

Cyberbullying tops parents' worries, survey shows



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CONSUMER WATCH

Most parents never stop worrying about their kids. From the time when we first find out we're going to become parents, there's always something to think about, events to plan for, and many of those things keep us awake at night.

While the list of fears may change as our kids get older, they never go away. Initial worries about our kids' health in the cradle give way to worries about their journey through adolescence and college, and then to concerns about their careers, families and their own children. Of course, for most parents, most of the things we spend time fretting over never come

to pass. But that doesn't stop us from worrying anyway.

Every year, the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital at the University of Michigan conducts a national survey to determine the things that make us parents toss and turn, producing a list of the top 10 fears of parents of kids from birth to age 18. And — predictably — that list of worries changes with the times. This year, the impact of social media and technology is making its effects felt, as two of the Top 10 parent fears (expressed by parents as something they're "very concerned" about) are related to technology. Topping the list is bullying/cyberbullying, which more than six in 10 parents expressed as their top concern.

Of course, bullying is an age-old problem, but with smartphones and social media, just about every child is eventually going to encounter cyberbullying from one side or the other. This phenomenon has been linked to increasing suicides among teens, as well as heightened levels of anxiety and stress for many

kids.

Being a teen is hard enough without having to worry about someone using social media to trash your reputation or spread hateful rumors. Cyberbullying is still being defined, but most experts agree it's aggressive behavior that targets an individual using social media or other electronic communications. Given the ability of a single person to use social media to spread information quickly to lots of people, coupled with the emotional roller-coaster many teenagers experience as they progress through adolescence and the importance of reputation, it's little wonder that it's become a threat.

"Adults across the country recognized bullying, including cyberbullying, as the leading health problem for U.S. children," noted Dr. Gary Freed, a Mott professor of pediatrics and the poll's co-director.

Another tech-related fear of parents is internet

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