ADL Curriculum Connections
Anti-Bias Lesson Plans and Resources for K-12 Educators

Cyberbullying
Understanding and Addressing Online Cruelty

Students Handouts and Supporting Materials for Teachers

Middle Level Lesson: Dealing with the Social Pressures that Promote Online Cruelty

Understanding and Addressing Online Cruelty

REASONS[1] for online social aggression	STRATEGIES for reducing online social aggression
1. I can't see you (invisibility lessens empathy).	■ Visualize the person on the receiving end of the message and imagine how they will feel. ■ Balance time spend online with activities that involve face-to-face interaction.
2. You don't know me (anonymity emboldens people to say things they normally wouldn't).	■ Picture yourself saying this to someone in person. Could you? How would it feel?
3. See you later (communication that does not involve immediate, real-time feedback may reduce inhibitions).	■ Think about the response your message may provoke at a later time from the recipient, other peers and adults.
4. It's just a game (the Internet may seem like a world separate and apart, with different rules and norms).	■ Consider the real-life outcomes and consequences that your actions could have. ■ Never engage in fantasy play without others' consent and willing participation.
5. It's not me (responsibility for cruel behavior may be placed on an online persona or identity rather than on oneself).	■ Ask yourself if the person on the receiving end will experience your comments as part of a fantasy or role-play.
6. Look at me (personal attacks are an easy way to attract notice; negative attention may be better than no attention).	■ Reflect on how you really want others to view you. ■ Consider behaviors that will lead to positive attention and friendships.
7. Don't mess with me (retaliation online is less threatening than standing up to a foe in person).	■ Consider whether revenge will actually solve your problems or make you feel better. ■ Talk to a trusted adult about proactive solutions.
8. I'm one of you (participating in online cruelty may seem like a way to gain social acceptance; standing up to it may seem like it will bring ostracism).	■ Ask yourself if you really want friends who are cruel to others. ■ Talk to an adult about ways to avoid online hostility and support those who are targeted.
9. You're not like me (the Internet may be a vehicle for expressing hate or prejudice that is socially unacceptable at school).	■ Imagine how it would feel if you were targeted for being different. ■ Seek help from a teacher or counselor who can help you to deal with negative feelings.

[1] Reasons 2-4 are from Suler, J. 2004. The Online Disinhibition Effect. CyberPsychology and Behavior 7: 321-326; reasons 1, 5 and 6 are from Willard, N. 2007. Educator's Guide to Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats. Center for Safe and Responsible Use of the Internet. Retrieved from http://www.cyberbully.org/cyberbully/docs/cbcteducator.pdf.

Welcome to the Web Site that Makes Fun of Dave

After being teased, taunted and punched for years, some peers set up an abusive Web site about David that made his life unbearable. The site—titled "Welcome to the Web site that makes fun of Dave"—was active for months before David found out about it; none of his friends or classmates bothered to warn him about it.

The students who created the Web site included pages of hateful comments directed at David and his family. Soon other students at school joined in, posting rude remarks that embarrassed David and smeared his reputation. Some students used a link to David's e-mail address to send messages like this one: "You're gay, don't ever talk again, no one likes you, you're immature and dirty, go wash your face."

The abuse went on for seven long months before the Web host agreed to take down the site. By that time David felt so defeated that he decided to leave school and complete his studies at home.
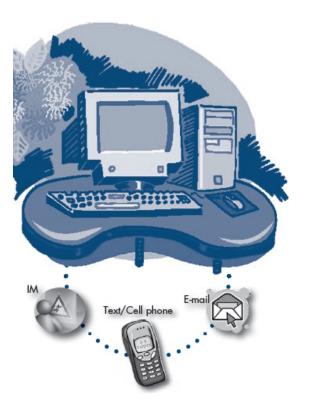
"Rather than just some people, say 30 in a cafeteria," commented David, "hearing them all yell insults at you, it's up there for 6 billion people to see. Anyone with a computer can see it. And you can't get away from it. It doesn't go away when you come home from school. It made me feel even more trapped."

Cyberbullying Scenarios

1. You are sitting around the computer with a group of friends at a Friday night sleepover when Emily asks, "Who don't we like? Who can we mess with?" Someone suggests Sarah, a girl with a physical disability that causes her to walk with a limp. For some time, Sarah has been trying to become part of your group, but has been excluded because some girls think she is "weird." When you all discover that Sarah is online, Emily sets up a fictitious screen name and sends Sarah an IM that says, "Nice moves in gym class yesterday. Walk much?" You laugh along with the other girls and participate in more mean messages.

2. You have an account on a gaming site, where you like to play World of Warcraft with your online friends. One day your parents discover an e-mail from the site administrator indicating that the account will be terminated due to the posting of the following message: "I hate Hitler because he didn't finish the job – he should have killed all the Jews." At first you swear that you had nothing to do with the message, but later admit that you were encouraged to post it by another student, who has been calling you mean names and threatening to hurt you. You tell your parents that you figured it wouldn't hurt anyone to post the message and it might get the bully to finally leave you alone.

