

January-February 2006

## MYSACE.COM...A FAVORITE SITE IN CYBER WORLD

-Jill Ricker

At a time when adolescents are developing their sense of selves, they are spending more and more time behind the veil of the cyber world. Most adults generally come to their computers for a task. Our children come for games and some of the same things that we do, but then go one step further. They come to the computer to socialize.

Today, many adolescents are establishing their social identities online. Adults may socialize with friends by email or instant messaging. Adolescents do this as well, but the information they exchange is accessible to anyone. Their inhibition regarding what they say about themselves and others is significantly lower than if they were face to face with a peer.



There are few consequences. There is no one giving immediate feedback before they click "enter". There are no facial expressions to read or body language to pick up. Because of this, many adolescents are providing inappropriate amounts of information that they would

not offer "in person". By establishing their social identities online, they are losing out on gaining the natural filters that we learn by socializing in-person.

We caution our children about giving out their names and personal information online out of fear of predators. What many parents do not know is that sites such as MySpace.com are a place where, despite our warnings, the same information that we caution our children about sharing is posted in what feels like a "safe" environment.

Teens conceal little about their lives online. Even if you sign on with a false age, city or state, there are other places within this site where you are asked to identify yourself. Often, MySpace allows a person to gain information on another individual simply by using their name. From this they can gather other information such as city, high school, friends, interests, etc.

It is easy to see the attraction to MySpace. Teens have a personal page to call their own. They can put their favorite music on their site, answer questions about themselves, post pictures of their friends as well as themselves, write about parties...where and when they will be held as well as the outcomes, meet new people, keep a running diary (blog), etc. Self expression is a key item to the draw of the site. MySpace and other sites like it are a place for adolescents to go and socialize with no adult supervision.

Harmful or harmless...we must each decide. It is worth familiarizing yourself with these types of sites and then determining what is best for you and your family.

*How do you get onto the site?*

[www.MySpace.com](http://www.MySpace.com)

To get in, you have to be 16...or at least claim you are.

Type your email address and a password and you are logged on—then you can locate friends by typing their name into a search box. Some people sign in with an alias, so you need to know their screen name or other identifying name. Create your own personal profile, gather friends and photos to put on your site or just browse and meet new people. Here are a few people I met while clicking on random pictures...

- **Jillian, from Tempe, Arizona, says, "Life's short... eat deserts first." Jillian says she's 19.**
- **Billy, from Millpitas, CA, says "SUP my name's Bill, Jerry is my bitch." Billy, 20.**
- **Jess, from Appleton, Wisconsin says, "Tequila makes my clothes fall off." Jess, 18.**

Welcome to MySpace

Myspace membership is reported at 40 million, and ranked No. 15 on the US Internet for visits in October. Experts say MySpace and other sites like it are creating new forms of social behavior that blur the distinctions between online and real-world interactions. This topic is gaining attention and will continue to provoke timely research.

Check it out for yourself. It's a site worth seeing—Jill Ricker

## COMMUNICATION STARTERS- LBMS GUIDANCE COUNSELOR SUE WILSON TALKS ABOUT TALKING WITH YOUR KIDS...

It's really important for families to keep the door open for communication...especially during the junior high school years. Once children get older, every question feels confrontational, so these open communication channels are an important foundation for good communication later.

1. What do you like about each of your friends?
2. Is it more important to look good, act good, or have good grades? Why?
3. If you could change one thing about your life, what would you change?
4. Where are you going (when they leave with their friends)?

5. What interesting thing happened to you at school today?



Get them talking! And keep them talking!

6. What would you like to change about the world if you could? and ...what's something you could do right now to make the world a better place?
7. Do you know any kids who are (name the activity—could be anything from doing drugs to playing soccer)? what do you think about that (or them)?

Start a family "bank" and charge a quarter if they can't think of an answer—then use the money you collect for a family activity. NO teenager is going to give up money...they'd rather answer the question!

