

Chapter 3

Virtual Battles: Cyberbullies



Overview

Many of us, unfortunately, have witnessed classmates bullying others, and some of us have experienced bullying firsthand, often through our computers or phones. In this chapter, you will learn about the different types of cyberbullying, the technological tools of the cyberbully, and the negative effects of cyberbullying. Prevention and coping skills are discussed, as are the positive social changes that can occur when teens use their experiences with cyberbullying to educate others.



Key Terms

- Cyberbullying
- Harassment
- Flaming
- Outing
- Degradation
- Deception
- In-person bullying



A cyberbully sends a mean email about a classmate to several friends.



The friends forward the message on to their friends.



The message sweeps across cyberspace in seconds.

What Is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying occurs when digital messages are used to threaten, torment, or embarrass someone. Unlike the traditional schoolyard bully, cyberbullies use everything from cell phones to social media to spread hateful comments that can sweep across cyberspace in seconds. Whether it's a string of humiliating text messages or a threatening email from a peer, cyberbullying is serious business.

What Does Cyberbullying Look Like?

Imagine Sabrina, a ninth grader who is excited to start her first week of high school. When she gets home from her first day, she logs onto her Facebook account and is greeted with a flood of messages. Everyone seems to be talking about her . . . but the attention isn't good. Mean-spirited comments about her looks and her family and untrue rumors are posted everywhere. Classmates (and even friends!) chime in with degrading comments about her weight, hair, and intelligence.

Sabrina can't believe the hurtful words she's seeing. Before she knows it, the messages are forwarded to many of her fellow students in school. Sabrina's friends respond with nothing more than an "lol." Only this isn't a joke—this is a case of cyberbullying.

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Common Types of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can take many different forms. With just a click of a mouse or a touch of a button, insulting messages can reach thousands. **Listed below are some of the most common types of cyberbullying:**

- **Harassment** is **repeatedly sending messages** with an offensive or derogatory meaning.
- **Flaming** is **insulting a participant** in an online discussion or argument, using volatile and cruel language.
- **Outing** is **revealing someone's private thoughts**, secrets, or personal information.
- **Degradation** is using digital tools to **spread lies** or rumors.
- **Deception** is stealing someone's passwords and **impersonating him or her** or creating a false account.

Common Technological Tools of Cyberbullying

In cyberbullying cases, social media tools are used to deliver vicious and repetitive messages. **The five most common cyberbullying tools are listed below:**

- Emails
- Websites
- Text messages
- Instant messages
- Forums and chat rooms



Fact!



Did You Know?

80% of teens say they have defended a victim of cyberbullying, and 79% have asked a cyberbully to stop mean behavior.

Source: Pew Internet and American Life Project

Think carefully before you send messages in cyberspace. Once it's out there, it's out there forever.

Fact!



Did You Know?

88% of teens participating in social networks have witnessed cruel or mean interactions in cyberspace.

Source: *Pew Internet and American Life Project*

In-Person Bullying vs. Cyberbullying: What's the Difference?

Children are often taught the rhyme, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." In truth, though, words **can** hurt—both in the real and in the virtual world. However, people often respond differently to **in-person bullying** than they do to cyberbullying. If you witnessed a friend being pushed to the ground, what would you do? Would you yell for help? Try to stop the fight? Report the incident? If you heard a person saying mean things to a friend, would you verbally intervene?

Not doing anything is difficult if you're an eyewitness to bodily harm or to in-person verbal cruelty. You can see the person committing the violence or making vicious remarks, and you're often compelled to do something about it. But online, bullies can sling hurtful words from a distance, and people are often less inclined to get involved. In addition, cyberbullies sometimes find ways to torment others while remaining anonymous, which makes it difficult for others to stick up for their victims.

