch:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJ074lO47HQ>

Common Sense on Cyberbullying

What is cyberbullying?

Bullying is not new. But today's kids use cell phones and computers to bully others. They send mean comments, photos, videos, and text messages to hurt and embarrass one another. Much of this type of information is posted on social networking sites like Facebook so it is very public. Millions of people can see it.

Cyberbullying can be done by one person or a group. Kids don't think they can be identified online, so they think it is okay to be mean. They do it any time, 24/7, and it is very difficult for teachers and parents to discover. And once something is digital, it is very hard to get rid of.

How does cyberbullying affect the victim?

The intent of cyberbullying is to make someone unhappy or to make someone suffer. It often makes victims miserable. It hurts their self-confidence and embarrasses and shames them. This emotional damage can last forever.

What can parents do?

- » **Give your children a Code of Conduct.** "If you can't say it to their face, don't text, IM, post it."
- » **Ask your children for information.** Do they know anybody who has been bullied? Talk about it; open the door for them to tell you about cyberbullying.
- » **Explain what will happen to your kids if they engage in bullying.** Tell them exactly what you would do if you were to learn that they had done this.

Tips for parents of elementary school kids:

- » **Don't let your kids spend too much time socializing online.** Choose sites with chat that is already screened. Also explain the rules of cyber behavior. Tell them that the rules are just like all others and that lies and secrets can hurt.
- » **Tell them not to share passwords even with friends.**

Tips for parents of middle school kids:

- » **Watch their use.** Check to see what they are posting online and on cell phones.
- » **Tell your children what to do if they are bullied.** Tell them not to answer, to tell an adult they trust right away, and NOT to delete the message (this is evidence and can be reported).
- » **Explain what will happen if they bully.** Just like with a younger child, create a consequence and stick with it.
- » **Remind your children that there is no privacy on the Internet.** When they post something on a social networking site, add a photo, or send a text, this can all be made public. If they don't want everyone to see it, they shouldn't write/post it.
- » **Tell them not to start something they don't want to finish.** Gossip and game chat can become very ugly in minutes. Remind them to be careful with what they say.

Tips for parents of high school teens:

- » **Tell them to think first.** Even though they like to take risks, this is not the place to do it. Anything they post can be misused by someone else.
- » **Remind them that they can still ask for your help.** Let them know that you will not judge them but help them to handle the situation.



Common Sense on Self-Expression and Identity

What's the issue?

In the offline world, unless it's Halloween it's pretty clear who you are. But in the digital world, kids can be anyone they want to be and make up new identities. They can be penguins, zombies, or ninjas. Their screen names can be SexyKitten or AngryBoy. They can make up screen names and create fake profiles. Kids can also design avatars — cartoon characters that are their alternate selves — to look any way they want.

Why it matters

Making new identities online can be a safe and creative way for kids to explore who they are. And having an alternate identity can be a real gift for a kid who's shy or afraid of being rejected by classmates.

On the other hand, a digital identity can be a way for kids to avoid personal consequences. When kids hide behind their online identities, they can push limits and act in ways they wouldn't in the offline world. Some kids may explore anti-social or harmful identities — like being a bully or someone who talks about hurting themselves or other people. Other kids share too much information and create reputations that might hurt them in the future.

Either way, if there's a big difference between an online and offline identity, it can hurt a kid's sense of self. This is especially true when an online identity gets a lot of attention and positive feedback, and kid starts to rely on it. They may even do things that they know are silly or dangerous to just to feel daring and have people talking about them.

What can parents do?

- » **Talk to your kids about anonymity.** Just because your kids are disguised doesn't mean they can't be identified. They must be responsible for their actions, whether they're portrayed as a penguin or a person.
- » **Remember that exploration is part of growing up.** Ask questions about your kids' online identities. Why did they make the choices they did?
- » **If your kids' avatars or screen names concern you, talk with them.** Ask questions about their choices. And don't be too quick to worry or judge. Their identities can mean something deep, or simply be the result of a whim.
- » **Identities grounded in hatred, violence, illegal activities, or risky sexual behavior should be avoided entirely.** No child needs to be associated with unhealthy or unethical behavior.
- » **Ask your kids to think about whom they want to be in their online life.** Is the digital identity they're creating currently how they want to be seen? How about in 5 years? In 20 years? Remind them that they have the power to present and control their identities and reputations.



Common Sense on Protecting Online Privacy

What is online privacy?

Kids live in a world where everyone and everything is connected. Once kids put something on the Internet, they lose control over that information. Text messages, comments, videos and pictures can be copied and sent to millions of people in a second. All this information can last a long time. So protecting your child's online privacy means more than just being careful with personal information like a phone number or address.

Why does privacy matter?

