Cyberbullying: Crossing the Line

Essential Question: When does inappropriate online behavior cross the line to cyberbullying, and what can you do about it?

Learning Overview and Objectives

Overview: Students learn to distinguish good-natured teasing from cyberbullying. Students learn about serious forms of cyberbullying, which include harassment, deception, "flaming," and threats to safety.

Students watch the video Stacey's Story, a documentary-style story of young people who have been involved in cyberbullying situations. Students then discuss the video and related case studies in the Cyberbullying: Crossing the Line Discussion Guide.

objectives

Students will:
- Analyze online bullying behaviors that "cross the line"
- Learn about the various ways that students can be cyberbullied, including flaming, deceiving, and harassing
- Adopt the point of view of teens who have been cyberbullied, and offer solutions

Materials and Preparation

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Materials
- **Video — *Stacey's Story***
- **Cyberbullying: Crossing the Line Student Handout**
- **Cyberbullying: Crossing the Line Student Handout — Teacher Version**

Preparation
- Download the video ***Stacey's Story***, preview the video, and be prepared to play the video for the class
- Copy the **Cyberbullying: Crossing the Line Student Handout** for all students
- Review the **Cyberbullying: Crossing the Line Student Handout — Teacher Version**

Parent Resources
- Send home the **Cyberbullying Parent Tip Sheet**

Key Vocabulary

- **Harassing:** Bombarding someone with messages over digital media. Repeated contact when it is least expected
- **Deceiving:** Using fake names, posing as someone else, or creating a fake profile about someone else
- **Flaming:** Saying mean things, usually in ALL CAPS, and often in a public forum with the intention to humiliate
- **Hate Speech:** A verbal attack targeting someone because of their race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation

Cyberbullying: Crossing the Line

teaching plans

Introduce

ASK *What are some of the ways that you and your friends tease each other online for fun?*

Sample responses:

- *Send jokes back and forth*
- *Alter photos of one another, but in a goofy, not mean, way*

ASK *What are signs that online teasing has moved from being harmless to crossing the line? How might it feel?*

Sample responses:

- *Statements feel scary, not funny anymore.*
- *You feel helpless.*
- *You feel like your reputation might suffer.*
- *You are worried about your safety.*

SHARE with students that it is often hard to decide what to do in cyberbullying situations, but that there are some situations when students must report cyberbullying. Let them know that it is important to tell a trusted adult (someone who will listen and who they believe will have the skills, desire, and authority to help them) immediately if any of the following situations arise:

- *You are being bombarded by messages repeatedly.*
- *Many kids get involved, making you feel as if you cannot get away.*
- *Any physical threats are made.*
- *People engage in hate speech (a verbal attack targeting someone because of their race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation).*

EXPLAIN that you are going to watch videos of a teen who was part of a cyberbullying situation.

Teach 1: View Video

REVIEW Key Vocabulary with students. Ask students if they have heard these words before, and what they think the words mean. Then share the definitions with students and ask them to generate examples.

SHOW the video, ***Stacey's Story***

EXPLAIN that the video contains a real cyberbullying story.

Teach 2: Discuss Vignettes

DIVIDE students into groups of four or five and hand out copies of the **Cyberbullying: Crossing the Line Student Handout** to each student. Review the Video Discussion Questions with students as a whole group. Refer to the **Cyberbullying: Crossing the Line Student Handout — Teacher Version** for guidance about leading the discussion.

If there is time, students should read Case Study 1, Attacked from All Sides, and/or Case Study 2, Election Sabotage.

Wrap Up and Assess

Use the following questions to assess if students understood the lesson objectives.

ASK *What are some of the different forms of cyberbullying?*
Sample responses:
- *Harassment, which feels virtually impossible to escape*
- *Deception, because it is dishonest to impersonate someone else, and it can damage their reputation*
- *Flaming, because of the extreme and cruel language*
- *Hate speech, which is discriminatory, and very damaging to someone's reputation*

REVIEW that cyberbullying can make you feel angry, frustrated, sad, or fearful, especially when you don't know who is sending the harassing messages. EXPLAIN that it can be hard to judge someone's intentions online. Let students know that no matter how a message is sent, words used with the intention of hurting someone are taken very seriously by schools, parents, and even the police. Let students know that they should tell trusted adults if they observe or are involved in cyberbullying, and that they must report it to the school, their parents, or other trusted adults when someone has threatened to hurt someone else.

