



Essential Question: What should you do when someone uses mean or scary language on the Internet?

Learning Overview and Objectives

Overview: Students consider that while they are enjoying their favorite websites they may encounter messages from other kids that can make them feel angry, hurt, sad, or fearful. They explore ways to handle cyberbullying and how to respond in the face of upsetting language online.

Students discuss all the ways they use technology for communication, put themselves in the shoes of children who are cyberbullied on a kids' game website, and explore both the similarities and differences between in-person versus online communication. Students then brainstorm ways to respond to cyberbullying.

objectives

Students will:

- Empathize with those who have received mean and hurtful messages
- Judge what it means to cross the line from harmless to harmful communication online
- Generate solutions for dealing with cyberbullying

Materials and Preparation

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Materials

- **Words Can Hurt Student Handout**
- **Talk and Take Action Student Handout**
- Colored pencils
- String

Preparation

- Copy the **Words Can Hurt Student Handout**, one for every four students
- Copy the **Talk and Take Action Student Handout**, one for every student
- Cut string the length of the classroom

Parent Resources

- Send parents the **Cyberbullying Parent Tip Sheet**

Key Vocabulary

- **Frustrated:** Irritated at not being able to do what you want
- **Cyberbully (verb):** Using technology tools such as the Internet and cell phones to deliberately upset someone else
- **Ethics:** Ideas about how people should act and behave



teaching plans

Introduce

INVITE students to share all the ways they enjoy going online and using digital media, such as cell phones and the Internet.

ASK

- *What are your favorite websites, if any?*
- *What are your favorite video games, if any?*
- *Who do you stay in touch with through cell phones and the Internet?*

ENCOURAGE students to share the positive feelings and experiences they have had with cell phones, the Internet, and other types of digital media.

Teach 1: What's the Problem?

ORGANIZE students into groups of four, and have each group pick a person to record their ideas.

DISTRIBUTE the **Words Can Hurt Student Handout**. Have the groups of students read the scenario about Rani and Aruna receiving mean messages through a children's game website.

HAVE each group answer the questions, and then have them share their responses with the class. Look for responses that show empathy for Rani and Aruna and acknowledge that the messages are mean and hurtful and should be stopped. Ask students to read the "A Matter of Ethics" section on the **Words Can Hurt Student Handout**.

INVITE students to share their own stories.

ASK *Have you seen mean messages sent to you or others online? Tell us about it, but do not use real names.*

PLACE students in pairs. **INVITE** one partner to write the phrase "You're weird" on a piece of paper, and then hand it to their partner. Tell them that they just received this text.

ASK *What are the reasons the person might have texted "You're weird"?* (They're continuing an inside joke; the first person did something silly at an earlier time; a group of kids is teasing the kid; the person who sent the text really does think the person is weird but is afraid to say it to their face.)

ASK *How did the partner feel who was called weird?* (Possibly like the other person was kidding around, but maybe that the person was teasing or being hurtful.)

Now ask one person from each pair to say to the other person, "You're weird," with a smile on his or her face.

ASK *What are the reasons that the person might have said "You're weird" with a smile on his or her face?* (They're sharing an inside joke; the first person did something silly).



ASK *How did the partner feel who was called weird?* (Like the other person was kidding around, teasing, not serious.)

ASK *Why would you feel differently if you could see the person?* (Look for responses that indicate students understand that people communicate with their faces, bodies, etc.)

Teach 2: Crossing the Line

PLACE the piece of string across the length of the classroom. Ask students to stand on one side of the line. Then ask them to imagine that they are online and somebody has sent them a message, which you will read to them. Tell the students to stay where they are if they think the message is okay; to cross over the line if they think the message is not okay; and to stand *on* the line if they think the message is in between.

READ each of these messages aloud and have students respond:

- *You are an idiot.*
- *I'm having a party and you're not invited.*
- *I like your new haircut.*
- *You are really ugly.*
- *Thanks for the advice. Next time would you mind telling me in person rather than by IM?*
- *Did you finish your homework?*
- *Why is it taking you so long to finish it?*
- *You are such a freak.*

REVIEW with students that kids like to go online and use cell phones to email, chat, watch videos, send messages, play games, and do homework. But sometimes the language can get mean or scary. Messages that make people feel badly cross the line. Sometimes that meanness is unintentional, but when people use tools such as the Internet and cell phones to deliberately upset someone else over and over, that's *cyberbullying*.

Teach 3: Find Solutions

HAVE students return to their seats and refer back to the **Words Can Hurt Student Handout**.