You've got to be fair though; the adult should limit to one question per

## Meet Scott Fortcamp—Westlake's School Resource Officer

**O**fficer Scott Fortcamp has walked Westlake High School halls since 2001. In addition to providing school building security and handling criminal investigations, Scott is a classroom guest lecturer delivering lessons on Relationship Violence, Drugs and Alcohol, Search and Seizure Laws, Law Enforcement Careers, Communication Skills, Anger Management, and much more.

"Each semester I assist the physical education teachers with three days of Self Defense Training for their 9th grade students. I've joined students on the Leadership Challenge Retreat, Ropes Course, and tours to the Westlake police Department, City Hall, and Grafton Prison. Along with Karen Petrus, I work with students on peer mediation and violence prevention. I am also involved with the Westlake Parent Connection and Westlake High School Diversity Groups."

Scott sits on several committees, including: the Family and Children's First Council, The Youth Services Coordinat-

ing Committee, The Truancy and Diversion Sub Committee, The Cuyahoga County Juvenile Court's Diversion Program, and Westlake City Schools Safety Committee.

His job allows him to work with students on class projects by providing law related resources and personal interviews.

"I have an open door policy so students and teachers can feel free to speak to me if they have a problem or concern. I worked with several at risk students over the years on behavior and law related issues in a program I created entitled Behavior Improvement Program. When students are arrested or charged with a crime, I try to explain the legal process and what they will encounter. Once the investigation has concluded and the student has been charged, it is an excellent opportunity for me to counsel the student about what he or she has done wrong."

### Just the facts...

**Education:** Scott graduated from Celina Senior High School class of 1988. Played Football for Kent State University and

Mount Union College. Graduated in 1993 from Mount Union with a Bachelor of Arts Degree Political Science.

**Employment:** 1996 Westlake Police Department, trained at the Ohio State Highway Patrol Academy in Columbus.

**Continuing Education:** Master Instructor in Defensive Tactics, State and National School Resource Officer training and ongoing continuing education on school safety, violence prevention, education, counseling, terrorism, etc.



## WPC BOOK REVIEW

### The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander - By Barbara Coloroso

*"I categorically reject any notion that violence is ever justified. It is always an act of desanctification, not being able to see the divine in the other." - Rabbi Michael Lerner*

Barbara Coloroso writes a gritty yet very practical book addressing the bullying topic—but don't expect a relaxing bedtime read! She begins with the Columbine tragedy and continues on to locker room hazings, sexual harassment, gay bashing, and suicides by those wishing to escape the daily hopeless humiliation of being bullied.

Despite the heavy dose of bleak reality, *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander* is replete with practical information for parent and child/teen alike. The clarity is so helpful that I would welcome a smaller handbook distilled from this larger work.

This book is exhaustive in breadth, yet reads like a simple "how to" handbook. What is and isn't bullying? What actions constitute teasing (a healthy act among friends) and taunting (verbal bullying)? Likewise, what is flirting and what is sexual harassment? And the warning signs that your child is being bullied – very helpful because he may not come out and tell you!

Chapters describe the motivation, emotions, and thought processes leading youngsters into playing the role of bully, the bullied, or the bystander. Examples, anecdotes, and lists make it easy to grasp the psychology. It is not to be trivialized or ignored.

What can be done then, if your child is playing the role of bully, or being bullied? I would highly endorse the advice given in this book. In fact, it is good advice for families without bullying issues. Families can empower children and free them from the need to bully, or the need to be pushed around by one. Optimistic and democratic families produce resilient, competent kids. These children have little need to manipulate others, and can resist manipulation from others.

