Turn Down the Dial on Cyberbullying

Essential Question

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

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to ...
- 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.

Materials and Preparation

- ▶ Videos downloaded from the AG Video File:

"**Ricardo's Story – Making Fun of Others Online**"

"**Stacey's Story – When Rumors Escalate**"

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

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

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.

PART 1: ▶ **SHOW** students the video "**Ricardo's Story – Making Fun of Others Online**." (*10 minutes*)

ASK:

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.
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.

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 devices. On the other hand, conflicts that start online often go offline at some point.

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 anytime, anywhere. And when more offenders join in the online cruelty, the situation gets even worse.

NOTES:

PART 2: **"Stacey's Story"** *(15 minutes)*

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary terms **escalate**, **de-escalate**, **bystander**, and **Upstander**.

▶ **SHOW** the video "**Stacey's Story – When Rumors Escalate**" 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?	Sample responses: • Target: Stacey, whose intentions are misunderstood and who feels beaten down by being picked on offline and online • 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
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.
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
• **Ignore and block the bully.** Offenders often want attention. Take it away and they may give up. • **Save the evidence**. You may need it later for documentation. • **Change your privacy settings.** Allow only people you trust to see or comment on your pages. • **Tell trusted friends and adults.** Create a support network.	• **Stand up to the offender when appropriate.** 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.) • **Point out the bully's motivation to the target.** Comfort the target by explaining that many offenders act cruelly just to gain control, power, or status. • **Help the target advocate.** 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.

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.
What might prevents a bystander from taking action? What advice would you give someone to convince them to be upstanding?	Bystanders may hesitate to get involved in a cyberbullying situation because they don't want to become targets themselves. Encourage students to put themselves in a target's shoes. What would it feel like if nobody wanted to help them out when they needed it most? Remind students that they can show support in many ways, even simply by listening to a target about his or her experience.

Wrap-up *(5 minutes)*

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives. You may want to ask students to reflect in writing on one of the questions, using a journal or an online blog/wiki.

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
What are some ways that online cruelty and cyberbullying can escalate, or intensify?	Sample responses: • When multiple people become involved in the cruelty or bullying • When the online cruelty becomes public, through posts, tagging, and comments • When people start sending threats
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.