Characteristics of Cyberbullying

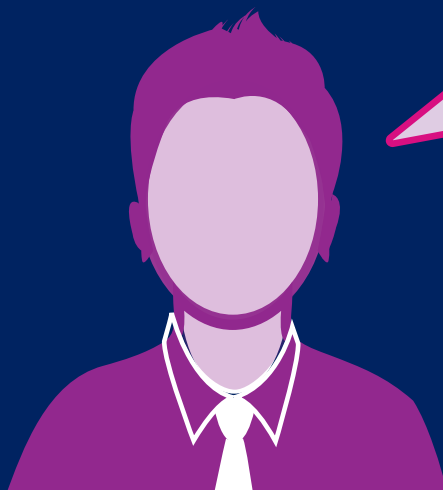
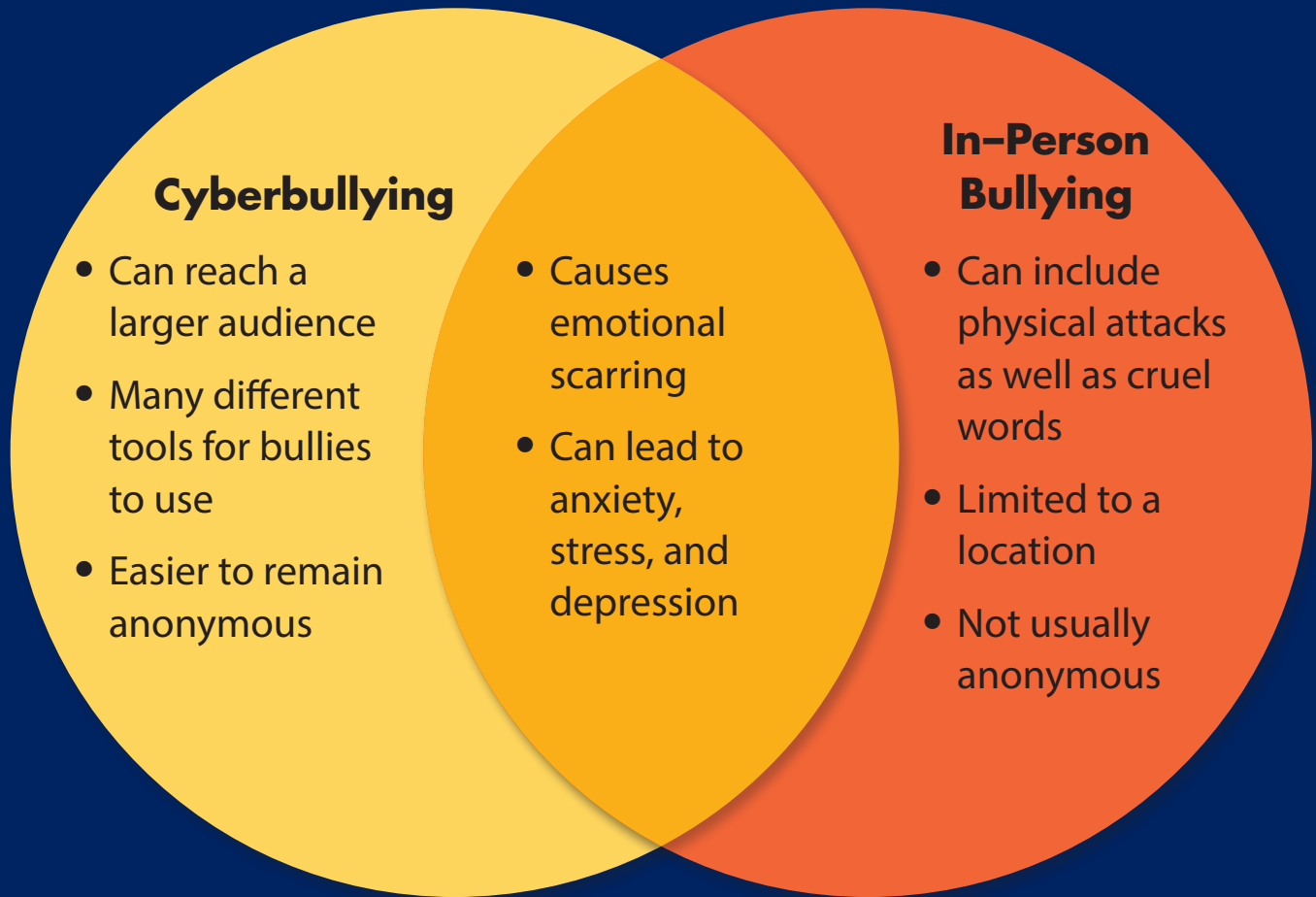
- **False digital accounts** or multiple screen names make it easy for bullies to remain anonymous.
- Cyberbullying **can follow people home**, which can take away the place where many teens feel most safe.
- Cyberbullying **knows no limits**, because messages can be publicly shared through social media, and they can be seen by people around the world.
- **Hiding behind a screen** sometimes gives bullies more confidence to say things they wouldn't say in person.

