

The sample letters and excerpts from codes of conduct illustrate a variety of ways that schools can hold their students accountable for their Internet behavior. I include these samples not to claim that they are the best or the only viable approaches, but to give a sampling to be looked at closely by both school administrators and involved parents.

A Sample Letter to Parents from a Private High School

May 6, 2005

Dear Parents,

The school year is winding down filled with many great activities, events, and ceremonies. However, there is one area of concern that I need to share with you. As I am sure you are aware, many of our students use technology for social purposes. The most popular site used by our students is MySpace.com. Students post profiles of themselves which include photographs and personal information for the world wide web.

This site and others have a large following that may include people with less than virtuous intentions. I encourage you to look into this site and sit down with your son or daughter to engage in open and honest communication regarding the acceptable use and associated potential dangers of such a site.

Sincerely,

Assistant Headmaster, Private High School, Los Angeles

Excerpt from a Sample Letter to Parents from a Christian High School

May 1, 2006

Dear Parents and Friends,

The purpose of this letter is to share information, observations, and concerns about Internet use, blogging and personal websites, and to help you become more vigilant parents in dealing with the technological advancements that have captured the attention of our children.

As kids spend more time online, they spend less time elsewhere. They spend less time with family, less time on homework, less time at youth groups, less time reading, less time sleeping. There is a very addictive quality to Internet use; and these same teenagers are already preoccupied with their iPods, cell phones, and hand-held electronic games.

Occasionally we become aware of inappropriate material on a website. This happens when parents bring us information that they have copied from their child's blog, which includes connections to blogs of their children's friends. We contact the parents of the offending student; and if there is a violation of school policy, we deal with it accordingly.

Once, during a school fieldtrip, several of my students decided to play a joke on a rather shy boy. This junior boy made the mistake of sharing that he had a crush on a freshman girl (who did not return the affection). What ensued for the remainder of the trip was a barrage of false cell phone text messages appearing to be from the said girl to the boy expressing interest and downright flirting. I'm sure the perpetrators could be heard laughing each time this boy would be texting away on his phone, not realizing how cruel the prank really was. The other victim, the girl, had no idea this scenario was being played out and was a bit jarred when the junior boy approached her by putting his arm around her shoulder—an unwanted gesture to her, but an invited one to him according to the texts he had received from “her.” Had this ruse been attempted through handwritten notes, perhaps it would have been easily deciphered by way of handwriting analysis and/or method of delivery; however, the anonymity of a text message aided in disguising any foul play. These high tech hi-jinks are particularly mortifying to teenagers because not only have they been had by their peers, but also there is a trail of evidence for all to relish. This young man now had to sit back while the other boys read and re-read his text responses. Ouch.

Of course we work diligently to make sure this does not occur on any school computers we are constantly updating our firewall protections, and our policies for Internet use are very clear and strictly enforced.

*We are not telling you how to parent. On the contrary, the wonderful students who attend [our school] attest to the diligence and dedication of our parents. Yet we know there are some students, and indeed some adults, who are very attracted to these worldly activities. We all want our children to behave in a manner that is consistent with the calling of Christ. The Scriptures tell us that we are to be **in** the world, but not **of** the world. It is our prayer that this will help to improve communication with your children on his important issue. The world-wide-web is overflowing with information. However, it is the Lord who adds wisdom.*

Sincerely,

Principal, Christian High School, Los Angeles

A Message from a Public Middle School's Principal

Excerpted from the June 2006 Newsletter

When students engage in inappropriate behavior online, it inevitably creates conflict, drama, and hurt feelings here at school. At least 40% of the peer conflict issues that our counselors handle originate on the Internet. We've even had a recent incident where students took inappropriate pictures at school and then posted the photos on one of these websites without the knowledge or permission of some of the students in the photos. Needless to say, we have strict rules against the inappropriate use of cameras on campus, but we have little control over where students post photos outside of school. I strongly encourage all parents to become knowledgeable about their child's Internet habits, to talk with their child about Internet safety and etiquette, and to closely monitor their child's Internet usage. If your child uses MySpace.com or other networking sites, I strongly encourage you to regularly go online and look at your child's webpage along with those of their friends (links from your child's page).

Excerpt from Florida Public School's Code of Student Conduct

Harassment and Bullying

Sexual harassment or bullying of students or staff is an extremely serious violation of the Code of Student Conduct, as well as a violation of criminal law. It will not be tolerated in schools, school buses, or at school-sponsored activities. Any such offenses may result in severe disciplinary action when such behavior disrupts the learning process.

It is Harassment When a Student

- *Writes comments about a person, e.g., on a bathroom wall, on a web site, via instant messaging, or through text messaging*

It is Bullying When a Student

- *Torments, threatens, taunts, ranks, degrades, targets, harasses, or humiliates a student or staff member using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies, or mobile phones or inviting others to join in these acts.*

The School Board reserves the right to regulate, review, investigate, and discipline students for cyber bullying, or for other disciplinary violations when such Internet statements, postings, or acts are made while on school campus, or while made off-campus and such statements, postings, or acts threaten violence against another student or otherwise disrupt the learning environment or orderly conduct of the school, school business, or school activities.

Excerpt from Connecticut Private High School's Policies and Procedures

Unacceptable Use of Internet and Other Electronic Resources

- 7. Malicious use of the network to develop programs that harass other users or infiltrate a computer or computing system.*
- 8. Hate mail, chain letters, harassment, discriminatory remarks, and other antisocial behaviors are prohibited on the network.*
- 9. Use of the network to access or process pornographic material, inappropriate text files (as determined by the system administrator), designing images with obscene or inappropriate messages are prohibited.*
- 13. Use of profanity, obscenity, racist terms, or other language that may be offensive to another user is prohibited.*

The newest pioneers in the MySpace wilderness are high school athletic directors and coaches. Many of the coaches I interviewed are candid about surfing the MySpace pages of their athletes. Some have even put their players on notice: *Online evidence of drinking alcohol, using drugs, or harassing others can lead to suspension from the team.* The following is a sample Athletic Code of Conduct contract:

Excerpt from Texas Athletic Code of Conduct Contract

No member of an athletic team, cheerleading squad, club sport or team manager will, after executing the athletic code:

2. Exhibit gross misconduct or behavior/citizenship that is considered detrimental to his/her team or school. Student-athlete behaviors must be in compliance with acceptable standards of conduct as per the current edition of the Student Parent Handbook. Some examples of inappropriate behavior may include, but are not limited to illegal acts, theft, fighting, vandalism, aiding and abetting, lying to school officials, falsifying information/signatures on permit or permission forms, hazing, bullying, or intimidating acts. Maintaining or being identified on a blog site which depicts illegal or inappropriate behavior will be considered a violation of this code.