



Notes From
The Parent Forum on Adolescent Mental Health
Tina Meier's presentation
Feb. 16, 2010

Tina Meier from the Megan Meier Foundation

- A. Mission: to bring awareness and education, and promote positive change to children, parents, and educators in response to the ongoing bullying and cyber-bullying in our children's daily environment.
- B. Please see their website for more information and related resources:
www.meganmeierfoundation.org
- C. The story: Megan was diagnosed with depression and attention deficit disorder in 3rd grade. She was bullied in 7th grade to the point where she would go to lunch. She and a friend down the block started a fake account on MySpace using the photo of another girl because they didn't feel pretty enough to use their own photos. When her parents found out, Megan's account was closed. She was grounded and only her parents, who had to be in the room when she was on the computer, knew the computer passwords. Her parents installed a monitoring program as well.

In 8th grade, Megan switched to a smaller, private school that was in hopes of getting a fresh start. She joined the volleyball team, started working out, lost 20 pounds, and had a new set of friends. Megan asked if she could start a MySpace account. Her parents agreed with the new rules in place. Megan got a friend request from a cute boy, Josh Evans, that she didn't know and asked if she could add him as a friend. Her Mom, Tina, agreed feeling that Megan would probably add him anyway, and said if he said anything inappropriate, Megan would have to delete him. For six weeks they communicated and Josh told Megan how beautiful and wonderful she was. Tina talked to Megan about the issues with having a "relationship" on-line. Megan couldn't really know Josh; he could be anyone.

Suddenly, Megan started getting unkind messages from Josh telling her "You're not a nice person." Megan was crying and very upset. Megan didn't get off the computer and wait until her Mom could talk through the situation with her as her Mom requested. She stayed on the computer after she said she would get off as her Mom

had to leave and take her other daughter to the doctor. Megan became more upset over the next 2 hours. Saying Megan was a “whore” and a “fat ass” were the most minor things Josh said to her. He also sent bulletins with the messages out to Megan’s classmates.

When Tina arrived home, Megan was beside herself. Tina told her that this wouldn’t have happened if she had gotten off the computer as she had said that she would. Megan replied that her Mom was supposed to be on her side and went to her room. Tina’s parents discussed the situation with each other for about 20 minutes, when Tina suddenly had an awful feeling and ran upstairs to check on Megan. She found that Megan had hung herself in her closet.

Six weeks later, a neighbor invited them to a meeting about Megan where they found out that their neighbor, her 13-year old daughter (the one Megan made the fake MySpace account with) and an 18-year old had set up the fake account as Josh Evans. The 13-year old and Megan had been friends for years. They had overnights at each other’s homes. Megan went on vacation with their family. Their friendship became rocky in 7th grade. They had heard that Megan had called their daughter a Lesbian and set up the fake account to find out what Megan was saying about the 13 year old.

Their family is devastated by this tragic loss. Their neighbor was found guilty in a federal trial held in CA of 3 misdemeanors. However the judge overruled the decision saying he couldn’t convict her because others lie online all the time. They worked with legislators and passed Senate Bill 818 in Aug. 2008, a harassment and Internet stalking law. 17-year olds and under can be convicted as a juvenile. 18-year olds and over can be convicted of a felony. Tina now speaks to schools and parents across the country on bullying and cyber-bullying.

Tina’s Recommendations:

- Talk to your child often. Have open communication.
- Set up rules and consequences. Supervise your children on the computer. Do not let them be on the computer in their bedroom. Have the computer in a public area of your home.
- Sexting is becoming a frequent problem. Boys ask girls to send them a photo of them partially nude or nude. The photos can go anywhere and be shown to anyone. If your child has a photo

like this, they possess child pornography and can be prosecuted. Girls, to whom this has happened, have committed suicide.

- Facebook Surveys – Our kids are always taking these surveys and posting the results on their facebook page. These surveys are not monitored by facebook. Many of them have malicious software that can get information off of your accounts.
- Google your child's name and their friend's names in quotes to see if they have an account you don't know about.
- If an adult stranger came to your house and asked to see your child, you would question them. We need to be equally vigilant about the "friends" our children have online.
- Know the passwords for your children's facebook account and cell phone. If you are paying the bill, you have a right to know what they are doing and be reassured that they are using technology safely.

Resources:

www.netlingo.com

www.meganmeierfoundation.org has parent resources on socializing safely online, the top 50 newbie terms everyone needs to know, the top 50 Internet acronyms, top 50 text terms, forms of cyber-bullying, emoticons, Internet definitions, links, and suicide and crisis help and other online resources. They also have resources for kids, teens and tweens.

Notes from Marian McCord's presentation are on a separate page attached on this website.