Extension Activity

Students brainstorm about an anonymous reporting system. Tell them that most kids say they would report cyberbullying if they did not have to identify themselves. Ask students to brainstorm ways for students to anonymously report cyberbullying at school. Have them make an action plan for dealing with the problem and a proposal for convincing administrators, teachers, students, and parents to get involved.

Alignment with Standards – National Educational Technology Standards for Students© 2007
(Source: International Society for Technology in Education, 2007)

2. Communication and Collaboration
   a. interact, collaborate, and publish with peers, experts, or others employing a variety of digital environments and media
   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

Discussion Guide

Video Discussion Questions

Stacey's Story

1. Why did the girls start to harass and threaten Stacey online in the first place?

2. When do you think the girls' behavior "crossed the line"?

3. Stacey says, "People talk really big, when there's, like, miles between you." What do you think she means by this statement?

4. In what ways might the online context make the situation worse than if the bully had harassed Stacey offline?

5. Stacey's mom says that Stacey should call the school and report the incidents. Stacey responds that it would "just make it worse." Do you think this is true? Why or why not?

Case Studies

Directions

Read the two case studies and answer the questions with your group. Be prepared to share your responses with the class.

case study 1   **Attacked from All Sides**

Eric gets a lot of pressure from his parents to do well in school. Other kids in school tease him because he works so hard but still gets poor test scores. He gets instant messages and text messages during the day and at night about his poor grades. The word "loser" is in most of them, and the language becomes stronger every day. Today he received a text from a number he did not recognize, with a photo of his body with a turkey's head. A thought bubble above the picture reads: "Why am I so STUPID? What a *!*#&** I am." Eric thinks Alexis, the most popular girl in the eighth grade, is behind the message.

1. What forms of cyberbullying did the students use on Eric? What is your evidence?

2. How do you think Eric feels? What elements of this situation make him feel this way?

3. Do you think Eric should tell his parents about the cyberbullying?

4. What qualities do you think a "trusted adult" should have? Who are these people in your life? In what ways can a trusted adult actually be effective?

5. If Alexis was the bully, what could school personnel, such as the principal, do or say to Alexis to make her realize that her behavior is wrong?

6. Have you ever been part of, or heard of, a situation similar to this? If so, share the story with the group without using names or details.

Discussion Guide

case study 2   ## Election Sabotage

Tanya is pretty popular. She is running for class president. The election is a week away, and Tanya is neck and neck with Sara. Sara's friends decide to sabotage Tanya. They create a fake social network page for Tanya. They use a photo of Tanya for her profile picture, and for her interests, they write: "partying, making fun of anything ASIAN, loving myself." Most of the students at the school are Asian, and rumors start to spread that Tanya is a racist. As election day nears, Sara's friends start to flame Tanya with texts that say things like "racist" almost every hour.

1. What forms of cyberbullying did Sara's friends use on Tanya? What is your evidence?

2. Do you think there is ever a good reason for impersonating someone else online or creating a profile about them?

3. Do you think Sara knew what her friends were doing? What is Sara's responsibility in this?

4. What do you think the consequences should be for Sara and her friends if the school finds out?

5. If you found out about what happened, would this be a reason not to vote for Sara?

6. Have you ever been part of, or heard of, a situation similar to this? If so, share the story with the group without using names or details.

Discussion Guide

Video Discussion Questions

Directions

The Video Discussion Questions are for **Stacey's Story**. The vignette is a real cyberbullying story. The goal of the video questions is for students to apply critical thinking to the information they have learned about cyberbullying.

Stacey's Story

1. Why did the girls start to harass and threaten Stacey online in the first place? (Guide students to recognize that the girls started to bully Stacey because of a misunderstanding. It seems that they thought she was trying to flirt with one of the girl's boyfriends. It turns out the boy was actually Stacey's cousin. Make it clear, though, that cyberbullying Stacey was not an appropriate response even if the guy had not been her cousin.)

2. *When do you think the girls' behavior "crossed the line"?* (Pretty much right from the beginning. They called her names publicly on MySpace and said she was stupid. But the threats did get worse over time.)

