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Time To Teach Digital Etiquette, Experts Suggest

TechWeb

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Cyberspace has become the breeding ground for a new type of bully. Rather than stealing a child's lunch money, the bullies are now taking pride, experts at Kansas State University said Friday.

Kansas State University Professor Mike Ribble said traditional bullies that get in the person's face must deal with the victim's body language and eye contact, but in cyberspace the bully benefits from the safety of isolation.

Ribble, who teaches a course known as Digital Citizenship in the 21st Century, defines "cyberbullying" as a person who anonymously ridicules or belittles another in conversations online in Internet chat rooms, bulletin boards, or social network sites, such as New Corp's MySpace.com or Google Inc.'s YouTube.com.

"It's too easy to write the first thing that comes into your head and then hit send before thinking of the long-term consequences," Ribble said.

Users forget even though they may delete a message, it's typically backed-up somewhere for future review. Ribble said it's an old school of thought, but people need to think about what they want to say before they write it.

On the YouTube Web site, company bloggers Maryrose and Mia posted a note earlier this week titled "Please Be Decent and Kind" to encourage those who visit the site to mind their manners.

"We've got thick skin, so we're not talking about the "wtf-why-is-this-featured" jabs at our (sniff, sniff) senses of humor and taste," the post reads. "We're talking about the hateful comments directed at users who've done nothing to hurt anyone. Comments about their sexual orientation or weight or looks or skin color; things that we all know don't count a bit toward what's really important."

The blog post stopped short of a full lecture, as the YouTube gang tried to encourage users to treat each other "decently and kindly." Still, it's not clear if the blog posted earlier this week has done any good.

But the problems go far deeper than being "decent and kind." Ribble suggests schools and educators need to start teach children digital etiquette because as more technology becomes deeply integrated with daily life.