



Plugged-In Parents: Cyberbullying and Digital Drama

Script: Cyberbullying and Digital Drama Presentation



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Plugged-In Parents: Cyberbullying and Digital Drama
Keeping kids safe, happy, and healthy in the digital age.

Title Slide



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We are
We are a trusted guide for the families, educators, and advocates who help kids thrive. We provide resources to harness the power of media and technology, and to shape public policy to improve the well-being of every child.

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Cyberbullying
Cyberbullying is...
Digging, targeted harassment via digital communication that's often anonymous to the child being hurt.

We hear a lot about cyberbullying, but what is it really?

Basically, bullying is ongoing harassment meant to bring down someone (or elevate the perpetrator); cyberbullying is the same thing, only using digital tools.

It can take lots of forms that we'll talk about, and kids also experience digital drama that technically isn't bullying but can still cause distress.



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AT&T created a short film called "There's a Soul Behind That Screen" that features clips from teen-created films about cyberbullying. Some of the short films are documentary-style and some are dramatized. Common Sense worked with AT&T to create the parent advice content that accompanies the film. You will receive this packet as you leave today. We'll watch several clips from the film during the presentation, starting with the **teen take on social media and cyberbullying**.

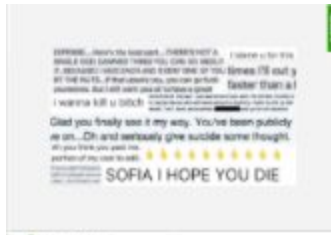
(Play video)



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Cyberbullying is our main concern, but **digital drama can actually take lots of forms**.

It's more than saying mean things about a person. In fact, some of the stress a teen can feel about online interactions isn't about bullying but other kinds of pressure and anxiety.



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But in general, parents are most concerned with **online cruelty**, so we'll first talk about some of the forms that can take:

- **Flaming:** Basically a heated, online argument with lots of insults thrown back and forth. These are instigated by the bully on a regular basis, and the victim retaliates.
- **Threats:** Anonymity makes it easier to threaten violence or other harm.
- **Trolling:** The constant stream of negative comments.



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Then there are slightly **subtler and sneakier** forms, some of which are meant to be mean and some which are driven by other motivations:

- **Revenge porn:** If a teen has shared any nude or suggestive pictures, and an ex wants to get back at them for something, the ex will share the pictures far and wide.
- **Subtweeting:** Tweeting about someone without @-ing them (mentioning them by name)/using their handle, so the victim doesn't necessarily see the mean tweets or can't be sure they're about him/her.
- **Outing:** You tell your friend something personal one day, then you get into a fight. She reveals that information to everyone.
- **Excluding:** Often, this is unintentional, which means it's not bullying, but when kids post pictures of an event knowing an uninvited person will see the pictures and feel bad (and does it more than once), that's bullying. It can also mean unfriending.
- **Pressuring/smothering:** This can take lots of forms -- pressuring for sexy pictures, having the passcode to a phone, being in constant contact, etc.
- **Impersonating/hacking/spying:** Making a fake account in someone else's name.
- **Rumors:** They've always existed, but digital forums make it easier to spread them

to more people.



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There's been quite a bit of research in recent years around cyberbullying, but **statistics vary widely** in both directions.

What we can take away from the wide range of reporting:

- It **doesn't happen to every kid**, but minor types are probably underreported because kids aren't in major distress and don't think of it as cyberbullying.
- **In-person bullying is still more common.**
- However, despite the **low prevalence**, when it's a serious case, it's **high impact**.
 - One embarrassing picture sent to lots of people can have real negative consequences on a kid's life, and they can potentially be long-lasting.



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The **consequences** of cyberbullying can vary widely depending on lots of factors.

- For some kids it's a bummer, but they **bounce back** quickly.
- For others it's really hard in the moment and impactful but quickly becomes a **bad memory**. (Play video No. 1.)
- For others still, it's totally **devastating**. (Play video No. 2.)



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Many people wonder why: **Why** do kids and teens bully each other online? For all of the same reasons kids (and adults) have always bullied each other:

- To gain positive attention and social standing.
- To feel powerful.
- Because they're angry at a friend.
- Because they meant to tease and it got serious.
- Because they were bullied.

Sometimes, kids begin by teasing each other, and things ramp up. Also, since tween and teen friendships sometimes flip quickly, hurt feelings can spur on cyberbullying. Often, bullying comes from a place of pain, powerlessness, and insecurity, though it doesn't look like that on the surface. Kids who are reacting in anger may intend to hurt someone, but sometimes bullies aren't focused at all on the pain they're causing and are mostly motivated by the acceptance and power the bullying might cause.



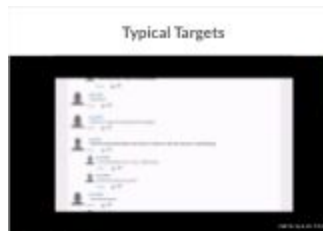
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So how is online bullying different?

