Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use
Targeted Youth Risk Online Prevention & Intervention

Risk Insight

✦ The young people who are at greater risk online are generally those who are at greater risk offline.

▸ These youth generally have psychosocial problems, friends who engage in risk behavior, and disrupted relationships with parents.

▸ These youth are less likely to make good choices, less resilient in getting out of difficult situations, less likely to listen to adult guidance, and less likely to report online concerns to an adult because they more likely to have made bad choices that led them into the situation.

✦ Online risk behavior is grounded in mental health concerns. Victimization can result in mental health concerns. Because many incidents involve known peers, such behavior will often cause a disruptive or harmful impact at school. Behavior could result in criminal victimization or behavior.

▸ Effective targeted risk prevention and intervention will require a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach.

✦ There are no evidence-based best practices to address these concerns. The research regarding these new risks is still emerging. The technologies and digital media activities will continue to change rapidly.

▸ It will not be possible to emulate traditional risk prevention initiatives that establish relatively static programs that use evidence-based best practices. It will be necessary to shift to a dynamic "continuous improvement" model.

✦ Adults are generally not present in digital environments ~ but other young people are.

▸ Influencing positive peer helper responses and peer reporting of concerns will be very important to achieve success.

✦ Digital media can provide significant opportunities to effectively address the concerns of "at risk" youth.

▸ The electronic record of actions and relationships can provide excellent insight into risk behavior and factors and provide the opportunity for early intervention.

▸ The online environment itself can be used to provide information, self-help resources, individual or network-based support, and crisis intervention.

• The ability to seek help "invisibly" online may support greater help-seeking behavior.

• Witnesses and friends may also seek online guidance to help those at risk.

Risk Areas

✦ Cyberbullying and cyberthreats.

▸ Electronic aggression and posting material that raises concerns of the potential of violence to self or others.

✦ Risky sexual and relationship issues.

▸ Sexual solicitation or exploitation, unsafe cyberdating, use of digital media by abusive partners, and creating sexualized images.

✦ Unsafe or dangerous groups.

▸ Unsafe groups support harm to self, such as anorexia, self-cutting, drug/steroid use, suicide. Dangerous groups encourage harm to others, including hate groups, gangs, hackers, and trafficking in pornography.

✦ Underlying concerns.

▸ Unsafe postings or interactions and addictive access.

Recommended Action Plan

State Level Collaboration

✦ Establish a state-level multidisciplinary task force to develop state-level plans and to provide support for community level initiatives involving: Community mental health. Education ~ safe schools and educational technology. Law enforcement ~ juvenile justice and Internet crimes. Related professional organizations and industry.

✦ Regularly conduct a state-level youth risk online survey ~ preferably in association with other youth risk behavior assessment to enable comparison of risk and protective factors.

✦ Empower existing risk prevention programs in schools and communities to effectively respond to this new manifestation of risk behavior.

▸ Provide professional development to risk prevention professionals, health community, safe school professionals, and law enforcement.

▸ Ensure rapid dissemination of new research.

▸ Provide funding and support for initiatives to address youth risk online. Require that these initiatives have a reasonable likelihood of success:

• Objective data about the concern. Implementation plan including performance measures. Rationale for the initiative demonstrating evidence to support likelihood of success. An evaluation plan.

▸ Ensure ongoing sharing of insight between the initiatives.

▸ Conduct a biannual peer review of selected initiatives. The objective of this peer review is to ensure rapid dissemination of insight around successes and failures.

Community and School Level Collaboration

✦ Establish a similar multidisciplinary task force at the community level, including schools, mental health, and law enforcement.

▸ Facilitate provision of professional development and development of new prevention and intervention initiatives, following guidance set forth above.