Cyberbullies sometimes hide behind a screen in order to protect themselves while they are harming others.



Cyberbullying vs. In-Person Bullying

While in-person bullying can be limited to a location, the poison of cyberbullying can spread instantly, 24 hours a day, to every part of the globe. The diagram below compares cyberbullying to in-person bullying.



Remember:
If you are cyberbullied, tell a trusted adult—such as a parent, teacher, or counselor—what is happening.



If you have the right anti-cyberbullying strategies at your disposal, you won't need to resort to bullying back.

Coping with Cyberbullying

When faced with a cyberbullying situation, it can be tempting to bully back, following the motto, "An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth." However, seeking revenge will only make conditions worse. What's a better approach?

The five strategies listed below will help you cope with cyberbullying in a more constructive way:

1 Tell a trusted adult.

A parent, teacher, or counselor can help you process what is happening.

2 Don't seek revenge.

It never helps to bully the person who is bullying you.

3 Report the incident to the service provider.

For example, if you experience cyberbullying on a social networking site such as Facebook, report the incident directly to the company.

4 Block communication from the bully.

Make it impossible for him or her to contact you through email, social networking sites, or text messages.

5 Maintain positive online safety habits.

Create strong passwords and avoid sharing private information, including your home address.

Preventing Cyberbullying

You can take steps to avoid becoming a cyberbully or becoming the victim of cyberbullies. One important action you can take is to protect your private information. It may not seem like a big deal to post your phone number or email address on an online profile, but you never know who will gain access to that information. While it is not uncommon to give a phone number to a friend in real life, many people have online friends who aren't necessarily real friends. For example, you may friend someone online because you go to the same school, but you may not actually know anything about that person.



If you wouldn't give your phone number to someone in real life, you shouldn't do so online. That means that you should keep private information off of online profiles or other publicly accessible areas. Conversely, if you find someone's home address, email address, or phone number on his or her online profile, don't misuse the information to harass the person.

How to Avoid Becoming a Cyberbully or Falling Victim to a Cyberbully

- **Respect your peers**, both online and offline. Don't treat people cruelly.
- If faced with a bully, **be the bigger person** by walking away from the situation.
- **Don't participate** in spreading or receiving hurtful messages.
- **Help raise awareness**; the more teens discuss cyberbullying, the less likely it is that people will engage in this behavior.
- **Never text or post photographs** that you would be embarrassed for your parents or teachers to see. Once a photograph is sent or posted, it's in cyberspace, and cyberbullies can take advantage of it. Embarrassing photographs can haunt you for the rest of your life.

Many teens struggle with long-lasting mental anguish due to being cyberbullied.



Effects of Cyberbullying

Those who fall victim to digital jabs must deal with mental and emotional wounds. When a person is bombarded repeatedly (or even occasionally) with negative comments, after a while he or she may begin believing that those things are true.

Many teens who encounter cyberbullying struggle with the issues listed below:

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| • Stress and anxiety | • Fear | • Health problems |
| • Sadness and loneliness | • Drop in grades | • Change in eating or sleeping patterns |
| • Depression | • Low self-esteem | • Use of alcohol or drugs |
| • Loss of interest in activities | • Low self-confidence | • Thoughts of suicide |

Positive Social Change

Cyberbullying is bad for our health and can leave emotional scars that are difficult to overcome. But some teens take their experiences with cyberbullying and use them for the common good. **Listed below are the two most common ways to turn a cyberbullying incident into a force for positive social change:**

- 1 Many teens deal with the aftermath of bullying by talking about it with a trusted adult, friends, or a counselor. Some share their story with other teens.
- 2 Some teens use their experiences with cyberbullying as a platform to promote awareness. By publicly speaking out on the issue, teens have a chance to help change negative online behavior.



Some teens use their experiences with cyberbullying to promote awareness of the issue for the common good.

Chapter 3 Assessment



What Do You Think?

