

# Turn Down the Dial on Cyberbullying

## Essential Question

*What factors intensify cyberbullying and online cruelty, and what can you do to lessen them?*

## Lesson Overview

Students learn that cruelty can escalate quickly online because people are often anonymous and posts spread quickly. They view the video “**Ricardo’s Story – Making Fun of Others Online**,” and identify the factors that contribute to online cruelty. Students then watch the video “**Stacey’s Story – When Rumors Escalate**,” identify the roles of various players in the video, and describe what Upstanders can do to lessen the effects of this online cruelty. Students then create diagrams on their **Dial It Down Student Handout** to show how online cruelty can either escalate or de-escalate.

## Learning Objectives

*Students will be able to ...*

- reflect on the factors that intensify online cruelty and cyberbullying.
- identify what targets and Upstanders can do when online cruelty occurs.
- recognize their own role in escalating or de-escalating online cruelty.

## Materials and Preparation

-  Preview the videos “**Ricardo’s Story – Making Fun of Others Online**” and “**Stacey’s Story – When Rumors Escalate**,” and prepare to show them to students.
- Copy the **Dial It Down Student Handout**, one for each student.
- Review the **Dial It Down Student Handout – Teacher Version**.

## Family Resources

- Send home the **Cyberbullying Family Tip Sheet (Middle & High School)**.

**Estimated time:** 45 minutes

## Standards Alignment –

### Common Core:

**grades 9-10:** RI.1, RI.2, RI.3, RI.4, RI.8, RI.10, W.2a, W.2b, W.2c, W.2d, W.2e, W.2f, W.4, W.5, W.6, W.7, W.8, W.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.3, SL.5, L.4a, L.6

**grades 11-12:** RL.1, RL.2, RL.4, RL.7, RL.8, RL.10, RI.1, RI.2, RI.4, RI.10, W.2a, W.2b, W.2c, W.2d, W.2e, W.2f, W.4, W.5, W.6, W.7, W.8, W.9, W.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.2, SL.3, SL.5, L.4a, L.6

**ISTE:** 1a, 1d, 2a, 2d, 3b, 3d, 4a, 4b, 4d, 5a, 5b

## Key Vocabulary –

**target:** a person who is the object of an intentional action

**offender:** a person who has malicious intent to hurt or damage someone

**bystander:** a person who does nothing when they witness something happening

**Upstander:** a person who supports and stands up for someone else

**escalate:** to increase or make more intense

**de-escalate:** to decrease or make less intense

## introduction

### Warm-up (5 minutes)

**EXPLAIN** to students that online cruelty, also referred to as cyberbullying, takes place whenever someone uses digital media tools such as the Internet and cell phones to deliberately upset or harass someone else, often repeatedly.

 **SHOW** students the video “Ricardo’s Story – Making Fun of Others Online.”

#### ASK:

*Do you think Ricardo is a cyberbully?  
Why or why not?*

Guide students to recognize that Ricardo probably is a cyberbully because he openly criticizes people online. On the other hand, we do not know how mean his comments were and if he might change his behavior in the future.

*What does Ricardo mean when he says that information “gets around really quick”?*

Guide students to think about how information generally travels faster and reaches more people on the Internet than offline, and that this fact potentially makes the impact harsher.

*Ricardo thinks that harassing others on Internet, rather than in person, appeals to some teenagers because they can’t be attacked back physically. What do you think?*

Guide students to think about how people may cyberbully online because they do not have to face their target and can “hide” behind their devices. On the other hand, conflicts that start online often go offline at some point.

*Have you ever encountered online cruelty?  
How do you think someone might feel after being the target of it?*

Sample responses:

- upset
- alone
- trapped
- hurt
- angry

**DEFINE** the Key Vocabulary words **target** and **offender**.

**DISCUSS** with students how the targets of online cruelty may feel they can be bombarded with negative comments at any time, anywhere. And when more offenders join in the online cruelty, the situation gets even worse.

## teach 1

### Watch “Stacey’s Story” (15 minutes)

**DEFINE** the Key Vocabulary terms **escalate**, **de-escalate**, **bystander**, and **Upstander**.

 **SHOW** the video “Stacey’s Story – When Rumors Escalate” and answer the following questions about online cruelty as a class.