***Bullying is not a normal part of growing up; something that kids just have to endure.***

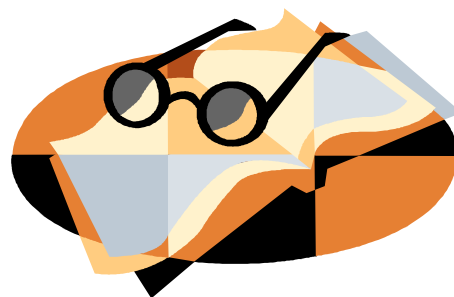
***Bullying is an act of contempt, of humiliating, of putting someone down.***

Parents are also advised to teach social skills and choose constructive options for entertainment. Exposure to media violence produces children who may be desensitized, and less likely to understand and respond to someone else in need. Even non-violent media can contain "cruel, raunchy, crude, violent images and lyrics (which) prevent the nurturing of empathy and respect..." Starved of "real life" opportunities to develop social skills, feel empathy and practice conflict resolution, the children are more likely to imitate what they see in the media. Parents can counteract this trend in several ways, including limiting media exposure. Discussing negative and violent content with children can help them think about

the messages the media is sending.

Once children are armed with self-confidence, self-esteem, empathy and social skills, they can be encouraged to do good for themselves and for others. Since bullies thrive on their audience, the "innocent bystander" is actually part of the problem. There are many tactful suggestions for bystanders who can intervene, take a stand, and take action. Likewise parents who are hearing about bullying from children need to respond diplomatically. Many schools have anti-bullying policies, procedures, and programs. The kids need adults at school to be role models and provide adequate supervision in all areas of their school experience, including the school bus. Students should have the right to feel safe at school, free from being degraded, harassed, or humiliated.

—Kari Steinetz



You can find this book at  
Westlake Porter  
Public Library.

# SAVE THE DATE! APRIL 29TH— WPC'S ANNUAL RUMMAGE SALE

**Westlake  
Parent  
Connection  
Rummage Sale  
Saturday  
April 29th**

**We need your help!**  
Please remember us as you clean out the closets, basement and toy chest.



**Donation  
drop off  
Friday April 28  
Church of the  
Redeemer  
23500 Center Ridge  
Westlake  
9AM-7PM .**

## PARENT TO PARENT WESTSIDE NETWORK

The Parent to Parent Westside Network a 501c3 non-profit organization, representing parenting organizations from

- Avon
- Bay Village
- Fairview Park
- Lakewood
- North Olmsted
- North Ridgeville
- Rocky River

- Westlake.
- Included in the network are the
- Bay Advocates
  - Community Challenge Fairview Park
  - Community Challenge Rocky River
  - Westlake Parent Connection.

### Our Mission

*The Parent to Parent Westside Network is a non-profit group representing Westside communities of Cleveland, assembled to educate, communicate, and network with fellow parents about the tough issues confronting all school age youth.*

### Our vision

Create a venue for Westside families, homes, schools, and places of worship to discuss the tough issues facing our youth and seek solutions together. To give voice to the people who share this healthy vision.



The **Parent to Parent Westside Network (PPWN)** understands that our children's social, academic, and athletic lives cross geographic boundaries, therefore we as parents must form our own "connections" with our peers in other cities.

The **PPWN** provides member organizations

- with:
- ◇ Shared advertising of Parenting Programs offered by the individual groups
  - ◇ Combined volunteer resources
  - ◇ Larger audience
  - ◇ Stronger voice and influence regarding prevention of risky youth behavior in each community.

# ART AUCTION BENEFITS PARENT TO PARENT WESTSIDE NETWORK

The Parent to Parent Westside Network is hosting its' first annual Fund Raising Art Auction on Saturday, April 1, 2006.

Dollars raised at this event fund our programming for the 2006–2007 school year.

The event begins with a one hour pre-view party featuring specialty desserts and a chocolate fondue fountain.

The live auction hosted by Ross Galleries will feature oils, watercolors, lithographs, sports memorabilia, estate jewelry and sculpture.

Opening bids are up to 50% less than traditional gallery prices.



