Youth Cyberbullying: from understanding to prevention
Follow-up Q&A from webinar on April 2, 2020

A special thank you to the [University of Buffalo's Alberti Center for Bullying Abuse Prevention](#) and the [New York State Center for School Safety](#) for their help with answering the questions below:

1) During this uncertain time, students may be exhibiting behavior changes due to social distancing. In addition, they are spending more time online and on phones doing schoolwork and connecting with peers. What should parents be looking for if they are concerned their child is being bullied?

This is a great question! Although we do not know for certain, cyberbullying rates may increase with more frequent use of technology by students during this time. Many of the "signs" that parents should look out for still apply: hiding their screen or devices frequently, avoiding talking about they are doing online, exhibiting emotional responses to what is happening online (e.g., distress, anger), avoiding social situations (in this case online social interactions) or becoming withdrawn, depressed, or losing interest in social activities online. If your child or teenager is exhibiting behavior that is different from before and it is impacting their ability to function on a daily basis (e.g., complete schoolwork, engage with friends online, participate in family activities, exercise), talk with them to find out why.

Especially during this time, parents should talk with their children about being safe and respectful online. Be sure to let them know that their use of technology will not be restricted if they report cyberbullying, as this is a common reason why youth do not report it. Visit this [resource](#) from PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center for guidance.

2) I am grandparent raising my grandchildren; this is new to me! How can I learn more?

It can be incredibly overwhelming to stay updated on apps that children and teens are using. Common Sense Media is a helpful site that includes [parents' guides](#) to popular apps, such as TikTok, YouTube and Snapchat. All information and resources for parent on bullying and cyberbullying applies to grandparents, relatives, and/or friends raising children. A key to bullying prevention is developing and maintaining a positive relationship with the child that allows for open communication.

3) Some people may excuse bullying as "being assertive" or "playful". What <u>is</u> and what <u>isn't</u> bullying?

Bullying behavior is unwanted acts of aggression from a peer or a group of peers that is repeated or likely to be repeated. There are many different forms of bullying from physical acts, such as kicking, punching or physically damaging a person's belongings, to verbal, such as offensive remarks directly towards a peer. Bullying can also be indirect, such as behavior intended to damage a person's relationships, such as gossiping. In order for purposeful, unwanted aggressive behavior to be deemed "bullying," there are two additional conditions: 1) there must be a perceived or real imbalance of power or a perceived imbalance of power between the victim and perpetrator, and 2) the behavior must be repeated or at least have the potential to be repeated. Together, the three components of bullying (intent to cause harm, repetition, and power imbalance) make bullying distinct from assertiveness and playfulness (e.g., teasing between two friends).

It is clear that based on these definitions, not everything is bullying. However, it can be somewhat difficult to determine when playfulness crosses the line and becomes bullying. Although some behavior may be perceived as being "playful" or "assertive" to one person, we should think about how the behavior might be perceived from the other person. For more information, visit Alberti Center's fact sheet for [parents and educators](#).

4) What are some things schools can do to address bullying while in a remote environment?

Schools should continue to enforce any bullying prevention/intervention procedures during this time (e.g., reporting procedures). School administrators (e.g., principals) and teachers can remind students that safe and respectful behavior is expected in the online environment, just as it was expected within school walls. Efforts to maintain a positive school climate through school-wide/classroom-wide messages on social media or other online platforms and checking in with students as much as possible will be helpful in cyberbullying prevention.

Schools may wish to emphasize digital citizenship skills during this time. Common Sense Education offers free digital citizenship lessons plans for grades K-12 that could be modified for an online environment. These also include home resources under "Parents Need to Know." Providing parents with resources on cyberbullying (e.g., what it is, prevention strategies, and what to do if their child reports cyberbullying to them) may be beneficial, too; visit Alberti Center's cyberbullying fact sheet for more information.

5) Any information regarding DASA for schools and remote learning related to cyberbullying?

We are not aware of any specific information that NYSED has put out about DASA during COVID-19 except the guidance that the face-to-face DASA training requirement can be done online. We will share any new information, should it become available from NYSED.

6) Some key staff in my school do not view bullying as a significant problem but it is! How do we get everyone to commit to addressing this problem?

Begin by collecting school-wide data on the prevalence and types of bullying to inform prevention and intervention efforts specific for your school. Data can be collected along with student and staff perceptions of school climate and safety.

Preventing bullying cannot happen without the support of the entire school community, especially administrators and school-based mental health professionals. It may be helpful to frame bullying prevention efforts within existing tiered frameworks for promoting a positive school climate and social emotional development. Instead of thinking about bullying prevention as a separate "to do," efforts may be more effective if tied into existing initiatives supported by school administration and staff. In particular, school psychologists are uniquely positioned to help with bullying prevention through their knowledge of systems-level change and youth mental health. For more comprehensive information on frameworks for bullying prevention, please refer to the National Association of School Psychologists' bullying resources.

8) How do you handle a situation where your child has an app that is inappropriate for their age?

Apps are readily available and can make the Internet an enhanced experience, but this can be very challenging when parents and children have different views on what is appropriate. The Cyberbullying Research Center offers a lot of information, including technology use contracts.

It is best to be open and honest with your child about their behavior online and any apps they may be using. Explain why the app might be harmful or unsafe for them. Some apps do allow for a kid-friendly experience and could be utilized under parent supervision or collaboratively with a parent. Further, certain apps allow for certain parental controls within the specific app (e.g., turn off chatting, hiding profiles). Taking the opportunity to educate your child about the concerns and emphasizing healthier alternatives may be helpful. Common Sense Media is an excellent resource for parents on apps, TV shows, and movies. This website offers detailed information and guides for parents about specific apps. Internetmatters.org also offers specific guidance on apps.