

National expert shares tips on how to teach children online etiquette



Dr. Elizabeth Englander, expert on cyber-bullying, offered tips to Tri-Town parents, teachers and principals at a free seminar last week at Masconomet High School auditorium.

By Kathryn O'Brien/tritown@cnc.com

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Middleton Boxford Topsfield —

Texting, Facebook networking and cell phone chatting — are these forms of electronic communication getting out of control in your family?

Dozens of Masconomet parents, teachers and principals had the opportunity this month to listen to Dr. Elizabeth Englander, a national expert on cyber-bullying who offered practical strategies on how to guide youngsters through a world full of electronic distractions.

Englander, director of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center at Bridgewater State University, presented to the audience an hour and a half of strategies and guidelines to help parents handle the challenges of raising children in a technological society.

“I’m not against technology. Kids need more practice and guidance, not less. Don’t go home and pull out the plug,” she joked.

Kids today have plenty of technical know-how when it comes to finding their way around a computer.

“It’s the social skills that they lack,” said Englander who revealed that some 56 percent of youngsters have admitted to giving out their passwords/log-in information. Another 71 percent say they delete text messages before a parent sees them.

Twitter is making a comeback with students, said Englander, because more and more schools have banned Facebook use, forcing the youngsters to find other means to communicate.

Surprisingly, she told parents that children should be allowed to make their own social mistakes so they don't turn around as adults and make the same social errors.

Her first suggestion for parents had nothing to do with the computer.

"Always be willing to host your child's friends and playgroups in your own home. You need to expose them to as many social circumstances as possible," urged Englander.

The expert also advised parents to plan fun activities for the children who visit so that others will "want to get in on it, too. You're associating your child with things that are cool or fun," she said.

Englander also stressed that family support is instrumental in raising a child today.

"Have fun together," she said. "Spend a Saturday on a family outing — skip a trombone lesson or a soccer game."

And she warned, "Don't tolerate vicious sibling rivalry.

Social mistakes online

Englander emphasized "almost anything between teens today gets reverberated online, and then the online mistakes feed in to difficulty at school the next day."

"Kids don't understand the impact of electronic communications," said Englander, who mentioned youngsters must learn what they do online is NOT private and can be seen by all. They also need to know why security matters and learn how to control the technology, she added.

One of Englander's most startling tips related to the use of those friendly applications such as Farmville on Facebook. Although such applications are free, the software manufacturers have designed the games so a user's private information is revealed to many for marketing purposes, she stressed.