ASK *What could Rani and Aruna do to deal with being cyberbullied?*

EXPLAIN that there are many ways they could choose to solve this problem. Let them know that you will give them ideas about how to handle cyberbullying, but that you think they will come up with great solutions as well.

LEAD a brainstorming session. You may practice brainstorming about an idea unrelated to cyberbullying. For instance, have them first brainstorm about ways that computers can be better used to help students learn. Now invite students to answer the question and think of all the actions that Rani and Aruna could take. Let students know that they should say the first ideas that come to their heads. Tell them they should not be too worried about making mistakes, and that they should not judge others on their responses.



The Power of Words

LIST the students' ideas on the board or chart paper. Remind students that they should not pass judgment on other students' ideas at this point.

DISCUSS the entire list with students and decide which solutions are fair to all concerned and respectful of the rights of others.

Teach 4: How to Handle a Bully

COMMEND students for their brainstorming. Let them know if any of the solutions that they suggested had to do with cooling down, finding help or telling a trusted adult, or even ignoring the bully. Explain that these responses are on target, according to information that researchers have gathered about what works when dealing with cyberbullying.

DISCUSS with students how easy it is to feel angry or upset when somebody sends you a mean or scary message online. Explain that cyberbullies deliberately try to make you feel that way, just like real-life bullies deliberately try to make people feel bad. Discuss the following ideas about what they can do when faced with cyberbullying:

- *Cooling down can be a good first step when you receive a mean message online. Taking a deep breath, counting backwards from 10, or pausing to think about what you will do next can give you time to think of the BEST way to handle the situation.*
- *Finding help or telling a trusted adult or a friend can be a good way to take action. You shouldn't deal with the cyberbullying situation alone. The person you tell should be someone who wants to hear what you have to say, and will help you work on a solution. Adults can be especially good because they often have the power to influence the situation, or can give you advice about what to do.*
- *Ignoring the bully can be very effective. Bullies often like attention. When you deprive them of attention, they may lose interest.*
- *Whatever you do, remember to keep a copy of your communication with the bully. If you delete the communication, there is no proof of how the bully treated you if you need to show it to a trusted adult.*

Wrap Up and Assess

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives.

ASK

- *Why is it a bad idea to send mean or scary messages online? (Because they can make the person who gets them upset, angry, or scared.)*
- *Why might there be more misunderstandings between people when they send online messages as opposed to face-to-face discussion? (Online messages can be more confusing or scarier than face-to-face messages because there are no face-to-face cues to help you understand people's intentions.)*
- *What can kids do when they get cyberbullying messages? (They can (1) calm down and take a deep breath, (2) tell a friend or a trusted adult who can help develop a plan to handle the situation, (3) ignore the bully, (4) keep a copy of the communication with the bully.)*

REVIEW with students that words matter and can hurt, and that bullying is not okay – either in the real world or online.



Extension Activity

In small groups, have students make a cyberbully protection kit. The kit should contain a shield that they decorate with an anti-cyberbullying symbol and a scroll that lists things they could say to a cyberbully. The kit can be created with cardboard or paper and markers, or online with Kerpoof (<http://www.kerpoof.com>).



Homework

Students use the **Talk and Take Action Student Handout** to create a cartoon about a cyberbullying situation. See Make Beliefs Comix for a free online tool: <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com>. Students create one frame that shows the cyberbullying situation or message. The next frame shows what they might do when faced with this situation or message. The last frame should show a positive outcome of the situation, which might involve confiding in a trusted adult. Encourage students to show their parents their cartoon and to get advice about what they could do. In the final frame, parents provide suggestions about what they might say or do if they learned about the situation.

Alignment with Standards – National Educational Technology Standards for Students® 2007

(Source: International Society for Technology in Education, 2007)

2. Communication and Collaboration

- b. communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats

5. Digital Citizenship

- a. advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology
- d. exhibit leadership for digital citizenship



