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# *Preface*

*Many schools are buying expensive antibullying curriculum packages, big glossy binders that look reassuring on the bookshelf and technically place schools closer to compliance with the new laws. But our research on child development makes it clear that there is only one way to truly combat bullying. As an essential part of the school curriculum, we have to teach children how to be good to one another, how to cooperate, how to defend someone who is being picked on, and how to stand up for what is right.*

—Senior Lecturer Susan Engel and Professor Marlene Sandstrom, psychology, Williams College, Massachusetts

For the last ten years, we have been exploring the online lives of adolescents: the good, the bad, and everything in between. Advances in technology have revolutionized the way teens communicate, learn, and interact. Our research has taught us that, despite what the media might have us believe, most of what teens are doing online is very positive. The vast majority of adolescents use technology safely and responsibly the vast majority of the time. However, some do make mistakes or use technology in ways that create significant problems for themselves or others. Cyberbullying and sexting are examples of two such problems that receive a significant amount of media attention. As you will learn in this book, these behaviors are not at epidemic levels, but at the same time they should not be ignored. So what can you do?

This book seeks to explain and promote the importance of school climate in preventing teen technology misuse. Most of books and articles in print today simply describe the nature of cyberbullying or sexting (e.g., what it looks like, how much of it is occurring, and among whom). While this is an important first step, we seek to meaningfully build on the knowledge base and more explicitly connect the high-tech behaviors of teens to the school environment.

Much of what you will read is based on information we have learned through our decade-long exploration of the ways teens are using and misusing technology. We have completed seven formal independent studies involving over 12,000 students from over 80 middle and high schools from different regions of the United States. To guide the discussion, this book specifically features information from our most recent study, a random sample of over 4,400 middle and high school students (11 to 18 years old) from one of the largest school districts in the United States. Surveys were administered to students in 2010, and the information gathered represents some of the most recent and comprehensive data on these topics. We will also refer to the work of many others who have labored to better understand how adolescents use, misuse, and abuse these technologies.

In addition to the quantitative data collected, we have also informally spoken to thousands of teens, parents, educators, law enforcement officers, and countless other adults who work directly with youth. Our observations are essentially a reflection of their experiences. During these interactions, we have been fortunate to learn from those on the front lines about what they are dealing with, what is working, and what problems they are running into. The stories we hear are largely consistent with the data we and others have collected that will be presented throughout this text. We also receive numerous emails and phone calls on a weekly basis from educators, mental health professionals, parents, and other youth-serving adults looking for help with specific issues. These conversations help us to understand and consider the problem from a variety of angles and perspectives. All of the stories included in this book are real. In some cases the language has been modified slightly to fix spelling and grammar mistakes and improve readability, but the overall messages have not been changed.

## **IMPORTANT FEATURES OF THE BOOK**

This book not only concisely boils down the latest available research on cyberbullying and sexting in a manner relevant and accessible to you, but—more importantly—strives to provide you with a road map for developing a positive climate at your school to reduce teen technology misuse. To reinforce the key concepts, there are a number of valuable in-text features, including the following:

- Breakout boxes with important concepts explained in detail
- Illustrations to help illuminate specific strategies
- Views from educators who understand the power of a positive school climate
- Discussion questions after each chapter

- “Prevention Points” in each chapter that highlight significant points
- Chapter summaries
- Index

In addition to these valuable resources, we also have put a number of extras on the companion website at [www.schoolclimate20.com](http://www.schoolclimate20.com). These include the following:

- Online quizzes for each chapter
- A Twitter feed and Facebook Fan Page with new Prevention Points you can put into action at your school
- Success stories from those on the front lines
- Emerging best practices in school climate research and evaluation
- New downloadable activities and worksheets
- Supplemental staff development questions
- Questions to facilitate further discussion and follow-up among your students
- Featured case studies

Resources will be added and continuously updated on the site, so visit often!

## BREAKDOWN OF CHAPTERS

Before we can dive into the details of *School Climate 2.0*, it is essential to build a solid foundation of understanding the online behaviors of adolescents. In Chapter 1 we begin the discussion by focusing on the intersection of teens and technology and how the inseparability of adolescents from their high-tech devices affects, and is influenced by, what is going on at school. In Chapter 2, we outline the characteristics of a positive school climate along with some of the beneficial outcomes associated with such an environment.

In Chapter 3 we detail the nature of bullying in the 21st century. In many ways the bullying of today is very similar to the way it was when we were growing up. But technology has enabled would-be bullies to extend their reach, resulting in many significant challenges for educators, parents, and others who are working to resolve relationship problems. *Cyberbullying*, which we define as *willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices*, typically refers to incidents in which students threaten, humiliate, or otherwise hassle their peers through malicious text messages, web pages, or postings on Facebook or YouTube. It is clear that peer harassment that occurs on school grounds is a significant threat to a positive school climate. That said, *online* bullying also disrupts the ability of students to feel safe and secure at school. The vast majority of the time, targets of cyberbullying know the person doing

the bullying (85 percent of the time in our research), and most of the time the bully is someone from their school. If students regularly post hurtful, embarrassing, or threatening messages to a fellow classmate's Facebook page, for example, it unquestionably affects that student's ability to feel comfortable, free, and safe to focus on learning at school.

Chapter 4 describes *sexting*, which we define as *the sending or receiving of sexually explicit or sexually suggestive nude or seminude images or video* that generally occurs via cell phone (although it can also occur via the Web). Some have described this problem in dismissive ways, calling it this generation's way of "flirting" or characterizing it as a safer way to experiment sexually and come to terms with one's own sexuality. While this may be true in part, engaging in sexting can lead to some significant social and legal consequences.

We begin to tie everything together in Chapter 5, where we explicitly link school climate to online misbehaviors. Here again we argue that schools with better climates will see fewer cyberbullying, sexting, or other online problems among students. Ancillary benefits for educators who harness the power of a positive climate at school may include better attendance, higher school achievement, and more cooperative attitudes across the student body and among staff. A school with a positive climate is definitely more enjoyable to work and learn in, and can therefore lead to many other beneficial outcomes for students and staff alike. The remaining chapters of the book focus on providing you with strategies to establish and maintain a positive climate (Chapter 6) through peer mentoring and social norming (Chapter 7), assessment (Chapter 8), and appropriate response strategies (Chapter 9).