

Cyber bullying, obsessional online use and the Kytherian connection

In recent months we have heard or read stories about the increasingly worrying trend of cyber bullying and excessive online use amongst young people, one of the downsides of our internet and digital revolution.

Cyber bullying typically occurs through the use of electronic mediums; for example, on the internet through emails, blogs and social networking sites, as well as via mobile phones. It is similar to that of traditional bullying in that it is an intentionally hurtful act, repeated over time and conducted by someone deemed more powerful. Nevertheless, cyber bullying is a trend that concerns parents, educators, psychologists and other professionals as the element of anonymity, unlimited exposure and lack of accountability make it very difficult to control and highly damaging to the emotional wellbeing of those being targeted.

Psychological research and intervention has also indicated that children's development can be significantly impaired by excessive online gaming or internet use (e.g. disrupted eating and sleeping routines, poor social skills and decreased motivation and direction). It is an emerging global problem with statistics revealing that 1 in 10 teens are at risk of developing obsessional online behaviours, with the age of onset being around 12.

On 11th and 19th March 2010 our own **Yana** (nee **Kepreotis**) **Belogiannis**, a *Child and Adolescent Specialist and Director of the Kids & Teens Group*, appeared on Channel 7's Morning Show and was interviewed by **Kylie Gillies** and **Larry Emdur**. **Yana** was asked questions about the incidence and causes of cyber bullying and excessive online use, as well as strategies on how best to deal with these problems.

Yana emphasised the importance of addressing the underlying causes of cyber bullying and obsessional gaming or internet use; the emotional and behavioural difficulties (e.g. low self esteem, poor emotional regulation, anxiety, depression) that can manifest themselves in these online behaviours. **Yana**, who has considerable experience in dealing with youth who engage in excessive online use and victimisation, highlighted the need for parents and educators to become familiar with these online tools and maintain an open dialogue with their children regarding the prevalence and impact of online use.

Yana identified several warning signs for parents to be mindful of:

- Low self esteem
- Disrupted sleep and eating routines (e.g. substituting sleep for online gaming or internet use)
- Type of online activity (e.g. time spent engaged in online gaming as opposed to homework tasks)
- Breakdown in relationships and social interaction skills

To view the Morning Show segments featuring **Yana Belogiannis**, visit the "Latest News" section of the *Kids & Teens Group* website www.kidsandteens.com.au

If you are interested in the workshops and seminars that **Yana** runs as well as other mental health services, contact her via yana@kidsandteens.com.au

Yana Belogiannis is to be heartily congratulated for her appearance on national TV.

George Vardas

