

Cyberbullying

Getting started: If this is the first time that participants are meeting each other, consider using one of the icebreaker activities found in our Facilitator's Guide.



What makes cyberbullying so toxic, invasive, and harmful? How do teens think about cyberbullying — and how can they help be part of the solution instead of part of the problem? Cyberbullying has been a major buzzword over the past several years, with a distressing number of headlines calling attention to every parent's worst nightmares: school expulsions, arrests, youth suicides. Thankfully, many schools and young people are now taking a stand against cyberbullying, and children are stepping forward to demonstrate empathy and kindness.

Key Vocabulary

cyberbullying

Cyberbullying involves online harassment or cruelty, and is often characterized by repeated or ongoing incidents.

The Case, Part 1

Note: In order to authentically capture the issue, we have drawn on real cases, which have elements that some parents may find distressing.

In our work with teens, the Amanda Todd story comes up often as an example of a deeply upsetting cyberbullying case. It is a story of bullying and cyberbullying with the most tragic and extreme ending imaginable: Amanda Todd took her own life at the age of 15. Shortly before she committed suicide, Amanda posted a heart-wrenching video on YouTube telling her story. In the video, she shares her experience by flipping through a series of flashcards.

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyHX7wMJBY0>

Amanda explains in the video that she would “go with friends on webcam” when she was in seventh grade and got a lot of positive feedback, including being called beautiful and stunning. Eventually, she was asked to flash the camera. She did, and the person with whom she was chatting took a picture and sent it out widely. She changed schools, but the photo followed her: He created a Facebook page using her exposed picture and friended people from her new school. She again lost her friends, and she again moved schools. Yet, both the stories of her mistakes and the bullying — on and offline — continued to follow Amanda.



This YouTube video is approximately 8 minutes long. Preview the video to decide if you will show it to the group or if you'd rather read through the description below of the case. If you choose to show the video, load it beforehand so that you don't have to deal with it buffering during the viewing.

When Amanda posted her story, she also shared the following description accompanying her video, “I’m struggling to stay in this world, because everything just touches me so deeply. I’m not doing this for attention. I’m doing this to be an inspiration and to show that I can be strong. I did things to myself to make pain go away, because I’d rather hurt myself than someone else. Haters are haters but please don’t hate, although im sure I’ll get them. I hope I can show you guys that everyone has a story, and everyones future will be bright one day, you just gotta pull through. I’m still here aren’t I?”

Distressingly, people left cruel comments on the video, even after Amanda’s death. The case is horrific and extreme. However, it serves as a powerful entry point for teens to share their reactions to bullying and cyberbullying. In the following clip, a group of teens share their reactions to the Amanda Todd story and their thoughts on what could have been done to help.

Watch Teens React to Bullying (Amanda Todd) from 3:50 – 7:00 minutes (~ 3 minutes).

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF6cmddWOgU>

Prepare to show this case’s two videos. Make sure this video is cued up beforehand to the proper starting point. Load the second video as well to prevent it from buffering.



Consider

- What strikes you about the teens’ reactions?
- Is there a particular comment from the Teens React video that stands out for you? Why?
- One of the teens suggests that it’s “the parents’ fault.” Do you agree that parents are responsible for how their kids treat others online?
- How do you think parents can help in situations of bullying and cyberbullying?
- What seems similar or different about cyberbullying compared to offline bullying? Do the two require similar or different interventions to support kids?
- As a parent, when (if ever) would you get involved with a cyberbullying incident? What would you consider in deciding how to respond?
- The teens share a range of reactions regarding what should happen when people post cruel comments online, including a firm but vague sense that “something should happen” and more concrete suggestions like revoking accounts, removing the comment box, or shutting down the websites. What do you think is an effective response to online cruelty?

Don’t fear disagreement. If parents in your group take strong opposing opinions and the discussion is getting heated, you may want to comment on the value of learning about the range of different perspectives in the community. This can help encourage a flow of diverse perspectives and remind everyone of the discussion’s purpose.

Not an expert? No problem. If someone asks a question and you’re not sure how to respond, don’t panic! You are a facilitator; you’re not expected to be the expert. You can turn the question to the group: “I actually don’t know the answer to that, does anyone else have any experience with that kind of situation?”

The Case, Part 2

In the Teens React video, they suggest that Amanda “just really needed a friend.” Social media platforms can be part of the problem, but they can also be a powerful component of the solution. Pause to watch the “We are all Daniel Cui” video and consider how the students and Daniel Cui’s school stood up against cyberbullying.

Watch We Are All Daniel Cui: (~ 3 minutes)



<https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=3824560741502>



Consider

- What is your immediate reaction to the video?
- What do you think made the biggest difference for Daniel? Why was his peers’ reaction to the incident so impactful?
- What do you hope for your kids when they see cyberbullying happening in their online lives? What is your minimum expectation and what is your hope?

Wrapping up: Feel free to look at the tip sheet together and invite reactions. You can again invite people to read quietly and then react by posing questions, such as: *Which of these tips resonates most for you? Are there any tips you would definitely try? What is missing?*

If you are running low on time, distribute the tip sheets at the end of your meeting. The trick is to make sure people are leaving with some concrete information, rather than feeling overwhelmed and wondering what to do next.

Cunningham, Calvin. “FULL VIDEO: Amanda Todd: Struggling, Bullying, Suicide, Self Harm, Fighting.” *YouTube* Video, 8:15. September 2, 2014.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyHX7wMJB0>

TheFineBros. “Teens React to Bullying (Amanda Todd).” *YouTube* Video, 14:42. September 2, 2014.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF6cmddWOgU>