**ASK:**

*Who was involved in the story and what roles did they play? Who was the target? Who were the offenders? Were there bystanders and/or Upstanders?*

Sample responses:

- **Target:** Stacey, whose intentions are misunderstood and who feels beaten down by being picked on offline and online
- **Offenders:** The girl who misunderstood Stacey’s intent, as well as her friends who led the cruel online behavior
- **Bystanders:** All of the people who might have stepped in but did not, including Stacey’s cousin and others at school or online
- **Upstander:** Stacey’s mom, who empathized with Stacey and encouraged her to seek help from the school

*How do you think the online cruelty might be different from offline behavior?*

As Stacey says, most of the comments were made anonymously and from “miles away.” Students should recognize that it may be easier for offenders to be cruel when they are not face to face with their target. Students should also understand that it is easy for online cruelty to spread quickly, both because of the technology and because of the herd mentality.

*What do you think you might have done if you were Stacey? What could you have done if you wanted to be an Upstander in this situation?*

Invite student responses, and then guide students through the chart that follows.

**DISCUSS** the following ways that targets and Upstanders can help de-escalate online cruelty.

### How Targets and Upstanders Can De-escalate Online Cruelty

Targets	Upstanders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ignore and block the bully.</b> Offenders often want attention. Take it away and they may give up.</li> <li>• <b>Save the evidence.</b> You may need it later for documentation.</li> <li>• <b>Change your privacy settings.</b> Allow only people you trust to see or comment on your pages.</li> <li>• <b>Tell trusted friends and adults.</b> Create a support network.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Stand up to the offender when appropriate.</b> If you see something negative, say something. Make it clear that you think online cruelty is wrong, and tell the offender to back off. (It may be easier to do this if you have good standing with the offender.)</li> <li>• <b>Point out the bully’s motivation to the target.</b> Comfort the target by explaining that many offenders act cruelly just to gain control, power, or status.</li> <li>• <b>Help the target advocate.</b> Help the target find friends and school leaders who can help de-escalate the situation. It’s easier to stand up to cruelty when you are not alone.</li> </ul>



**ASK:**

*Have you or a friend ever experienced a situation similar to Stacey's? How might the strategies in the chart have helped you in that situation?*

Have students apply what they have learned to personal experiences, without using real names.

*What might prevent a bystander from taking action? What advice would you give someone to convince them to be upstanding?*

Bystanders may hesitate to get involved in a cyberbullying situation because they don't want to become targets themselves. Encourage students to put themselves in a target's shoes. What would it feel like if nobody wanted to help them out when they needed it most? Remind students that they can show support in many ways, even simply by listening to a target about his or her experience.

## teach 2

### Create “Dial It Down” Maps (20 minutes)

**EXPLAIN** to students that they are going to map out two stories. One will show how online cruelty escalated in “Stacey’s Story.” The other will show how it might have de-escalated if Stacey had some Upstanders on her side.

**Note:** You may choose to have students create their maps based on other stories about cyberbullying and online cruelty, rather than on Stacey’s Story. You can have students research news stories on their own, or you can assign stories from this set of scenarios, created by the Cyberbullying Resource Center ([www.cyberbullying.us/Cyberbullying\\_Scenarios.pdf](http://www.cyberbullying.us/Cyberbullying_Scenarios.pdf)).

**DISTRIBUTE** the **Dial It Down Student Handout**, one for each student.

**ARRANGE** students in pairs. Have one student complete the left-hand column of the handout for Stacey’s Story to show how the situation escalated. Have the other one fill in the Turn Down the Dial on Cyberbullying version of her story to show how the situation could have been de-escalated.

**INSTRUCT** students to turn their handouts into maps, using elements such as size and color to indicate escalation and de-escalation, and arrows to show the flow of events.

**INVITE** students to compare their results with their partners. Then have volunteers share their maps with the class.

## closing

### Wrap-up (5 minutes)

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives. You may want to ask students to reflect in writing on one of the questions, using a journal or an online blog/wiki.

