

## **Cyberbullying and Online Cruelty**

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.

### **WATCH: Video– Ricardo’s Story**

1. Do you think Ricardo is a cyberbully? Why or why not?
2. What does Ricardo mean when he says that information “gets around really quick”?
3. 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?

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

**TARGET:** A person who is the object of an intentional action

**OFFENDER:** A person who has malicious intent to hurt or damage someone

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.

### **WATCH: Video - Stacey's Story**

**ESCALATE:** To increase or make more intense

**DE-ESCALATE:** To decrease or make less intense

**BYSTANDER:** A person who does nothing when they witness something happening

**UPSTANDER:** A person who supports and stands up for someone else

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?

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.”)

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?

**The following are some ways that targets and upstanders can help de-escalate online cruelty.**

**For Targets:**

- Ignore and block the bully. Offenders often want attention. Take it away and they may give up.
- Save the evidence. You may need it later for documentation.
- Change your privacy settings. Allow only people you trust to see or comment on your pages.
- Tell trusted friends and adults. Create a support network.

**For Upstanders:**

- Stand up to the offender when appropriate. 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.)
- Point out the bully’s motivation to the target. Comfort the target by explaining that many offenders act cruelly just to gain control, power, or status.
- Help the target advocate. 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.

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

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

Have you ever witnessed cyberbullying and not gotten involved, but later wished you had? What prevented you from taking action? What might you do differently if it happened again? Why is it important to take action to de-escalate online cruelty whenever you witness it?

Online cruelty has, in a few cases, led to teen suicides, attempted suicides, or teens stating that they want to take their lives. Fortunately, this is not the norm. Think about what factors might escalate cruelty to such a serious level that it would make the target feel this desperate, and what factors can de-escalated it. Think about what steps you should take if you believe a classmate is seriously distressed or depressed as a result of cyberbullying. You should understand that in such situations, in addition to trying to de-escalate it, you need to tell trusted adults what is going on.

Here are some more links about real-life stories about cyberbullying, including tragedies, and some strategies.

ABC News, "Cruel Kids, Tragic

Ends"<http://abcnews.go.com/Primetime/video?id=2443795>

CBS News, "Officials: Suicidal Teen Was Cyber-

bullied"<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/01/27/earlyshow/leisure/gamesgadgets/gizmos/main6146385.shtml>

The Westport Patch, "Westport Student Issues YouTube

Plea to Bullies"<http://westport.patch.com/articles/westport-student-issues-youtube-plea-to-bullies>



DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP IN A CONNECTED CULTURE

©2011 [www.commonsense.org](http://www.commonsense.org) [Terms of Use](#)