



# Turn Down the Dial on Cyberbullying and Online Cruelty

Estimated time: 45 minutes

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

## Learning Overview and Objectives

*Overview:* Students learn that cruelty can escalate quickly online because people are often anonymous and posts spread quickly. They view the **Connected Culture Video Vignette – Ricardo’s Story**, and identify the factors that contribute to online cruelty. Students then watch the **Student Video Vignette – Stacey’s Story**, 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.

### objectives

*Students will:*

- 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

### Digital Ethics Focus:

Self

Family and Friends

Community

## Materials and Preparation

### Materials

- **Connected Culture Video Vignette – Ricardo’s Story**
- **Connected Culture Student Video Vignette – Stacey’s Story**
- **Dial It Down Student Handout**
- **Dial It Down Student Handout – Teacher Version**

### Preparation

- Download and be prepared to play these two videos for the class: (1) **Connected Culture Video Vignette – Ricardo’s Story**, and (2) **Student Video Vignette – Stacey’s Story**
- Copy the **Dial It Down Student Handout**, one for every student

### Parent Resources

- Send home the **Cyberbullying Parent Tip Sheet for High School Students**

## Differentiated Instruction

Have students develop an anonymous school survey on incidents of cyberbullying (including how often students have acted as upstanders, bystanders, and offenders). ELL students can write the survey in both their native language and in English.

## 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



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- **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

## teaching plans

### Introduce (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 **Connected Culture Student Video Vignette — Ricardo’s Story**

- ASK** 1. *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.)
2. *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.)
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?* (Guide students to think about how people may cyberbully online because they do not have to face their target and can “hide” behind their computers. On the other hand, conflicts that start online often go offline at some point.)

**ASK** *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)

**TEACH** the Key Vocabulary words **escalate**, **de-escalate**, **bystander**, and **upstander**.

**SHOW** the **Student Video Vignette — Stacey’s Story**, 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?*

- *Target: Stacey, whose intentions are misunderstood and who feels beaten down by being picked on offline and online*



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- *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*

**ASK** 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.)

**ASK** 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.)

**ASK** 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.)

## 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: In the upper grades, 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



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on their own (e.g., <http://www.news-sentinel.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20110328/NEWS/103280322>, or you can assign stories from this set of scenarios, created by the Cyberbullying Resource Center: [http://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.

## Wrap Up and Assess (5 minutes)

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives. Alternatively, ask students to write a text or tweet that answers each question. Messages should be no more than 140 characters.

**ENCOURAGE** students to discuss how to apply what they have learned to situations in their own lives. Have they ever witnessed cyberbullying and not gotten involved, but later wished they had? What prevented them from taking action? What might they do differently if it happened again? Why is it important to take action to de-escalate online cruelty whenever they witness it?

**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*



## Extension Activity

Explain to students that online cruelty has, in a few cases, led to teen suicides, attempted suicides, or teens stating that they want to take their lives. But make sure students know this is not the norm. Then show students one of the following videos: two are about a teen who took his or her own life after becoming the target of online cruelty, and one is about a teen who makes a plea to the bullies. Have students break into small groups and record their ideas about what factors escalated the cruelty to such a serious level, and what might have de-escalated it. Invite students to share their findings with the class. Then discuss as a class what steps they should take if they believe a classmate is seriously distressed or depressed as a result of cyberbullying. Students should understand that in such situations, in addition to trying to de-escalate it, they need to tell trusted adults what is going on.

- ABC News, "Cruel Kids, Tragic Ends"

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



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- 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>



## Homework

Have students review the school’s bullying policy. If your school does not have a policy, have students find a sample policy online. Instruct them to study the policy and determine if there are clear guidelines for identifying and dealing with online cruelty in the school. Encourage them to suggest things they would like to see added or changed. You may wish to share these suggestions with administrators.

What did others do in response? What do you wish they had done?

### Alignment with Standards – National Educational Technology Standards for Students® 2007

(Source: International Society for Technology in Education, 2007)

#### 1. Creativity and Innovation

- apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products, or processes
- identify trends and forecast possibilities

#### 2. Communication and Collaboration

- interact, collaborate, and publish with peers, experts, or others employing a variety of digital environments and media
- contribute to project teams to produce original works or solve problems

#### 3. Research and Information Literacy

- locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use information from a variety of sources and media
- use multiple processes and diverse perspectives to explore alternative solutions

#### 4. Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

- identify and define authentic problems and significant questions for investigation
- plan and manage activities to develop a solution or complete a project
- use multiple processes and diverse perspectives to explore alternative solutions

#### 5. Digital Citizenship

- advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology
- exhibit a positive attitude toward using technology that supports collaboration, learning, and productivity

Common Sense Media is an independent, nonprofit resource that helps families and educators teach kids how to be safe and smart in today’s 24/7 media world. Go to [www.commonsensemedia.org](http://www.commonsensemedia.org) for thousands of reviews and expert advice.