#### ASK:

*What are some roles that different people play in cyberbullying situations, and how would you describe each one?*

Sample responses:

- Target: The object of the online cruelty
- Offender: The person who tries to hurt or harass the target
- Bystander: A person who does nothing when they see something happening
- Upstander: A person who supports and stands up for someone else

*What are some ways that online cruelty and cyberbullying can escalate, or intensify?*

Sample responses:

- When multiple people become involved in the cruelty or bullying
- When the online cruelty becomes public, through posts, tagging, and comments
- When people start sending threats

*Why is it important to be an Upstander rather than a bystander?*

Students should understand that bystanders are effectively allowing the target to be hurt and degraded by others; Upstanders take whatever action they can to stop this unacceptable behavior.

# Turn Down the Dial on Cyberbullying

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## Directions

Fill out the chart after watching the video, “**Stacey’s Story.**” One partner should complete the boxes on the left to show how the situation escalated. The other partner should complete the boxes on the right, which shows the initial incident, an escalating incident, and then two de-escalating incidents. Keep in mind that the incidents might not happen one after the other, even though they are shown this way.



After completing the chart, turn what you’ve written above into a diagram or map. Show how situations can escalate or de-escalate, using colors, shapes, and arrows.

<b>Stacey’s Story</b>	<b>Turn Down the Dial on Cyberbullying</b>
Initial incident (what happened first?):	Initial incident (what happened first?):
Escalating incident #1:	Escalating incident:
Escalating incident #2:	De-escalating incident #1:
Escalating incident #3:	De-escalating incident #2:

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<b>Stacey’s Story</b>	<b>Turn Down the Dial on Cyberbullying</b>
Initial incident (what happened first?):  <i>Offender mistakenly thinks Stacey is trying to flirt with her boyfriend, who is actually Stacey’s cousin.</i>	Initial incident (what happened first?):  <i>Offender mistakenly thinks Stacey is trying to flirt with her boyfriend, who is actually Stacey’s cousin.</i>
Escalating incident #1:  <i>The offender says, “Stay away from my boyfriend” and “Oh, you better watch out.”</i>	Escalating incident:  <i>The offender’s friends post mean bulletin messages about Stacey.</i>
Escalating incident #2:  <i>Friends of the offender post a threatening message saying they want to pick a fight with Stacey.</i>	De-escalating incident #1:  <i>One of Stacey’s friends sees the exchange and privately messages the offender to clear up the misunderstanding and to urge the offender to back off.</i>
Escalating incident #3:  <i>The online cruelty becomes public, through posts, tagging, and comments.</i>	De-escalating incident #2:  <i>Stacey changes her privacy settings so only friends can send her messages or post on her profile.</i>

After completing the chart, turn what you’ve written above into a diagram or map. Show how situations can escalate or de-escalate, using colors, shapes, and arrows. (Students should create maps or flow charts that clearly show movement from one incident to the next. They may show one incident breaking off into many, or they may use color or size to indicate an intensifying or waning situation.)



# Turn Down the Dial on Cyberbullying

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1. Reflect on each of these statements about the Internet. Circle three statements that support the idea that the Internet makes bullying easier and a bigger problem.

- a) Information can spread very quickly on the Internet.
- b) If you say something mean online, you don't have to worry about getting in a physical fight.
- c) You can find lots of information on the Internet.
- d) Anything someone says could stay on the Internet for a long time.
- e) You can get support from groups on the Internet.
- f) Parents, teachers, and students all use the Internet.

2. Mei keeps getting mean comments on her Twitter posts. Cara, Mei's good friend, has seen the comments and wants to help. What can both girls do to make the situation better?

- a) Mei could delete her Twitter account. Cara could let Mei use her Twitter account so that Mei can still post, but no one knows it's her.
- b) Mei could ignore and block the bully. Cara could comfort Mei.
- c) Mei could tell the bully to back off, and Cara could post mean things about the bully on Twitter.
- d) Mei could tell the bully to back off, and Cara could get a group of friends to post embarrassing photos of the bully.