**Opening bids start at approximately \$45 and are up to 50% less than traditional framed gallery prices. All artwork is custom framed and matted.**

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR:

### Art Auction

**Saturday, April 1, 2006  
7:00 - 10:00 PM**

**LACENTRE  
25777 Detroit Road**

**Westlake**

***Specialty Desserts, Chocolate Fountain,***

***Gourmet Coffees/Teas***

REQUEST your favorite Artist:

Adams, Agam, Altman, Behrens, Ben-Simhon, Benfield, Borelli, Boulanger, Chagall, Dali, Disney Animation Cels, Ebgi, Emanuel, Fauchere, Kinkade, Macwilliams, Max, Mindeli, Moses, Neiman, Orlando, Park, Picasso, Polak, Rembrandt, Renoir, Rockwell, Shvaiko, Suljakov, Szyal, Tarkay, Toulouse-Lautrec, Warhol, Wissotzky-Alexander, Wooster Scott, Wyeth, And Many More!

Also Featuring: Sports, Entertainment And Music Memorabilia

**\$20.00 per ticket**

**For Ticket & Volunteer**

**information contact:**

**Catherine Bailey at  
899-9822**

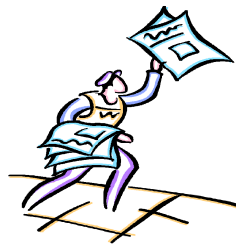
**Carol Winter at  
979-0168**

## BUSINESSES—ADVERTISE IN THE ART AUCTION PROGRAM

Please join our effort by advertising your business in our exclusive Art Show and Auction Program.

Advertising in the program enables the PPWN to meet fundraising needs and serves as a direct and inexpensive way to promote your business to the community.

Don't miss this opportunity to participate in a truly outstanding event. The



Support the PPWN and Promote your business

program lists all of the artwork to be auctioned and will be given to everyone in attendance.

**For advertising details  
please contact Carol Winter  
at 440-979-0168.**

# THE CHOKING GAME

## Emergency alert Ohio Resource Network for Safe & Drug Free Schools & Communi-

After the Westlake Parent Connection sent out an emergency blast we'd received from the Ohio Resource Network for Safe & Drug Free Schools and Communities on the **choking game warning** we heard back from one of our members who had personally witnessed students "playing the choking game."

**While chaperoning a class trip several years ago, this mother caught three boys playing a version of the choking game outside of the picnic shelter where the students were gathered and waiting for an event to begin. "One boy told the others to take in a very deep breath and hold it while he came up behind them and basically bear-hugged the breath out of them. The one boy did go totally down and was disoriented for awhile." The mother stopped the boys and alerted teachers. She still sees these boys at school events and says, "I still think about it every time I see them."**

This mother's story reminds us how important communication, education and networking with our parenting peers is.

The "choking game" is played by teenagers, typically between the ages of 9 and 15, to create a rush or high without using drugs. These teens attempt to temporarily cut off the oxygen supply until they pass out.

Recent news reports suggest that though this game is not new, it has become more of a problem in recent weeks as teens in Ohio, Idaho, California, and North Carolina have died playing this game.

It is difficult to determine the extent to which students are participating or the rate of death as it can easily be mislabeled as a suicide. The game, though not always deadly, is particularly deadly when the child tries to create the high when they are alone. It is estimated

that 400-500 children die yearly from this risky behavior in the US.

**Street names:** space monkey, blackout, funky chicken, something dreaming game, flat liner, tingling, and suffocation roulette.



**Warning signs** that a child might be participating in the behavior:

- complaints of frequent headaches
- pinpoint blood marks on the neck
- bloodshot eyes
- onset of aggressive behavior or aggravation
- finding ropes, belts, or other objects with odd knots tied
- activity behind closed doors.

**Short Term Effect:** Choking can produce a drunken, light-headed "feeling" that is typically short-lived. Choking can also depress your heart rate, disturb your heart rhythm, and sap your body of oxygen.

