Essential Question: What should you do when someone uses mean or scary language on the Internet?

Learning Overview and Objectives

Overview: Students consider that while they are enjoying their favorite websites they may encounter messages from other kids that can make them feel angry, hurt, sad, or fearful. They explore ways to handle cyberbullying and how to respond in the face of upsetting language online.

Students discuss all the ways they use technology for communication, put themselves in the shoes of children who are cyberbullied on a kids' game website, and explore both the similarities and differences between in-person versus online communication. Students then brainstorm ways to respond to cyberbullying.

objectives

Students will:

• Empathize with those who have received mean and hurtful messages

• Judge what it means to cross the line from harmless to harmful communication online

• Generate solutions for dealing with cyberbullying

Materials and Preparation

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Materials

• **Words Can Hurt Student Handout**

• **Talk and Take Action Student Handout**

• Colored pencils

• String

Preparation

• Copy the **Words Can Hurt Student Handout**, one for every four students

• Copy the **Talk and Take Action Student Handout**, one for every student

• Cut string the length of the classroom

Parent Resources

• Send parents the **Cyberbullying Parent Tip Sheet**

• Send parents the link to the *Connected Culture Parent/Teacher Video*

Key Vocabulary

• **Frustrated:** Irritated at not being able to do what you want

• **Cyberbully (verb):** Using technology tools such as the Internet and cell phones to deliberately upset someone else

• **Ethics:** Ideas about how people should act and behave

Introduce

INVITE students to share all the ways they enjoy going online and using digital media, such as cell phones and the Internet.

ASK
- *What are your favorite websites, if any?*
- *What are your favorite video games, if any?*
- *Who do you stay in touch with through cell phones and the Internet?*

ENCOURAGE students to share the positive feelings and experiences they have had with cell phones, the Internet, and other types of digital media.

Teach 1: What's the Problem?

ORGANIZE students into groups of four, and have each group pick a person to record their ideas.

DISTRIBUTE the **Words Can Hurt Student Handout**. Have the groups of students read the scenario about Rani and Aruna receiving mean messages through a children's game website.

HAVE each group answer the questions, and then have them share their responses with the class. Look for responses that show empathy for Rani and Aruna and acknowledge that the messages are mean and hurtful and should be stopped. Ask students to read the "A Matter of Ethics" section on the **Words Can Hurt Student Handout**.

INVITE students to share their own stories.

ASK *Have you seen mean messages sent to you or others online? Tell us about it, but do not use real names.*

PLACE students in pairs. INVITE one partner to write the phrase "You're weird" on a piece of paper, and then hand it to their partner. Tell them that they just received this text.

ASK *What are the reasons the person might have texted "You're weird"?* (They're continuing an inside joke; the first person did something silly at an earlier time; a group of kids is teasing the kid; the person who sent the text really does think the person is weird but is afraid to say it to their face.)

ASK *How did the partner feel who was called weird?* (Possibly like the other person was kidding around, but maybe that the person was teasing or being hurtful.)

Now ask one person from each pair to say to the other person, "You're weird," with a smile on his or her face.

ASK *What are the reasons that the person might have said "You're weird" with a smile on his or her face?* (They're sharing an inside joke; the first person did something silly).

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ASK *How did the partner feel who was called weird?* (Like the other person was kidding around, teasing, not serious.)

ASK *Why would you feel differently if you could see the person?* (Look for responses that indicate students understand that people communicate with their faces, bodies, etc.)

Teach 2: Crossing the Line

PLACE the piece of string across the length of the classroom. Ask students to stand on one side of the line. Then ask them to imagine that they are online and somebody has sent them a message, which you will read to them. Tell the students to stay where they are if they think the message is okay; to cross over the line if they think the message is not okay; and to stand *on* the line if they think the message is in between.