3. A(n) \_\_\_\_\_ helps to de-escalate, or lessen the impact of online cruelty by supporting and standing up for the person who is bullied.

- a) bystander
- b) Upstander
- c) target
- d) offender

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- e) You can get support from groups on the Internet.
- f) Parents, teachers, and students all use the Internet.

*Answer feedback*

The correct answers are **a**, **b**, and **d**. Bullying and online cruelty can be intensified online because information on the Internet can be anonymous, public, and can last a long time.

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- a) Mei could delete her Twitter account. Cara could let Mei use her Twitter account so that Mei can still post, but no one knows it's her.
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- d) Mei could tell the bully to back off, and Cara could get a group of friends to post embarrassing photos of the bully.

*Answer feedback*

The correct answer is **b**. Oftentimes bullies want attention, so it's best to ignore them. The best thing for Mei to do is to block and ignore the bully, and the best thing for Cara to do is to offer support and comfort to her friend.

# Turn Down the Dial on Cyberbullying

ASSESSMENT  
TEACHER VERSION

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3. A(n) \_\_\_\_\_ helps to de-escalate, or lessen the impact of online cruelty by supporting and standing up for the person who is bullied.

- a) bystander
- b) Upstander**
- c) target
- d) offender

*Answer feedback*

The correct answer is **b**. An Upstander does something to help or support the target of bullying.

# Turn Down the Dial on Cyberbullying and Online Cruelty



## \* DID YOU KNOW ...

More than half of teens think that cyberbullying is a **SERIOUS** problem. Most teens also think that cyberbullying is easier to get away with than in-person bullying.

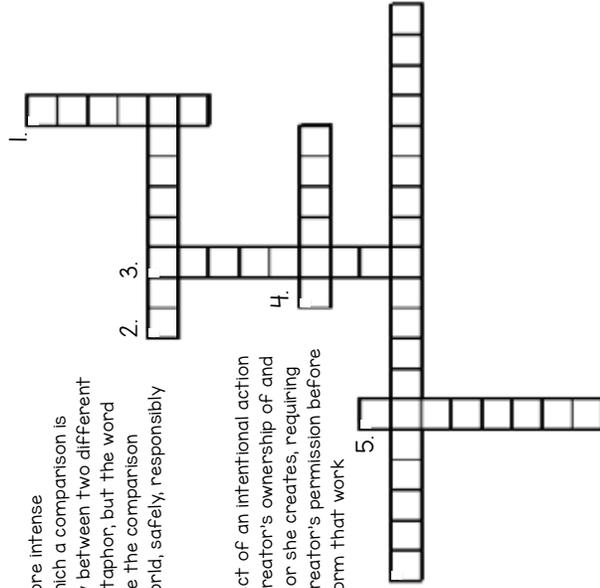
## Crossword Puzzle

Across:

- 2. to increase or make more intense
- 4. a figure of speech in which a comparison is made to show a similarity between two different things. It resembles a metaphor, but the word 'like' or 'as' is used to make the comparison
- 6. navigating the digital world, safely, responsibly and ethically

Down:

- 1. a person who is the object of an intentional action
- 3. a law that protects a creator's ownership of and control over the work he or she creates, requiring other people to get the creator's permission before they copy, share, or perform that work
- 5. the ability to use a small amount of someone's creative work without permission, but only in certain ways



## \* WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Why is it important to be an upstander rather than a bystander?

**\* DO YOU REMEMBER ...**  
What factors intensify cyberbullying and online cruelty and what you can do to lessen them?

## 1. Family Activity

Camille was home sick from school watching a movie when she looked down at her phone and saw her screen filled with text messages written in capital letters and punctuated with exclamation points: "I hate you!!! How could you?!" Camille panicked: She had no idea why she was receiving the flood of vicious text messages. She frantically texted two of her friends, but both were in class, and her calls went to voicemail. A few hours later, Camille pieced together what had happened. Someone had hacked onto her best friend's Facebook page, acting as her, and sent perverted messages to her best friend's boyfriend. Her best friend was furious and convinced it was Camille, since Camille was the only person who had her password. Camille hadn't been at school to defend herself, so their other friends had already heard about the incident and were mad at Camille too.

