

The Safe Haven updates you periodically on safety issues confronting communities, including child abuse, cyberbullying, financial elder abuse, and more. Through awareness and education, we can work together to help the vulnerable—kids, tweens, teens, and elders—stay safe.

kids/tweens

First-Time Drop in Incidents of Child Abuse

A recent federal study by the Department of Health and Human Services shows that child abuse rates in the United States declined for the first time since data has been collected on the subject. The number of sexually abused children dropped 38 percent; physical abuse decreased 15 percent; and emotional abuse of children decreased 27 percent during the years 2005-2006, compared with 1993 data. Experts believe several factors may have contributed to the decline, including greater public awareness and the proliferation of child abuse prevention programs. However, Richard Wexler of the National Coalition for Child Protection Reform believes “the relatively prosperous economy during the period of study” may be a primary reason behind the overall drop.

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Bullied Kids More Prone to Illness as Adults

New evidence shows that childhood bullying may be linked to later problems with mental and physical health. An Australian study found that adults who were bullied as children were more likely to suffer illness such as depression, anxiety, and physical ills such as fatigue and pains. Scientists suspect that the “daily stress of being bullied can translate into long-term damage to your body,” says the study’s co-author Dr. Stephen Allison. The study extends previous research findings that bullied kids suffer higher rates of depression, headaches, and abdominal pain.

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teens

Bullying Tragedy Spurs Prevention Actions

Massachusetts legislators and school officials have grappled with bullying intervention and prevention measures following the suicide of 15-year-old Phoebe Prince, a South Hadley, Massachusetts high school student and recent Irish immigrant who was bullied relentlessly on her cell phone and on social networking sites by students. Several students have been suspended pending school disciplinary hearings.

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And, on March 18, the Massachusetts House approved an anti-bullying and cyberbullying bill that the state senate had passed. Among other things, the bill permits schools to discipline students if they bully students on the Internet when it affects a victim at the school.

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TRUE OR FALSE:

1. Teenagers currently use the social networking site MySpace as much or more as they did five years ago.
2. Physical bullying rates have stayed the same or risen during the past five years.
3. Computer usage has replaced TV as the single biggest media draw for teens today.

ANSWERS
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Parents and Teens Disagree on Dating Violence

One in three teens report experiencing threats of violence, or physical or sexual abuse, and nearly half of teens who are in relationships report being controlled, threatened and pressured to do things they don't want to do, according to a recent poll by Teenage Research Unlimited for the Family Violence Prevention Fund and Liz Claiborne. Yet, 81 percent of parents surveyed by the poll said they either believe dating violence is not an issue or they don't know whether it is.

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e-safety

Gay Students Routine Victims of Cyberbullying

In a noteworthy study focusing on bullying of non-heterosexuals, Iowa State researchers found that half of gay students were “regular victims” of cyberbullying. Of the gay students surveyed, 45 percent who were bullied reported feeling depressed; 28 percent felt anxious about attending school; and 26 percent had suicidal thoughts as a result of being cyberbullied. 80 percent of the students surveyed said their peers should do more to stop cyberbullying.

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Youth Media Consumption Soars

Kids 8 to 18-years-old are using media—televisions, cell phones, computers, and other electronic devices—7 and a half hours a day, according to a recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation. Since the last study in 2004, media usage is up 1 hour and 17 minutes. And when media multitasking is considered, the amount of media consumed has increased 2 hours and 12 minutes over prior levels. Most parents don't place limits on how much their children can watch TV, play video games, and be on the computer, but when they do, children spend less time with media: “those with *any* media rules consume nearly 3 hours less media per day than those with no rules.”

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elders

Assisted Suicide Law May Not Protect Seniors

A year ago, the state of Washington, became one of two states (the other being Oregon) to legalize and regulate physician assisted suicide under its Death with Dignity Act. Oregon and Washington are the only states that permit and regulate assisted-physician suicide. But, according to Sister Sharon Park, executive director of the Washington State Catholic Conference, the Washington law puts vulnerable people at risk, such as seniors and people with disabilities.

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Elder Abuse Prevalant in Nursing Homes

Last year a jury assessed \$15 million in punitive damages against a Brooklyn, New York nursing home for trying to cover-up its poor patient care. Although punitive damage awards against nursing homes are not the norm, the case is illustrative of elder abuse that is prevalent in nursing homes throughout the United States: in 2009, 26 percent of nursing homes nationally were cited for poor quality of care; 44 percent for failure to ensure a safe environment for residents; and 36 percent had food sanitary violations, according to a report by the University of California, San Francisco.

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legal lookout

School Must Pay For Student Bullying

In a federal court case that could have wide-reaching implications for schools, a jury concluded that a Michigan school district must pay \$800,000 to a student for failing to protect him from years of bullying. The student's parents had sued the school district for sexual harassment under Title IX, the Equal Opportunity in Education Act, citing sexually based harassment. The bullying started with name calling in middle school and escalated to "sexual insults" and physical bullying in high school. The school district had an anti-bullying policy, but it failed to stop the pattern of abuse through anti-bullying education.

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Students Asserting Online Rights: Mixed Bag

As schools punish students for using Facebook to malign teachers, students are fighting back with mixed results. For example, the expulsion of a 17-year-old high school basketball player in Nashville, Tennessee was upheld last week. The student had posted angry messages on Facebook against his coaches, including "I'ma kill em all". The decision reflects schools' authority generally to punish kids for unprotected speech such as a threat of violence or when speech causes "substantial disruption" to the school, says David Hudson of the First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University.

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In contrast, a Florida student may proceed with her lawsuit to have her high school suspension expunged on grounds that the First Amendment protected her creation of a Facebook page titled "Sarah Phelps is the worst teacher I've ever had," a federal judge ruled. The trial is scheduled for this spring.

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KNOW

THE NUMBERS

on tween dating

- **47 percent** of kids ages 11-14 report kissing while on a "date"
- **56 percent** report it's important to have a boyfriend or girlfriend
- **55 percent** of tweens say they would not talk to an adult if they saw a friend being abused by a dating partner

To read more about the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's national opinion poll of tweens and dating abuse, go to:

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QUIZ CORNER

ANSWERS FROM PAGE 1

1. Teenagers currently use the social networking site MySpace as much or more as they did five years ago.
ANSWER: False. A study by the Cyberbullying Research Center shows that in 2006, over 40 percent of profiles were active, compared to 18 percent in 2009. And, over 60 percent of the targeted teen profiles in 2009 had not been logged into for over a year. This data suggests that teens are leaving MySpace behind for other social networking options.
2. Physical bullying rates have stayed the same or risen during the past five years.
ANSWER: False: A recent study published in the Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine found that physical bullying dropped seven percent in the last year, from 22 percent reporting bullying compared to 15 percent between 2003 and 2008.
3. Computer usage has replaced TV as the single biggest media draw for teens today.
ANSWER: False: According to the Kaiser Family Foundation's "Generation M2" study, TV watching continues to be the biggest media draw for teens: on average per day, teens watch 2.39 hours of TV (4.29 if other media platforms are considered, like Ipods and DVDS on computers); listen to music and audio devices, 2.31; use the computer, 1.29; play video games, 1.13; and read, .38.