3. *Stacey says, "People talk really big, when there's, like, miles between you." What do you think she means by this statement?* (Students might take Stacey's statement literally. It is fine if they do, but guide them to think about the intent behind Stacey's comment.)

   Sample responses:

   • *People say things that aren't true online because they are not face to face with you.*

   • *People are meaner online because you're not there to react.*

   • *People make bigger threats online because they feel invincible behind their computers.*

4. *In what ways might the online context make the situation worse than if the bully had harassed Stacey offline?* (Students might say that online bullying is either not as bad or the same as offline bullying. This is okay, because there is no right or wrong answer. The point is that there are differences between these two forms of bullying, and it is important to untangle some of the similarities and differences.)

   Sample responses:

   • *It's more public. Many MySpace friends and users who don't have anything to do with the incident can see the postings.*

   • *The offenders may be bolder over the Internet, saying things they might not say in person.*

   • *People may say things that are meaner online because it seems that actions are separated from consequences.*

   • *Bullying is no worse online than offline because the impact on the victim is the same.*

5. *Stacey's mom says that Stacey should call the school and report the incidents. Stacey responds that it would "just make it worse." Do you think this is true? Why or why not?* (Guide students to think about the importance of finding an adult they trust, though inform students that some schools have clearer and more well-thought-out policies than others. Ideally, a trusted adult would listen closely to students' concerns, take them seriously, investigate the problem, make it clear that there will be consequences for offenders, clearly define those consequences, and involve the parents.)

Sample responses:

- *There are people such as counselors, psychologists, and other school staff who might be trusted adults.*
- *Maybe Stacey is scared. Perhaps Stacey's mom can go with her to talk to adults at her school.*

Case Studies

Directions

Case Study 1: "Attacked from All Sides" is about students who harass someone for something about which he is already quite sensitive. In groups of four or five, have students read the case study, answer the questions, and report to the class what they discussed.

Case Study 2: "Election Sabotage" is about what happens when someone is impersonated and maligned online. In groups of four or five, have students read the case study, answer the questions, and report to the class what they discussed.

case study 1 | ## Attacked from All Sides

Eric gets a lot of pressure from his parents to do well in school. Other kids in school tease him because he works so hard but still gets bad poor scores. He gets instant messages and text messages during the day and at night about his poor grades. The word "loser" is in most of them, and the language becomes stronger every day. Today he received a text from a number he did not recognize, with a photo of his body with a turkey's head. A thought bubble above the picture reads: "Why am I so STUPID? What a *!*#&** I am." Eric thinks Alexis, the most popular girl in the eighth grade, is behind the message.

1. *What forms of cyberbullying did the students use on Eric? What is your evidence?*

    Sample responses:

    - *Harassment, because of the constant texts*
    - *Flaming, because of the mean messages*

2. *How do you think Eric feels? What elements of this situation make him feel this way?*

    Sample responses:

    - *Eric probably feels trapped, like he can't get away from the students' cruelty*
    - *The texts might make him feel stupid, especially because his parents have placed so much emphasis on his school performance*
    - *Eric might feel as if he has no choices, because Alexis is so popular. If he gets her in trouble, people might give him the cold shoulder for good.*

3. *Do you think Eric should tell his parents about the cyberbullying?* (Guide students to think about how important it is that students find adults they trust to tell them about harmful communication and cyberbullying. In this case, Eric's parents may not be the best people for him to tell because they are so focused on Eric's

academic success. It is also important to recognize that there are certain situations when kids do not want to tell their parents or teachers, and instead want to work it out themselves or just ignore it.)

Sample responses:

- *Maybe Eric should find another trusted adult because his parents seem more focused on academics. The right adult might be a teacher that Eric thinks will listen to and help him.*
- *Yes. Eric's parents will probably care, even though they seem more focused on his academic achievement. They probably have no idea what's happening to Eric at school.*

4. *What qualities do you think a "trusted adult" should have? Who are these people in your life? In what ways can a trusted adult actually be effective?* (Guide students to identify people who listen to them, who understand enough about technology to know why cyberbullying is so damaging, and who would be able to impose consequences [e.g., mediation or punishment] on the cyberbullies or be an advocate.)