## 2. Think Out Loud!

- ~ What is your immediate reaction to this situation? What seems realistic or unrealistic?
- ~ Would you consider Camille's experience a case of "cyberbullying"? Why, or why not?
- ~ How do you think Camille felt when she saw her phone? What might she have been thinking?
- ~ What can Camille do to explain to her friends that it wasn't her?
- ~ Why might Camille have had her best friend's password in the first place?

## 3. Common Sense Says ...

One of the easiest ways to keep yourself safe online and protect yourself against bullying? Make sure not to share your passwords with anyone, even if you totally trust him or her (the person might unintentionally do something that puts you or your information at risk). \* Create a password that is unique but also memorable -- and change your password regularly. (\*Parents are an exception to this rule.)



# Common Sense on Cyberbullying



## What's the Issue?

Cyberbullying is the use of digital media tools, such as the internet and cell phones, to deliberately humiliate and harass others, often repeatedly. Though most teens do not do this, those who do are often motivated by a desire for power, status, and attention – and their targets are often people they are competing with for social standing. Cyberbullies often take advantage of the web's anonymity to antagonize someone without being recognized.

Cyberbullying can take a variety of forms, such as harassing someone, impersonating someone, spreading rumors, or forwarding embarrassing information about a person. A bully's mean-spirited comments can spread widely through instant messaging (IM), phone texting, and by posts on social networking sites. This can happen rapidly, with little time for teens to cool down between responses. It can happen anytime — at school or at home — and often it involves large groups of teens.

## Why Does It Matter?

Cyberbullying is similar to face-to-face bullying, but online tools magnify the hurt, humiliation, and social drama in a very public way. Whether it's creating a fake Facebook or MySpace page to impersonate a fellow student, repeatedly sending hurtful text messages and images, or spreading rumors or posting cruel comments on the Internet, cyberbullying can result in severe emotional and even physical harm.

Though anyone can spot bullying behavior in the real world, it's much more difficult to detect it in the online world. Sometimes an entire social circle will get involved, and then it becomes harder for an individual teen to disengage from it. In fact, whole groups of teens may be actively or passively participating, and the target can feel that it is impossible to get away from the bullies. In addition, hurtful information posted on the internet is extremely difficult to remove, and millions of people can see it.

The following tips can help you recognize the warning signs of cyberbullying and serve as a guide for talking to your teens about preventing it.

## What Families Can Do

*You seem down. What's going on at school? Is anything upsetting happening online?*

*I'm here for you and so are your friends. Talk to me anytime.*

*Are there any teachers at school who have dealt with these kinds of situations before? I think you should tell one of them about what's been happening.*

*Bullies want attention, power, and status, which explains why they need to cause drama.*

*I saw a news story about a teen who was bullied online. What would you do in that situation?*

## common sense says

**Recognize context.** Cyberbullying is often not thought of as “cyberbullying” to the teens involved. Even though an incident has a history, a story, and nuance, rather than referring to it as “cyberbullying,” try the words “digital cruelty,” “abuse,” or “being mean” online.

**Help teens understand when behavior crosses the line.** Help your teen tune into his or her own feelings. If they feel emotionally or physically scared, it’s time to get help.

**Encourage empathy.** Help teens understand the detrimental impact of cyberbullying on people who are targeted, now and later in life. Encourage them to listen to targets and to become their allies.

**Be realistic.** Teens have their own social dynamics that often don’t include parents, so helping them directly may be difficult. Encourage teens to find friends or other trusted adults to help them through the situation, even if it’s not you. Websites are often slow to respond, if they respond at all, but reporting an incident to a website administrator can be an empowering step.

**Remember that your teen might be the bully.** Teens can take different roles in cyberbullying at different times. A teen who is cyberbullied might turn around and cyberbully someone else to feel powerful again. Ask questions to understand what role or roles your teens are playing.

**Tell them to disengage.** Encourage your teens to ignore and block the bully, and even log off the computer for a while. Point out that cyberbullies are often just looking for attention and status, so don’t let them know that their efforts have worked.