3. You are furious with your best friend after hearing that he went on a date with a girl he knows you have liked since the sixth grade. You dig out an old photo of your friend from before he transferred to your school and before he lost fifty pounds. You scan the picture of a very overweight fifth-grader into your computer and e-mail it to the girl with a message saying, "Just thought you should know what your boyfriend really looks like."

4. A group of anonymous students have created a Web site about one of their classmates named Larry. Although Larry does not identify as a gay person, the Web site includes postings about Larry being gay that include made-up stories, jokes and cartoons involving Larry and other students at the school. The site includes a place where visitors can post comments and an email link for people to send their messages directly to Larry. You receive an e-mail with a link to the site. Though you don't post any new comments to the site, you forward the e-mail with the link to your friends.

5. You have a disagreement with one of your teammates at a game and the coach ends up benching you for the remainder of the game. Afterwards, you are so steamed that you send an angry text to your teammate, blaming her for everything. She texts back, trying to explain her side of things, but this angers you further and you end up sending a series of nasty text messages, calling her mean names and even threatening to "put her in her place" if she messes with you at the next game.

6. Hanif is one of only a few Muslim students at your school. On a day when the morning news includes the report of a terrorist attack on a subway in another country, a group surrounds Hanif after school, calling him a "terrorist" and questioning his loyalty to the U.S. You are part of a group of onlookers, who watch as the group starts pushing and slapping Hanif. At the suggestion of your friend, you video the attack on your cell phone and later spread it around the school via e-mail using an anonymous account.

7. After rehearsal for the school play, Jill remains in the auditorium by herself to practice dance moves, forgetting that the video camera is still on. The next day you and a friend discover the video of Jill, which contains some silly and embarrassing footage. As a gag, you decide to create a fake MySpace page for Jill that contains some of the footage, and you invite the whole school to be her "friend." The video of Jill dancing becomes a school-wide joke, and people start to add visual and sound effects that make Jill look even funnier. Before long, the video begins to spread around the Internet and Jill receives hundreds of harassing messages.

Internet Safety Strategies for Students

Before going online...

☑ Make some rules with your parents/guardians before you go online, like the time of day and length of time you can be online, and sites you are allowed to visit. Don't bend the rules or visit other Web sites without their permission.

☑ Try to limit your cell phone and Internet use to a reasonable amount of time, and make sure you are keeping a healthy balance between online and in-person activities.

☑ Keep in mind that no message is completely private, including texts and e-mail. Your school and adult family members may be watching your online activity, and the police can recover all messages—even if you deleted them. If you are using the Internet to embarrass, threaten, harass or hurt others, chances are you will be caught.

☑ Be aware that many Internet and cell phone service providers have rules about behavior. If you break them, your account—and every account in your home—could be canceled. If you break the law, you may also be reported to the police.

While online...

☑ Never share private information about others and never say things that might make them feel unsafe or uncomfortable, even if you mean it as a "joke."

☑ Don't share personal or private information online—like your full name, school name, home address, phone number and personal photos—in places where strangers or people you don't trust can find them.

☑ Keep passwords and PINs to yourself—don't even tell your best friend—but never hide this information from your parents/guardians. They'll trust you more if you're open with them, and if a serious problem occurs, they made need this information to help you.

☑ Don't leave cell phones or other electronics out of sight. Keep them where you can see them at all times.

☑ Don't talk to strangers online, where it is easier for people to lie about their identity. A friend you meet online may not be the best person to talk to if you are having problems.

☑ Don't send your picture or personal information to strangers or people you only know online, and don't arrange to meet them without a parent's/guardian's permission.

☑ Don't open messages or attachments from people you don't know.

If you experience online bullying...

☑ Don't respond to bullying or inappropriate messages, but save them as evidence.

☑ Talk about problems you experience online with an adult that you trust, like a family member, teacher or school counselor.

☑ Always report online bullying, hate messages, inappropriate sexual activity and physical threats (including possible suicide attempts) to an adult family member, school authorities or the police.

☑ Block the e-mail addresses and cell phone numbers of people who are sending unwanted messages; change your phone numbers, e-mail addresses, screen names and other online information if necessary.

☑ For serious or continuing problems, file complaints with e-mail services, Internet Service Providers, Web sites, cell phone companies, etc. They can find the offenders, cancel their service and report them to the police if necessary.

☑ If you don't feel comfortable reporting problems yourself, ask a friend or adult to do it for you. Keeping the people close to you aware of what's going on will make you feel safe and supported.

☑ When in doubt about what to do, log off the computer and ask for help from a trusted adult.

DTRT!

DO THE RIGHT THING