Words Can Hurt

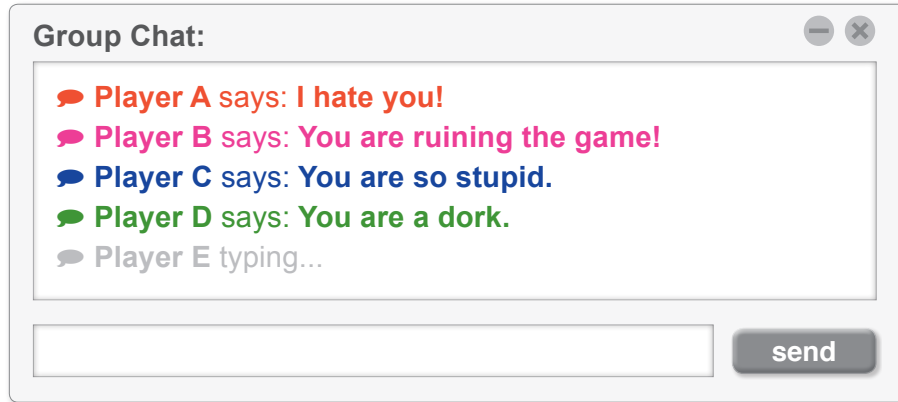
Name(s) _____

Class _____

Date _____

Directions

Rani and Aruna love a website that has games and chatting for kids. Their parents let them play on the site. Lately, though, Rani and Aruna have been receiving mean messages on the site, including:



Questions:

1. How do you think Rani and Aruna feel when they read those messages?

Rani and Aruna feel _____

2. How would you feel if you received messages like these?

I would feel _____

3. Why do you think people send these kinds of message to people they don't know?

People send these kinds of messages because _____

A Matter of Ethics

There is an old saying that "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."

I think that this saying is TRUE/NOT TRUE (circle one)

because _____



Talk and Take Action

Name _____

Class _____

Date _____

Directions

Below are three cartoon frames, and directions about what should go in each frame:

FRAME 1: Make a cartoon about something that a cyberbully might do or write online.

Remember to use language appropriate for school.

FRAME 2: Show what you might do if you saw what the cyberbully has done or written.

FRAME 3: What might be a positive outcome, or result, of the situation?

You can also use Make Beliefs Comix (<http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/>) to draw your cartoon online.

What might a cyberbully say or do?

What would you do in response?

What would be a positive outcome?

Use Common Sense!

- If you get upset, take a breather or get offline.
- Tell your parents or another trusted adult when you or someone else is being cyberbullied. Make a plan with the trusted adult about how to respond.
- Ignore and/or block the bully.
- Save a record of the communication between you and the bully.



Common Sense on Cyberbullying

Some Facts

- 20 percent of students ages 10 to 18 report experiencing cyberbullying (Cyberbullying Research Center, Hinduja and Patchin, 2010)
- Perpetrators of cyberbullying are usually the same age as their target (Wolak, 2007)
- Mean or hurtful comments (14 percent) and rumors (13 percent) are the most common forms of cyberbullying (Cyberbullying Research Center, Hinduja and Patchin, 2010)
- Nearly half of social workers at elementary, middle, and high schools report they do not feel equipped to deal with cyberbullying at their schools (*Children & Schools*, Slovak and Singer, 2011)

What's the Issue?

Spreading rumors and bullying is nothing new. Kids have always found ways to be cruel to one another. But computers, cell phones, and digital technologies make bullying easier and more widespread. Kids now use their cell phones and computers to hurt, humiliate, and harass each other, and it's starting at younger ages. Cyberbullying is defined as repeatedly sending or posting harmful or mean messages, images, or videos about someone else using the Internet, cell phones, or other digital technologies. Kids may call each other names, say nasty things about one another, threaten each other, or make others feel uncomfortable or scared.

Children's increased access to digital technology has created more pathways to communicate — for both good and for bad. Although cyberbullying is typically associated with tweens and teens, more cases are now being reported with younger children. Cyberbullying is especially disturbing because it is constant, inescapable, and very public. It can happen anytime — at school or at home — and can involve large groups of kids. The combination of the boldness created by being anonymous and the desire to be seen as “cool” can cause a kid who normally wouldn't say anything mean face to face to show off to other kids by cyberbullying someone. Younger kids may bully to get attention, because they think it will make them popular, or because they want to look tough and make others afraid of them. And because it happens online, it can easily go undetected by parents and teachers.

Why It Matters

Cyberbullying is a growing problem among younger kids. Younger kids are starting to use online communication and at the same time they are exploring ways to test other people's reactions. For instance, kids who send a mean message might not fully understand how another person might react to that message. What's more, hurtful information posted on the Internet is extremely difficult to prevent or remove, and anyone can see it. Imagine being publically humiliated in front of everyone you know. Such behavior usually happens when adults aren't around. So parents and teachers often see only the anxiety or depression that results from their kids being hurt or bullied. Parents can help by becoming aware of the issue, learning to identify the warning signs of bullying, and helping kids to understand how to be respectful to others online.



