

BULLYING AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION

TWELFTH GRADE

LESSON 3

TITLE: What Do We Think?

PURPOSE: To increase students' awareness about the problems of cyberbullying and develop greater empathy for the targets of online social cruelty.

OBJECTIVES: The student will be able to:

- explore their civic responsibility to make the Internet a safe space
- work to change the social norms in their school community.

SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS: LA. 1112.4.2.2, 1112.1.6.1, 1112.1.6.4

STUDENT SERVICES BENCHMARKS AND STANDARDS: PS 1.1, 1.2, 2.1

VOCABULARY: bystander, civic, cyberbullying, exclusion, harassment

INSTRUCTIONAL TIME: 60 Minutes

PREPARATION/INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS:

- dry erase board and markers
- Xerox copies of handout 12-1, 12-2 (one per student)
- A teacher copy of handout 12-3
- A teacher copy of handout 12-4

SPRINGBOARD ACTIVITY:

- 1) A day before the lesson, have students fill out the survey on handout: What Do We Think? Explain that they should answer each question twice, once based on what they believe and once based on what they think the majority of their peers believe. Emphasize that the survey is anonymous.
- 2) Collect the surveys and tally student responses by calculating both the average numerical response for each item and the number of students who chose 4 (agree) or 5 (strongly agree) for each item.

ACTIVITY:

- 1) Introduce the concept of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is willful and repeated harm inflicted through electronic media. Review the following points with your students:
 - a) Some forms include flaming, harassment, denigration, exclusion, impersonation, outing and trickery; see Glossary of Cyberbullying Terms for definitions on handout 12-2.
 - b) Common vehicles include social networking sites (MySpace, Facebook, etc.), other Web sites, chat rooms, e-mail, instant messaging, text/picture/video messages, gaming sites, blogs and message boards.)
 - c) Go over some of their own experiences with cyberbullying and how he/she responds when it happens.

- 2) Suggest that one reason many young people put up with online bullying and cruelty has to do with something called *social norms*. Explain to students what this means and how it relates to cyberbullying by paraphrasing from the reading, Background for Educators: Social Norms Theory on handout 12-3.

- 3) Tell students that the survey they filled out on handout 12-1: Online Behavior: What Do We Think?, is meant to demonstrate how social norms work. Randomly redistribute the surveys filled out earlier, one to each student. Ask students to stand if the survey they received indicates that the individual (who filled it out) agrees (4) or strongly agrees (5) with the first statement. Have everyone look around before sitting down. Next ask people to stand if the survey in their hand indicates that the typical peer agrees (4) or strongly agrees (5) with the statement. Have everyone look around again before sitting down. Repeat this process for the remaining three statements. Summarize the results of this survey by posting or verbally sharing the tally you compiled in step #2 above, then discuss the following questions:
 - a. What did you observe during this exercise? (Most often, individuals believe that their own online behavior and attitudes are different from their peer's behavior and attitudes.)
 - b. How do you think that this misperception affects people's behavior? (Students are more likely to take part in negative online behavior and less likely to stand up to it.)
 - c. Now that you have more accurate information about your peers' attitudes, how might this affect your behavior? (Students will feel more comfortable resisting cyberbullying and other forms of online

social cruelty, and acting as an ally to those who have been targeted.)

- 4) Ask students for concrete examples of how the four social norms listed on the survey play out in their day to day lives. Elicit stories that demonstrate, for example, how assumptions about the meaning of free speech have led students to say cruel things online; or how the unwritten code, “what happens online stays online,” has prevented students from reporting cyberbullying that they witnessed even though they knew it was wrong.
- 5) Ask students if they think that it is possible to change the social norms in a community.
- 6) Tell students that they are going to engage in an experiment to see if they can reshape the norms in their community around negative online behavior. Divide students into four groups and assign each group one of the following online social norms from the survey:
 - I have a free speech right to say whatever I want online.
 - On the Internet it is okay to reveal personal secrets for others to see.
 - What happens online should stay online.
 - What happens online is mostly a game, so no one can really get hurt.

Instruct each group to come up with a message for re-educating their peers about the norm they were assigned, to create a poster illustrating the message and to identify some strategies for disseminating their message.

- 7) Reconvene the class and have each group share its work. Ask students to come up with a name for the overall campaign and to create a plan for launching it in the school.
- 8) Distribute the handout 12-4: Internet Safety Strategies for Students, and review the information with students to reinforce safe and responsible Internet use. Send the handout home for students to share and discuss with family members.

ASSESSMENT: Teacher observation, class participation and completion of activity.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY: Send handout 12-4:Internet Safety Strategies for Students home with students. Ask students to review the sheet with their parents and bring it back signed.

Online Behavior: What do we Think?

For each of the statements below, circle the numbers that most closely correspond with both your own belief and the belief you feel is typically held by members of your peer group.

