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Safety workshops offer tools to cope with online bullying

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Many children are bullied over cyberspace, and many parents have no clue. "Most of them are completely unaware of what their children are doing online," said Russ Grimes, law enforcement technology specialist at the University of Montana — Missoula.

Children often don't admit to the bullying, though. They're afraid parents will revoke computer privileges, he said. "That's not the answer," Grimes said. At two free trainings in Great Falls next week, Grimes and other experts on Internet safety share the answers with parents, educators and law enforcement officers. "Parents are probably one of the more difficult groups of people to get to come to these trainings," Grimes said. Many simply don't know what their children are doing online, and they could use more information about cyberspace, said a school librarian. "Parents really need to look at ... what their kids are viewing," said Terri Jones, a librarian at C.M. Russell High School. Parents need to be able to give students guidance. For example, she said, students don't always understand why it isn't a good idea to post their pictures up on the Internet. "It's scary, I think," she said. Some parents think they should ban their kids from using computers or the Internet when they find out the dangers, Grimes said, but he disagrees. "The technology is a good tool," he said. And he has a method for preventing kids from misusing the Internet. "It's called communication," he said. Parents should talk with their children about cyber-bullying, he said. That can mean sending a kid a mean text message, or posting hurtful remarks about a child on a Web site. With MySpace.com and other personal networking sites, students are spending more and more time communicating online, Grimes said. Parents need to know who their kids are spending time with, said a law enforcement officer. "You just never know who is on the other side of the computer," said DaraLee Murphy, detective and school resource officer for the Great Falls Police Department at CMR.

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