5. *If Alexis was the bully, what could school personnel, such as the principal, do or say to Alexis to make her realize that her behavior is wrong?* (Guide students to think of responses that focus on educating Alexis about the harm of cyberbullying. Educating Alexis could involve the principal showing her various news stories about the problems that cyberbulling causes or having Alexis talk to her classmates about the dangers of cyberbullying. Either way, it is important that the principal make sure that Eric feels safe from retribution or future harm.)

6. *Have you ever been part of, or heard of, a situation similar to this? If so, share the story with the group without using names or details.* (Stress that cyberbullying is very common, and that most people have some story of cyberbullying to tell.)

case study 2   ### Election Sabotage

Tanya is pretty popular. She is running for class president. The election is a week away, and Tanya is neck and neck with Sara. Sara's friends decide to sabotage Tanya. They create a fake social network page for Tanya. They use a photo of Tanya for her profile picture, and for her interests, they write: "partying, making fun of anything ASIAN, loving myself." Most of the students at the school are Asian, and rumors start to spread that Tanya is a racist. As election day nears, Sara's friends start to flame Tanya with texts that say things like "racist" almost every hour.

1. *What forms of cyberbullying did Sara's friends use on Tanya? What is your evidence?*

Sample responses:

- *Deception, by impersonating her on her profile*
- *Flaming, because of the mean messages*
- *Hate speech, because of the untrue comments about Tanya making fun of anything Asian*

2. *Do you think there is ever a good reason for impersonating someone else online or creating a profile about them?* (Guide students to the conclusion that nothing good can come of impersonating someone else online, even as a joke, because things can get out of hand pretty quickly if information is seen by others and spreads.)

3. *Do you think Sara knew what her friends were doing? What is Sara's responsibility in this?* (Guide students to speculate about different scenarios, such as Sara knowing about it and not doing anything to stop it, versus Sara not knowing about it.)

Sample responses:

- *I think Sara probably knew, because the friends were close enough to her to sabotage Tanya.*
- *Sara should have told them to stop, or tried to take down the fake profile.*

4. *What do you think the consequences should be for Sara and her friends if the school finds out?* (Guide students to think about how the consequences for Sara will likely depend on how much she knew or participated in "the creation of the fake profile. Have students consider the end results that will raise awareness about the issue of cyberbullying for Sara, her friends, and the school community.)

Sample responses:

- *Sara should have to drop out of the race if she knew about the cyberbullying.*
- *The friends should issue a public apology to Tanya and clear her name.*
- *Sara's friends should be punished (suspended, etc.).*
- *The administration might present an educational assembly on hate speech and why it is so dangerous.*

5. *If you found out about what happened, would this be a reason not to vote for Sara?* (Guide students to think about how the answer depends on how much involvement Sara had with the cyberbullying. If Sara knew about it and did nothing to stop it, how can she be trusted do the right thing when in office? If she didn't know, why should she be punished for something her friends did?)

6. *Have you ever been part of, or heard of, a situation similar to this? If so, share the story with the group without using names or details.* (Stress that cyberbullying is very common, and that most people have some story of cyberbullying to tell.)

Lesson Assessment

Name

Class

Date

1. **Every time Ricardo messes up in an online game, another player sends him several messages making fun of him. Ricardo thinks the messages are funny, until he gets one that hurts his feelings. True or false: Ricardo is being cyberbullied.**

   a) True

   b) False

2. **Which of the following are examples of cyberbullying? Read each answer choice, and then circle YES or NO accordingly.**

a) Altering photos of friends in a goofy way, but not in a mean way	YES	NO
b) Making a physical threat online	YES	NO
c) Telling someone that you like them online	YES	NO
d) Physically pushing someone	YES	NO
e) Saying something mean about someone based on their race, gender, or religion	YES	NO

3. **The answer choices below are examples of comments someone might say online. Each one contains words written in ALL CAPS. Which one would be considered flaming?**

   a) "NO WAY! That's SO cool!"

   b) "LOL i can't stop laughing"

   c) "SERIOUSLY? NOBODY CARES. GET OUT."

Lesson Assessment

1. **Every time Ricardo messes up in an online game, another player sends him several messages making fun of him. Ricardo thinks the messages are funny, until he gets one that hurts his feelings. True or false: Ricardo is being cyberbullied.**

    a) True

    b) False

    Answer feedback
    The correct answer is **a**, True. The other player's behavior has crossed the line into cyberbullying when the message hurts Ricardo's feelings.