At the extreme, choking can result in sudden death due to lack of oxygen to the brain. Teens are killing brain cells every time they play this "game". They may also experience nausea, loss of appetite, coughing fits, and disorientation and loss of coordination, making it

hard to walk or even stand for about 15 minutes after this dangerous risky behavior.

**Long Term Effect:** This behavior can result in permanent brain damage and death.

**What you can do:** The American Psychological Association states that many times parents can offset dangerous risk taking behavior by simply being there and knowing what is going on in your teen's life.

1. Have a solid relationship with your teen and discuss issues that he faces.
2. Be able to speak frankly with your teen about dangerous behaviors.
3. Establish a pattern of chaperoning parties and asking where your teen is and with whom he is spending time.

*For more information contact:*

The Ohio Resource Network  
for Safe and Drug Free Schools  
and Communities

P.O. Box 210109

2624 Clifton Ave

Cincinnati, Ohio 45221-0109

1-800-788-7254 (opt#2).

## A WORD FROM WPC PRESIDENT ...DANI ALTIERI MARINUCCI

MySpace.com...hmmm, a very interesting place—I suggest you visit it.

I first heard about this cyberspace communication site while attending a presentation on bullying from a parent whose daughter was being ridiculed by a group of girls through the chat room on myspace.com.

The parent told me how she went on the website to see how it worked and found that her daughter was posting all kinds of personal information including her home address and school name.

I went home and learned that one of my children had a posting on the site. Following a very heated discussion her site came down. After reading the Plain Dealer article and visiting the site myself I am further convinced that I did not overreact.

During the holiday break the Plain Dealer published an article on the dangers of teenagers sharing information through personal websites. Free services like myspace.com make sharing information easy and tempting. Read the December 18th article by clicking on the link at the end of this column.

Visit the website and you will find that myspace.com is much more than an innocent vehicle for kids to meet kids. Case in point: the offering “swinger” as one browsing option is enough proof that this website, and others like it, harbor questionable intentions.

Myspace.com is promoted as an online community that lets members meet “their friends’ friends” by posting photos, journals and interests.

Anyone can use the system, all they need to do is sign up and create a file.

It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to see that this faceless communication vehicle is dangerous. The FBI had no trouble identifying the problem with this website.

“It is a pipeline to the kids for offenders,” says Arnold Bell, of the FBI’s cyber division in Washington, D.C.

Bay Village High School principal Jim Cahoon, who was interviewed by the Plain Dealer, shared some of his concerns with Bay’s Parent group the Bay Advocates.

“Many students in Bay High School and in Bay Middle School have their own screen in Myspace.com Students have the ability to email and instant message each other through the web site. Pictures are posted which are at times innocent and at times provocative.

The Plain Dealer article also points out other websites,

which until yesterday I was not familiar with. Bay does not monitor myspace.com (we have looked at it, though). We believe parents should be aware of it and monitor it.”

We join Principal Cahoon’s suggestion that parents:

1. visit myspace.com and see for yourself what the site promotes;
2. Talk to your kids, ask them if they are on the site; and
3. Monitor your child’s computer time, the sites they visit and who they are communicating with.

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[Plain Dealer, December 18, 2005](#)



## UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Mon, January 9 7:00 p.m. Westlake Porter Library	<b>“Girl on Girl and Cyber Bullying”</b> <i>How to help if your child is being bullied or is the bully.</i>
Tues, February 7 7:00 p.m. Westlake Porter Library	<b>“What is Cutting?”</b> <i>Self-mutilation and other destructive behaviors</i>
Mon, March 6 7:00 p.m. Westlake High Cafeteria	<b>“Latest Information on Drugs &amp; Our Kids”</b> <i>A Show &amp; Tell for Parents</i>
Tues, April 25 7:00 p.m. Westlake Porter Library	<b>“Social Hosting”</b> <i>What the law says about hosting teen parties</i>