1=strongly disagree; **2**=disagree; **3**=unsure; **4**=agree; **5**=strongly agree

1. I have a free speech right to say whatever I want online.

a. Your response 1 2 3 4 5

b. Your peers' typical response 1 2 3 4 5

2. On the Internet it is okay to reveal personal secrets for others to see.

a. Your response 1 2 3 4 5

b. Your peers' typical response 1 2 3 4 5

3. What happens online should stay online.

a. Your response 1 2 3 4 5

b. Your peers' typical response 1 2 3 4 5

4. What happens online is mostly a game, so no one can really get hurt.

a. Your response 1 2 3 4 5

b. Your peers' typical response 1 2 3 4 5

Glossary of Cyberbullying Terms

The following reflect the most common forms of cyberbullying, though this list is not exhaustive.

Flaming: Online fights using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language.

Harassment: Repeatedly sending offensive, rude and insulting messages.

Cyberstalking: Repeatedly sending message that include threats of harm or are highly intimidating; engaging in other online activities that make a person afraid for his or her safety.

Denigration: “Dissing” someone online. Sending or posting cruel gossip or rumors about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships.

Exclusion: Intentionally excluding someone from an online group, like a “buddy list” or a game.

Trolling: Intentionally posting provocative messages about sensitive subjects to create conflict, upset people, and bait them into “flaming” or fighting.

Impersonation: Breaking into someone’s account, posing as that person and sending messages to make the person look bad, get that person in trouble or danger, or damage that person's reputation or friendships.

Outing and trickery: Sharing someone’s secrets or embarrassing information online. Tricking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information, which is then shared online.

Background for Educators: Social Norms Theory

Social norms are people's beliefs about the attitudes and behaviors that are normal, acceptable, or even expected in a particular social context. In many situations, people's perceptions of these norms will greatly influence their behavior. When people misperceive the norms of their peer group—that is when they inaccurately think an attitude or behavior is more (or less) common than is actually the case—they may choose to engage in behaviors that are in sync with those false norms.¹ Pluralistic Ignorance is the term that is used in academia to discuss social norms theory and refers to the incorrect belief that one's private attitudes, judgments or behavior are different from others.

Social norms theory has been most commonly applied to the problem of excessive alcohol consumption on college campuses. Many studies have shown that college students overestimate how much their peers drink. Prevention experts have argued that this misperception of the norm drives greater alcohol consumption. A growing body of evidence suggests that providing information to students about accurate drinking norms is associated with decreased drinking on campus.

With regard to cyberbullying, many youth may falsely believe that online rumors, teasing and cruelty are approved of by their peers and that it would invite ostracism to refuse to participate in or to take a stand against such behavior. This misperception may cause young people to avoid acting as an ally to the targets of cyberbullying and to even engage in negative behaviors with which they privately feel uncomfortable. Over time, online social aggression may become normalized for youth, and they may become desensitized to its damaging effects on others. However, interventions that correct students' misperceptions by demonstrating that most young people don't find online cruelty to be "cool" could provide students with the awareness and confidence needed to avoid cyberbullying behavior and to speak out against it.

¹ From Higher Education Center. Social Norms and Social Marketing, www.edc.org/hec/socialnorms (accessed January 2008).

INTERNET SAFETY STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS

Before going online...

Talk with parents/guardians about rules for going online, such as the time of day and length of time you can be online, and sites you are allowed to visit. Do not visit other areas or break these rules without their permission.

Remember that no message is completely private, including e-mail and text messages. Your school and adult family members may be watching your online activity, and police can recover all messages, even if you have deleted them. If you are using the Internet to harm others, chances are you will be caught and punished.

Be aware that many Internet Service Providers have rules about online 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.

Make sure that you limit your internet use to a reasonable amount of time and ask yourself if you are keeping a healthy balance between online and in-person activities.

While online...

Never share private information about others and never say things that might violate the safety or rights of others, even if you mean it as a “joke.”

Limit the amount of personal information you share online and don't post your full name, school name, home address, phone number, and personal photos in places where strangers can find them.

Never share passwords, account IDs or PINs with others (even your best friend), with the exception of your parents/guardians—never hide this information from them.

Don't leave cell phones or other personal electronics (such as a laptop, iPhone, Blackberry, PDA, etc.) out of your sight.

Remember that some people are dishonest about their identity online. Avoid chatting with strangers on the Internet. A friend you meet online may not be the best person to talk to if you are having problems.

Never send your picture or personal information to someone you only know online, and never meet an online friend in person without a parent's/guardian's permission.

Do not open messages or attachments from people you don't know.

If you are the target of online bullying or aggression...

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

Discuss any online incidents that make you feel uncomfortable with a trusted adult, such as a family member, teacher or school counselor.

Always report online bullying, hate incidents, inappropriate sexual activity and threats of harm to self or others to an adult family member (such as a parent), school authorities and the police.

Block the e-mail addresses and cell phone numbers of people who are sending unwanted messages; if the messages continue, an adult family member can help you to change your phone numbers, e-mail addresses or screen names.

File complaints with e-mail services, Internet Service Providers, Web sites, cell phone companies, etc. Service providers can find the offenders, cancel their service, and report them to the police if necessary.

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