2. **Which of the following are examples of cyberbullying? Read each answer choice, and then circle YES or NO accordingly.**

a) Altering photos of friends in a goofy way, but not in a mean way	YES	(NO)
b) Making a physical threat online	(YES)	NO
c) Telling someone that you like them online	YES	(NO)
d) Physically pushing someone	YES	(NO)
e) Saying something mean about someone based on their race, gender, or religion	(YES)	NO

    Answer feedback
    Any online behavior that is meant to upset, offend, or humiliate someone else is considered cyberbullying.

3. **The answer choices below are examples of comments someone might say online. Each one contains words written in ALL CAPS. Which one would be considered flaming?**

    a) "NO WAY! That's SO cool!"

    b) "LOL i can't stop laughing"

    c) "SERIOUSLY? NOBODY CARES. GET OUT."

    Answer feedback
    The correct answer is **c**. Flaming involves saying mean things online, usually in ALL CAPS, and often in a public forum with the intention to humiliate.

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Common Sense on Connected Culture

Some Facts

- Almost 80 percent of teens own a cell phone (Nielsen, 2009)
- About 4 out of 10 teens ages 13 to 17 experienced some type of cyberbullying in the previous year (Harris Interactive, 2007)
- About three-quarters of kids 12-17 say they have helped others while gaming (Pew, 2008)

Overview of Issue

We are all part of communities. Our schools, our towns, our hobbies or interests all form the centers around which we connect with other people. These communities all have codes of behavior (written or unwritten) that help everyone get along. But in today's 24/7 digital world, we are also part of online communities. And these communities connect us to people we may not know. They connect us in ways where we are known only by screen name, or where we are anonymous. They connect us to people who are sometimes very far away. Whether we're reading or writing an online restaurant review, posting something on a Facebook page, texting a friend, or sharing a picture on a photo website, we're participating in a world where we can be instantly connected to thousands of people at a moment's notice.

Why It Matters

When our kids connect to each other either from a distance or through a screen name, it can impact the way they behave. Actions can be free from discovery or consequences. When something happens anonymously, it's easier for people to behave irresponsibly, cruelly, or unethically. Kids benefit from a code of conduct for online and mobile activity just as they need a code of conduct in the real world. They should be empowered to be good digital citizens, in addition to being good citizens in general. Our kids are creating online communities with every click of the mouse or text they send. And they will have to live in those communities. The information they post about themselves or others will last a long time and travel great distances. So parents and teachers need to help kids think about the consequences of their online actions. Kids should learn that how they behave when they are connected really matters to them, their friends, and to the broader communities they participate in. Finally, there's a great deal at stake. When kids misuse online or mobile technology to harass, embarrass, or bully others, they can do real and lasting harm.

common sense says

Connected culture can be positive or negative – it's what people make it. When guiding our kids, it's important for them to understand that they have a choice in all of their online relationships. They can say something positive or say something mean. They can create great community support around activities or interests, or they can misuse the public nature of online communities to tear others down.

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Common Sense on Connected Culture

Talk about cyberbullying: It's real. It's everywhere. And remember that kids sometimes will tell you about a friend's problems rather than their own experiences. Make sure your kids know how to deal with a cyberbully, and that if the situation gets serious, urge them to tell a trusted adult about it.

Give kids a cyberbullying vocabulary. Talk about bullies, victims, bystanders (those who witness offensive behavior but don't do anything to stop it), and upstanders (people who actively try to stop cyberbullying). It will help them understand what roles they play or could play.

Encourage positive posting. Are your kids fans of YouTube? Have they said something encouraging about something they've seen and loved? Have they added knowledge to a wiki or shared their experience on a hobby or interest site? From the earliest ages, kids need to know they can add positively to the online world.

Remind kids that texts and IMs may not persist, but they still have impact. Anything they say or do with their phones or through quick messages may seem to disappear when the devices shut down, but the impact on others remains – whether for good or bad.

Tell kids to apply the Golden Rule online. If kids wouldn't say something to someone's face, then they shouldn't text it, Skype it, tweet it, Facebook it, IM it, or post it.