Everything we do online leaves a trail. This trail, called a digital footprint, is made up of bits of pieces of information that allow other people to learn about us. The trail can last a long time. For example, if a kid puts a silly or racy photo of himself on the Internet, someone could find it later.

This means your child's reputation can be affected by what she posts online. Kids' deepest secrets can be shared with thousands of people they have never even met.

There are other problems with trying to control privacy. Many phones and programs have GPS (Global Positioning System). GPS identifies the exact location of the person using the cell phone. Kids can use the GPS information to tell their friends where they are and find their friends when they go out. Some phones let you identify the location of the pictures you take on your phone. And kids can post these photos to the Internet, identifying themselves, their family, their address, and other private information.

Another problem: companies sometimes use this information to send your child advertisements.

What can parents do?

- » **Remind your children to think before they put something online.** Remind them that this is their reputation. Someone else could use online information to hurt or embarrass them.
- » **Teach kids to keep personal information private.** Help kids decide what information is important for them to keep private when they are online. We recommend that kids do not share their addresses, phone numbers, or birth dates.
- » **Make sure your kids use privacy settings on their social network pages.** When they use sites like Facebook or MySpace, help your kids identify their close friends, family, acquaintances and then fix their privacy settings appropriately.
- » **Remind kids to protect their friends' privacy.** When they pass a rumor or identify someone in a picture (called “tagging”), privacy is affected. If your kids are tagged in friends' photos, they can ask to have the photos or the tags removed. But there's not too much they can do beyond that.
- » **Create a few hard-and-fast rules about posting.** Tell your kids that there will be no nude or semi-nude photos or videos ever — not online, not on a cell phone (known as “sexting”), no pictures of doing drugs, drinking, or having sex.
- » **Remind kids that the Golden Rule is true for the Internet, too.** What goes around comes around. If kids spread a rumor or talk badly about anyone, they can't assume that what they say will stay private. Whatever they say can come back to hurt them.
- » **Help kids think long term.** Everything leaves a trail on the Internet. It's like a track in cement, but it is online. Whatever is created may never go away. If your kids don't want to see it tomorrow, they should not post it today.

Let's review.

Help kids manage their online privacy.

- » Review their privacy settings on the social networks they use — and make sure the controls are strict.
- » Explain to kids that everything they post online can be viewed by anyone and last a long time.
- » Remind kids to think before they tell the world something.
- » Be aware and limit use of social-mapping programs that let kids post where they are.
- » Train kids in responsible behavior, like not posting or forwarding other people's information without permission.



Common Sense on Social Networking

What are social networking sites?

Social networking sites are places where kids can hang out together online. When you sign up for a social networking site like MySpace or Facebook, you get a profile page (your own space and name) to post pictures of yourself and your friends, artwork, videos, links to songs, and your personal thoughts.

You can invite your friends to connect to your profile. Eventually, kids can have hundreds, or even thousands, of “friends” linked to their page. Friends can chat and write comments on one another’s pages.

Social networking sites can be accessed on a computer or cell phone.

Why do social networking sites matter?

Social networking sites are great places to connect with friends and people with shared interests. They are also places for kids to express their creativity and explore their identities. But lots of kids post racy pictures, write inappropriate comments, and talk about drinking or doing drugs.

Unless your children use privacy controls, everything on their profile page can be seen by people other than their friends. There are many stories about kids who did not get a job they wanted or into their favorite college because of something on their profile.

To limit who can view their information, kids must use privacy settings. But even if your kids think they have used privacy controls, there are different ways to see people’s pages. So kids have to be careful about what they post.

What can parents do?

Tips for parents of young kids:

- » **Make sure your children visit only those sites that are okay for their age.** For kids 5-8, there are sites like Club Penguin or Webkinz with a lot of safety tools that help kids play without taking big chances.

Tips for parents of middle school kids:

- » **Facebook and MySpace state that their sites are not for kids under 13.** But it is easy to lie about your age because there is no way for the company to check.
- » **Ask your kids if they use these sites, so you can help them be safe.** If for some reason you think your kid is using Facebook or MySpace, but she says she isn't, there are ways to find out. Just click "History" on your Internet browser (Firefox, Internet Explorer, Yahoo, etc.). If you see either of these sites, your kids may have an account at one of them.
- » **Tell your kids to think before they post something.** Remind them that everything can be seen by people they don't know. Each family is different, but for middle school kids it's a good idea for you to have access to your kids' pages just to be sure that what they're posting is okay. Parents can help keep their children from posting something they will regret so they will not be sorry later.
- » **Make sure your kids use privacy controls.** Show them where the privacy controls are.
- » **Set some rules for what is and is not okay for your kids to communicate, play, and post online.** Posts that show them using drugs, drinking, or any sexual activity will be with them forever.
- » **Encourage your kids to be kind.** Lots of sites have applications like "bathroom wall" or "honesty boxes" that let users tell friends what they think of their friends' postings. Just remember that if your child would not say something to someone's face, he should not post it.
- » **Go online.** Get an account for yourself. See what kids can and can't do.