Common Sense on Cyberbullying

common sense says

- **Limit online socializing.** Because there is more risk for bullying on sites where kids can openly communicate, avoid open and free chat sites and look for those that offer prescribed or prescreened chat options, like Webkinz or Club Penguin.
- **Explain the basics of good behavior online.** Remind your kids that being mean, lying, or telling secrets hurts – both online and offline. And remember to praise your child when you see good behavior.
- **Remind your kids not to share passwords with their friends.** A common form of cyberbullying is when kids share passwords, log on to another child’s account, and pretend to be that person. Kids can protect themselves by learning that passwords are strictly private, and they should be shared only with their parents.
- **Make sure they talk to someone (even if it’s not you).** A child should tell a parent, teacher, or trusted adult if he or she is being bullied online. Tell your child that this isn’t tattling, it’s standing up for him- or herself.
- **Advise them on how to handle cyberbullying.** Even though they might be tempted to, your child should never retaliate against a cyberbully. They can stop the cycle by not responding to the bully. Also remind them to save the evidence rather than delete it.
- **Establish consequences for bullying behavior.** If your child is mean to or humiliates another child, consider taking phone and computer privileges away and discuss what it means to be respectful to others.

What Families Can Do Together

- Make a list together of how talking online is different than talking face to face. Get kids to think about how it might be easier to say things online you wouldn’t say in person, and how this may be good sometimes and a problem at other times.
- Practice writing a text or chat message to a friend. Model for your child how to compliment people and how to avoid mean words or behaviors.
- Point out that it’s important to stick up for others, online as well as in the real world. Discuss ways they can support friends who are bullied and report bad behavior they see online.



Lesson Assessment

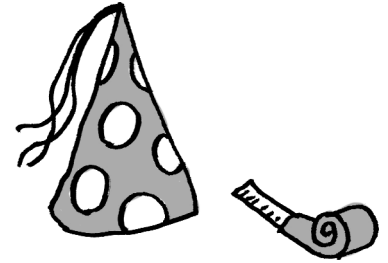
Name _____

Class _____

Date _____

1. Alicia receives a text message from her friend Ronald. The message says, "I am having a party. You are not invited." Circle the word that shows how Alicia might feel after she receives the message.

- a) hurt
- b) excited
- c) tired
- d) popular



2. Theo is having fun playing Dragons and Knights online. Then he sees a message from another player. It says, "You're ruining the game, stupid!" What should Theo do about the message? What shouldn't he do? Use the chart below to fill in the letters that go with each answer.

- a. Ignore the player who sent the mean message
- b. Write a message back that says, "You're so stupid, you're the one ruining the game"
- c. Pretend that he doesn't feel hurt by the message
- d. Save the message in case the other player sends Theo another mean message
- e. Tell an adult about the message
- f. Never play Dragons and Knights online again

THINGS THEO SHOULD DO	THINGS THEO SHOULD NOT DO



Lesson Assessment

3. Sometimes it's hard to know what a message online means when you read it. You may not know if a message is okay or hurtful because you can't hear how the person says it. Circle the category that shows how you think the message was meant. Do you think the message was meant to be okay, hurtful, or something in between?

Message: Good job, nerd!



Okay



In Between



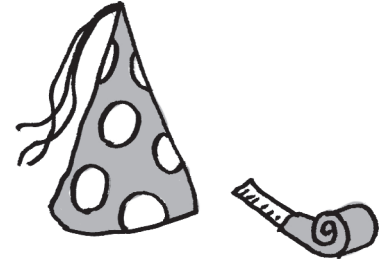
Hurtful



Lesson Assessment

1. Alicia receives a text message from her friend Ronald. The message says, "I am having a party. You are not invited." Circle the word that shows how Alicia might feel after she receives the message.

- a) hurt
- b) excited
- c) tired
- d) popular



Answer feedback

The correct answer is **a**. Alicia probably feels **hurt** by Ronald's message. Telling someone they aren't invited can hurt their feelings. Things that are hurtful in person are also hurtful online

2. Theo is having fun playing Dragons and Knights online. Then he sees a message from another player. It says, "You're ruining the game, stupid!" What should Theo do about the message? What shouldn't he do? Use the chart below to fill in the letters that go with each answer.

Answer feedback

THINGS THEO SHOULD DO	THINGS THEO SHOULD <u>NOT</u> DO
a) Ignore the player who sent the mean message	b) Write a message back that says, "You're so stupid, you're the one ruining the game"
d) Save the message in case the other player sends Theo another mean message	c) Pretend that he doesn't feel hurt by the message
e) Tell an adult about the message	f) Never play Dragons and Knights online again



Lesson Assessment

3. Sometimes it's hard to know what a message online means when you read it. You may not know if a message is okay or hurtful because you can't hear how the person says it. Circle the category that shows how you think the message was meant. Do you think the message was meant to be okay, hurtful, or something in between?