- **Disinhibition** is the sense of being **anonymous and disconnected** from others' feelings that allows someone to behave in a way they may not in a face-to-face situation. Certainly in-person bullying is still a problem, but for most people, it's much easier to be mean from behind a screen when you're not looking someone in the eye.
- It's not just limited to the hallway or a bus stop. Now kids can comment, text, subtweet, screenshot, and impersonate on **lots of platforms**, so it feels like there's **no escape**.
- Also, the **reach is much wider**, so someone can send an embarrassing screenshot to 50 people in less than a minute and not see the impact on the victim.

- The way we communicate online takes many forms, and people like to **one-up each other** with memes, jokes, and comments. It can be easy to get lost in the banter and lose sight of the person being bullied.

(Play video.)



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- **Anyone and everyone** can be a target of cyberbullying in any of its forms.
- Research shows **white and Latina girls** are most often targets (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2015).
- However, there are groups that are more targeted both for in-person and cyberbullying:
 - **LGTBQ** kids.
 - Kids with **disabilities and/or learning differences**.
 - Kids who are **foreign-born**.
 - Clothes and general "**awkwardness**" are reasons reported by teens as well.

(Play video.)



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How do you know if it's happening to your kid?

First, let's talk about what a **typical tween/teen** might be experiencing to set a baseline for what's "normal" and "outside the norm." Of course, there's a lot of variation, and you know your kid best, so these are just some **overall generalities**.

On our site we outline what's happening for kids at certain ages **based on child development research**.

Here are some **characteristics/preoccupations** you might see as your kid hits puberty and beyond:

- **Popularity** and pecking order.
 - Worried about social status.
- **Growing independence** and distancing from family.
 - Can seem secretive, rebellious.
- **Concern about appearance**, especially in the eyes of peers.
 - What other kids think of them becomes very important.
- **Strong and swinging emotions**.
 - Hormonal changes can cause big feelings and quick changes in them.
- **Exploration of sexual identity**.
 - Desire to learn about, explore, and take on sexual identities.
- **Trying on different identities**.
 - Play with social roles, interests, and beliefs.
- **Lack of consideration for consequences**.
 - Biologically less able to consider consequences of actions and more likely to take risks, can feel invincible.



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What's tricky for parents is that the **signs of cyberbullying can overlap** with what's considered "normal" behavior for this age group.

- Kids **withdraw** and become more secretive.
- They're more **emotional** and volatile.
- Their behavior and **identity can shift**.

So it can be hard to guess what's happening for your kid if they won't tell you.

- One clue is that they're either **glued to a device** in an even more obsessive way than normal and full of angst around it, or they suddenly stop using their phone and try to **avoid being online**.
- Another is how long it lasts: If your kid **stays upset, anxious, and withdrawn** over the course of a few days, something is happening.
- While it may not be cyberbullying, it's likely a **good idea to ask**.

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While it can be tricky to tell what's actually happening with your teen, these behaviors fall outside of typical development and **require professional intervention**:

- **Self-harm.**
 - Cutting, burning, or otherwise inflicting harm on self.
- **Suicidal thoughts/ideation.**
 - Talking or writing about or referring to suicide or having a plan for how to do it.
- **Total withdrawal.**
 - Quits activities, won't see friends, won't talk or share with family, stays isolated.

One quick, accessible resource is the **Crisis Text Line**: You text 741741 to be connected with a counselor any day, any time.

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So what do we do?

First things first: If it's not happening to your kid right this minute, you can work on **preventing it** or at least fostering good communication and strategies if it ever occurs.

- Kids start bullying behavior young, so start **talking about it early** (ideally before a kid has a cell phone).
 - **Encourage empathy** early and often; try to help your kid see others' perspectives and understand others' feelings.
- As your kid goes online more often, talk through **potential scenarios and strategies**.
 - What can cyberbullying look like?
 - What information/content should they keep offline?
 - How do they block someone on different platforms?

- How do they take a screenshot on different devices?
- When is it time to get adult help?
- **Stay involved.**
 - It can be tempting to stay out of a kid's digital life because that's what they'd prefer (and it's not always easy to stay involved), but spot checks and check-ins can set the stage for more open communication later.
- **Set limits.**
 - Having a family plan around device-free times and zones, as well as rules around use not only keeps you all on the same page but also can help make sure the conversation around being online is ongoing and open.
- **Model digital citizenship.**
 - Start asking your kid if it's OK to post pictures of them, so that maybe they'll do the same with friends.
 - Be kind online yourself.
- **Digital citizenship curriculum.**
 - Many schools address online behavior, but Common Sense offers a free curriculum that kids can use at home or at school.