Write a three- to five-paragraph reflection on your personal experiences with cyberbullying. Your paragraphs should answer the following questions:

- 1 What negative impacts have you experienced, witnessed, or heard about cyberbullying? Describe your knowledge of cyberbullying using a real example or one you have seen in the media.
- 2 If someone were cyberbullying you, how would you react? Use examples from the chapter in your response.
- 3 If one of your friends was being cyberbullied, what would you do? Use examples from the chapter in your response.
- 4 In your opinion, what can schools do to reduce or stop cyberbullying among students?

Challenge: What Would You Do?

In this chapter, you learned about how to deal with cyberbullying. Now, apply what you have learned. Read the scenario below and write one paragraph explaining what you would do if faced with a similar situation. Use examples from the chapter to justify your reasoning.

Scenario:

Emily and Mariel have been best friends for years. One day, while over at Mariel's house, Emily is amusing herself with a new app on Mariel's phone when she discovers a text message. Curious, she reads the message. She is shocked to see it is from a classmate they used to be friends with. The message reads: "You are so crazy! I mean seriously, do you even know where to shop? Your clothes are UGLY. No wonder no one likes you!" Emily takes a closer look and realizes there are many other offensive, cruel messages in Mariel's inbox. Emily realizes she is now a bystander to a texting war, and she isn't sure what to do next.

What would you do if you were Emily?



Extension Activities

Activity 1 True or False?

Using the information from this chapter, determine whether each statement is true or false.

- 1 Cyberbullies use only text messages to send harsh comments.
- 2 If faced with a cyberbully, the best thing to do is to seek revenge.
- 3 Social media makes it easy for cyberbullies to remain anonymous.
- 4 Blocking a cyberbully from sending you messages is not a good way to deal with bullying.
- 5 Positive change can come from cyberbullying if teens talk about their experiences with others.

Activity 2 Key Terms

For each term, write a definition in your own words.

Cyberbullying

Flaming

Harassment

Outing

Deception



Activity 3

Reality Revealed: A True Story of Cyberbullying

The following scenario is based on a true story:

The hurtful messages began when Lynn was in eighth grade. After lunch one day, she discovered a website created by her peers that was all about her. The website contained hurtful, untrue, and threatening messages about her appearance, family, and personal life. Eventually the website was taken down, but Lynn faced a new set of issues when her Facebook account was hijacked and she discovered classmates were sending negative comments to her friends using her name.

The cyberbullying followed her from school to home and back again. As a result, Lynn quit many of her favorite activities and tried to pretend to be someone she was not in order to fit in. Because she heard so many negative comments about herself, after a while she started to believe they were true.

However, quitting activities that she loved only made it worse. Rather than suffering in silence, Lynn decided to use art to channel her frustrations and express herself. She found that drawing and painting helped her relax and cope with the negativity brought on by cyberbullying. Support from her family and friends also helped her stay positive.

Lynn became an advocate for combating cyberbullying by speaking out about her experiences. She now shares her story about the negative impact cyberbullying can have in hopes of changing teens' perceptions about the words they use online.

Using what you have learned in this chapter, write a one-page analysis of the story about Lynn. Your analysis should answer the following questions:

- 1 What types of cyberbullying did Lynn experience?
- 2 What were the negative impacts of the cyberbullying?
- 3 How did Lynn cope with the cyberbullying?
- 4 What do you think is the most important thing you can learn from Lynn's story? Why?



Hands-On

Dealing with Cyberbullying

Coping with cyberbullying is no easy task, but knowing the right moves to make when faced with a bully can make the situation easier to handle.

Read the scenario below and help Jin figure out what to do by writing five steps he can take to deal with the cyberbully. Think about solutions, such as blocking the bully or reporting the incident. Use complete sentences and examples from this chapter in your answers. Then create a poster or multimedia presentation of the five steps, and present your solutions to the class.

Scenario:

Jin is a freshman in high school. He uses Facebook regularly. His online profile lists his email address, interests, favorite movies, and cell phone number. While he likes using Facebook, he is frustrated with his email, because lately he is receiving up to 50 emails a day from an email address that he doesn't know. He suspects it could be someone from school, but he's not sure. The messages include insults about his personal life, and they are getting increasingly offensive. After a few weeks, the hateful messages spread to his cell phone, and he is bombarded with mean texts all day.

Not sure where to start?

Review the Coping with Cyberbullying section of this chapter or visit these websites:

- www.stopcyberbullying.org
- www.kidshealth.org