Message: Good job, nerd!



Okay



In Between



Hurtful

Answer feedback

Answers will vary. Sometimes it is hard to tell if a message online is meant to be hurtful or not when you can't see or hear how the message is said. Little clues like a smile, a frown, or a laugh that tell you about the meaning of the message are lost when all you see are the words on a screen.



Common Sense on Cyberbullying

Some Facts

- 20 percent of students ages 10 to 18 report experiencing cyberbullying (Cyberbullying Research Center, Hinduja and Patchin, 2010)
- Perpetrators of cyberbullying are usually the same age as their target (Wolak, 2007)
- Mean or hurtful comments (14 percent) and rumors (13 percent) are the most common forms of cyberbullying (Cyberbullying Research Center, Hinduja and Patchin, 2010)
- Nearly half of social workers at elementary, middle, and high schools report they do not feel equipped to deal with cyberbullying at their schools (*Children & Schools*, Slovak and Singer, 2011)

What's the Issue?

Spreading rumors and bullying is nothing new. Kids have always found ways to be cruel to one another. But computers, cell phones, and digital technologies make bullying easier and more widespread. Kids now use their cell phones and computers to hurt, humiliate, and harass each other, and it's starting at younger ages. Cyberbullying is defined as repeatedly sending or posting harmful or mean messages, images, or videos about someone else using the Internet, cell phones, or other digital technologies. Kids may call each other names, say nasty things about one another, threaten each other, or make others feel uncomfortable or scared.

Children's increased access to digital technology has created more pathways to communicate — for both good and for bad. Although cyberbullying is typically associated with tweens and teens, more cases are now being reported with younger children. Cyberbullying is especially disturbing because it is constant, inescapable, and very public. It can happen anytime — at school or at home — and can involve large groups of kids. The combination of the boldness created by being anonymous and the desire to be seen as “cool” can cause a kid who normally wouldn't say anything mean face to face to show off to other kids by cyberbullying someone. Younger kids may bully to get attention, because they think it will make them popular, or because they want to look tough and make others afraid of them. And because it happens online, it can easily go undetected by parents and teachers.

Why It Matters

Cyberbullying is a growing problem among younger kids. Younger kids are starting to use online communication and at the same time they are exploring ways to test other people's reactions. For instance, kids who send a mean message might not fully understand how another person might react to that message. What's more, hurtful information posted on the Internet is extremely difficult to prevent or remove, and anyone can see it. Imagine being publically humiliated in front of everyone you know. Such behavior usually happens when adults aren't around. So parents and teachers often see only the anxiety or depression that results from their kids being hurt or bullied. Parents can help by becoming aware of the issue, learning to identify the warning signs of bullying, and helping kids to understand how to be respectful to others online.



Common Sense on Cyberbullying

common sense says

- **Limit online socializing.** Because there is more risk for bullying on sites where kids can openly communicate, avoid open and free chat sites and look for those that offer prescribed or prescreened chat options, like Webkinz or Club Penguin.
- **Explain the basics of good behavior online.** Remind your kids that being mean, lying, or telling secrets hurts – both online and offline. And remember to praise your child when you see good behavior.
- **Remind your kids not to share passwords with their friends.** A common form of cyberbullying is when kids share passwords, log on to another child’s account, and pretend to be that person. Kids can protect themselves by learning that passwords are strictly private, and they should be shared only with their parents.
- **Make sure they talk to someone (even if it’s not you).** A child should tell a parent, teacher, or trusted adult if he or she is being bullied online. Tell your child that this isn’t tattling, it’s standing up for him- or herself.
- **Advise them on how to handle cyberbullying.** Even though they might be tempted to, your child should never retaliate against a cyberbully. They can stop the cycle by not responding to the bully. Also remind them to save the evidence rather than delete it.
- **Establish consequences for bullying behavior.** If your child is mean to or humiliates another child, consider taking phone and computer privileges away and discuss what it means to be respectful to others.

What Families Can Do Together

- Make a list together of how talking online is different than talking face to face. Get kids to think about how it might be easier to say things online you wouldn’t say in person, and how this may be good sometimes and a problem at other times.
- Practice writing a text or chat message to a friend. Model for your child how to compliment people and how to avoid mean words or behaviors.
- Point out that it’s important to stick up for others, online as well as in the real world. Discuss ways they can support friends who are bullied and report bad behavior they see online.