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- If cyberbullying does happen, sometimes kids handle it themselves or with the support of peers. Sometimes they even opt to take a **device break** on their own until things blow over.
- If your kid is taking the lead and shows interest in having a **fun family day or time offline**, be ready to jump on the opportunity; it could be they're trying to avoid drama.
- But overall, in order to best support your kid, it's important to stay **engaged** and involved in their online lives to some extent.
 - **It doesn't mean you need to fully monitor or spy**, but it does mean asking questions, checking things out, and checking in with your kid regularly.
- It's also important to be **empathic** and really try to put yourself in their shoes.
 - Sometimes parents will tell kids to "**ignore it**" or to just turn off their devices for a while, but that's often **not realistic or helpful** since so much of a kid's social life takes place online.
 - **Leading with empathy and compassion** first may help a teen come to the conclusion that they can take a device break or find some other constructive ways to handle it. Often teens just need an understanding ear to feel better.
 - And if it turns out they need more intervention, it's still a good place to start.

- After showing empathy and being encouraging, remind them that, even though it might feel like the world is ending and they're alone, it's actually just **one moment in their lives** and lots of people who love and support them can put the situation in perspective.
 - Make sure to start with empathy because leading with encouragement can land as dismissive.
- Sometimes our tweens and teens seek out **another trusted adult** to talk to, and that's OK. If they're seeking support from someone you trust, that's a positive step.



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Sometimes cyberbullying is **tyed to behavior that you wouldn't be happy about**, like sexual activity, sending nude pictures, drinking, or other against-the-rules actions that can make your kid even more reluctant to talk about it.

- No matter what the circumstance, it's always good for your kid to know that when they're in a dangerous or hurtful situation, **their well-being comes first**. As with calling for a ride after drinking, we want our kids to be safe first and learn lessons later. So if your kid comes to you for help because a sexy pic got passed around, try to put anger, shock, and outrage aside and step into support mode. Listen, don't lecture.
- It's likely that whatever **natural consequences** they're facing will be enough of a lesson, but when the worst is over, then it's a good time to reinforce limits.
- If your kid is being accused, try to **reserve judgement**. We never want to believe our kids can be mean, but if they hurt someone -- accidentally or on purpose -- we don't want to jump to their defense out of the gate.
- If your kid comes to you or you find out about a situation, **avoid jumping on the phone** to another parent or the school. Lead with an attentive ear to see if intervention is necessary. Often, kids figure it out on their own or with friends, and it results in a better solution.

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If your kid's safety is in question, the harassment is pervasive and overwhelming, their overall well-being is in jeopardy, and/or your kid asks you to intervene, then it's **time to step in**.

- Make sure your kid is **blocking and reporting** online.
 - Though they may want to be able to monitor what someone is saying -- and it's easy for the bully to make new accounts -- it's still worth using the block and report features in the platforms where the bullying is happening.
 - Tell them not to retaliate: It only adds fuel to the fire. They will stand up for themselves, but in a more constructive way.
- **Gather evidence.**
 - Take screenshots, get names, save text threads, etc.
- **Involve the necessary parties** to shut it down.
 - Sometimes face-to-face mediation between the bully and victim can resolve matters.
 - School personnel will often step in if the bullying is happening during school hours and/or on campus.
 - Many states have anti-cyberbullying laws (in California, those convicted can get up to one year and/or a \$1,000 fine), and police intervention is sometimes necessary.



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The most powerful tool we have to combat cyberbullying is **upstanding**, or when kids stand up to the bully and stand up for each other (also known as "cyberback").

- Though it's necessary for adults to step in sometimes, **tweens and teens taking care of each other** is truly the best way to stop cyberbullying.
- If there's little social reward for the bully and **pushback from other peers**, it's more likely to stop.
- We can **encourage kids to have each other's backs** and remind each other how a post, comment, or shared picture might affect someone else.

Community and Culture



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Creating a **positive community** and having an **ongoing conversation** can go a long way.

- Ask your school if there's a **digital citizenship program** in place to help foster prevention (as mentioned previously, we offer a free curriculum), and find out about the cyberbullying policy at your kid's school.
- Fight tech with tech: There are a **couple of apps** that can help kids be kind and think things through.
 - Sit With Us is an app created by a teen who was cyberbullied, and it helps kids find people who will welcome them at school.
 - ReThink is a utility that creates a pop-up message when a text or post seems iffy. It encourages kids to rethink before they go public.
- Talking to other parents and their kids in your kid's orbit **before trouble starts** is a good way to open the lines of communication around these issues.
 - Discuss rules around phones at events, at night, and at sleepovers: What are the rules? What should kids avoid posting? What might be embarrassing or inappropriate? If a parent does a spot check, will you be embarrassed?
- **Know kids are going to make mistakes**, and you can support them as a community. The more parents can keep their cool and model how to handle matters, the more kids can do it, too.

Resources for Support



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We have tons of resources to support you -- you can **visit our site** to get more information!

- We have a great website.
- It's full of free content.
- Including reviews, parent advice, and lists that we've curated, so you can find exactly what you need.



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You got this! Don't forget that we are all in the same boat trying to navigate through these shifting challenges. In the end, it comes down to parenting basics: There's no one right answer, and you know your kid best.



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Thank you!

Make sure to get a handout that has some resources, including the link to the full film, "There's a Soul Behind That Screen." You can also sign up for our newsletters and follow us on social media. I'd love to answer some questions!