Tips for parents of high school teens:

- » **Talk with them about their digital world.** Remind them that anyone can see what is on their pages — even if they think no one will. When they apply for a job or to a college, people may look at their pages. Ask your teens to think about who might see their pages and what those people might think about the posts or photos they see.
- » **Let them know that anything they create or communicate can be cut, changed, pasted, and sent around.** Once your teen puts something on her page, it is out of her control and can be used to hurt her or someone else. This includes talk and photos of sex, drugs, and alcohol. Tell your kids that online stuff can last forever. If they would not put something on the hallway in school, they should not post it on their pages.
- » **Remind them not to say something about or to someone else that they would not want said about them.**
- » **If they decide to meet someone in person, it must be in public.** Even better, they should bring a friend along. Remind your kids that it is never a good or safe idea to meet with strangers.
- » **Tell them to watch the time.** Social network sites can use a lot of time. Hours and hours can go by, and this does not help with homework.



Common Sense on Cell Phones

How are cell phones used?

Cell phones are not just used for talking. Cell phones can be used for texting, surfing the Web, checking Facebook, playing games, downloading applications, playing with ring tones, taking pictures, recording video, and more.

Why cell phones matter

Cell phones are powerful tools for creativity and communication. But kids can also use them in ways that you may not approve of and could get them in trouble, including:

- » Cheating in school;
- » Staying up late at night texting
- » Taking and sending racy pictures of themselves or their friends;
- » Being distracted when kids should be paying attention — for example, when they're driving;
- » Forwarding private texts, photos, and videos to embarrass someone.

Cell phones allow kids to enter a world that is private and mobile. So it can be hard for parents to figure out what their kids are doing. When your children are home, you can pay attention to what is happening. You cannot do this when they are out of the home on their cell phones.

What's the right age for your child to have a cell phone?

Many kids feel they have to have a cell phone. To figure out the right age for your kids, ask yourself the following questions:

How independent are they? Do your children “need” to be in touch for safety reasons — or social ones? How responsible are they? Can they follow limits you set for minutes talked and applications downloaded?

Can you trust them not to text during class? Can you trust them not to disturb others with conversations, and to use the text, photo, and video functions responsibly? Can you trust them not to embarrass or hurt others?

What can parents do?

Tips for parents of elementary school kids

- » **Ask yourself: Do they really need a phone?** Is it for safety reasons, or is it because everyone else has one?
- » **Make sure your kids understand the rules.** Save the phone numbers of approved contacts on the phone so that your kids can see who is calling. Tell them not to answer calls from numbers they don't know. Make rules for how much time they can talk. Talk to them about what phones are used for, and make sure they know when phones should be off.

Tips for parents of middle school kids:

- » **Make sure you have the right plan for calls or texts.** If you have teenagers, get a plan with no limits on texting or you will pay much more.
- » **Explain that cell phones are expensive.** You have to pay more for extra ring tones, sports updates, Web access, and other extras.
- » **Work out rules for cell phone use with your kids.** For example do not use phones in class, turn off the phone at night, and do not use phones at the dinner table.
- » **Make sure your kids are using phones the right way.** That means no rude or sexy texts, no embarrassing photos or videos. If you have a young teenager or younger kids, you might even want to view the text messages they send and receive. You will also want to check the time of calls to make sure they are made within your time limits.
- » **Talk about cyberbullying.** Kids can be tempted to harass other kids by bombarding them with too many text messages or by sending cruel messages to other kids. Tell your children to come to you if anything like that happens to them. Check the messages they send sometimes just to make sure their communication is okay.
- » **Tell your children that sexual talk of any kind is not allowed.** Kids often use sexual language as a kind of joke. On a cell phone, this can be instantly forwarded to anyone, and kids can get into all kinds of trouble.
- » **Establish real consequences for breaking your rules, like taking away the phone for a week!**

Tips for parents of high school teens:

- » **Tell them that they can never text or talk while driving.** That's how kids get into traffic accidents, the #1 killer of teens.
- » **Make sure they pick up your calls.** Many teens believe that calls from Mom and Dad are a bother. As long as you are paying the bills, make a rule that they have to answer when you call, except when they're driving.
- » **Have them look over each month's bill.** Let them see exactly how many minutes they are spending on the phone or texting.
- » **Create rules such as no phones at the dinner table, in the car, or in a restaurant.** Remind kids that they may have only a couple of years left at home to talk to you face to face!