READ each of these messages aloud and have students respond:

- *You are an idiot.*
- *I'm having a party and you're not invited.*
- *I like your new haircut.*
- *You are really ugly.*
- *Thanks for the advice. Next time would you mind telling me in person rather than by IM?*
- *Did you finish your homework?*
- *Why is it taking you so long to finish it?*
- *You are such a freak.*

REVIEW with students that kids like to go online and use cell phones to email, chat, watch videos, send messages, play games, and do homework. But sometimes the language can get mean or scary. Messages that make people feel badly cross the line. Sometimes that meanness is unintentional, but when people use tools such as the Internet and cell phones to deliberately upset someone else over and over, that's *cyberbullying*.

Teach 3: Find Solutions

HAVE students return to their seats and refer back to the **Words Can Hurt Student Handout**.

ASK *What could Rani and Aruna do to deal with being cyberbullied?*

EXPLAIN that there are many ways they could choose to solve this problem. Let them know that you will give them ideas about how to handle cyberbullying, but that you think they will come up with great solutions as well.

LEAD a brainstorming session. You may practice brainstorming about an idea unrelated to cyberbullying. For instance, have them first brainstorm about ways that computers can be better used to help students learn. Now invite students to answer the question and think of all the actions that Rani and Aruna could take. Let students know that they should say the first ideas that come to their heads. Tell them they should not be too worried about making mistakes, and that they should not judge others on their responses.

LIST the students' ideas on the board or chart paper. Remind students that they should not pass judgment on other students' ideas at this point.

DISCUSS the entire list with students and decide which solutions are fair to all concerned and respectful of the rights of others.

Teach 4: How to Handle a Bully

COMMEND students for their brainstorming. Let them know if any of the solutions that they suggested had to do with cooling down, finding help or telling a trusted adult, or even ignoring the bully. Explain that these responses are on target, according to information that researchers have gathered about what works when dealing with cyberbullying.

DISCUSS with students how easy it is to feel angry or upset when somebody sends you a mean or scary message online. Explain that cyberbullies deliberately try to make you feel that way, just like real-life bullies deliberately try to make people feel bad. Discuss the following ideas about what they can do when faced with cyberbullying:

- *Cooling down can be a good first step when you receive a mean message online. Taking a deep breath, counting backwards from 10, or pausing to think about what you will do next can give you time to think of the BEST way to handle the situation.*
- *Finding help or telling a trusted adult or a friend can be a good way to take action. You shouldn't deal with the cyberbullying situation alone. The person you tell should be someone who wants to hear what you have to say, and will help you work on a solution. Adults can be especially good because they often have the power to influence the situation, or can give you advice about what to do.*
- *Ignoring the bully can be very effective. Bullies often like attention. When you deprive them of attention, they may lose interest.*
- *Whatever you do, remember to keep a copy of your communication with the bully. If you delete the communication, there is no proof of how the bully treated you if you need to show it to a trusted adult.*

Wrap Up and Assess

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives.

ASK

- *Why is it a bad idea to send mean or scary messages online?* (Because they can make the person who gets them upset, angry, or scared.)
- *Why might there be more misunderstandings between people when they send online messages as opposed to face-to-face discussion?* (Online messages can be more confusing or scarier than face-to-face messages because there are no face-to-face cues to help you understand people's intentions.)
- *What can kids do when they get cyberbullying messages?* (They can (1) calm down and take a deep breath, (2) tell a friend or a trusted adult who can help develop a plan to handle the situation, (3) ignore the bully, (4) keep a copy of the communication with the bully.)

REVIEW with students that words matter and can hurt, and that bullying is not okay – either in the real world or online.

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Extension Activity

In small groups, have students make a cyberbully protection kit. The kit should contain a shield that they decorate with an anti-cyberbullying symbol and a scroll that lists things they could say to a cyberbully. The kit can be created with cardboard or paper and markers, or online with Kerpoof (http://www.kerpoof.com).

Homework

Students use the **Talk and Take Action Student Handout** to create a cartoon about a cyberbullying situation. See Make Beliefs Comix for a free online tool: http://www.makebeliefscomix.com. Students create one frame that shows the cyberbullying situation or message. The next frame shows what they might do when faced with this situation or message. The last frame should show a positive outcome of the situation, which might involve confiding in a trusted adult. Encourage students to show their parents their cartoon and to get advice about what they could do. In the final frame, parents provide suggestions about what they might say or do if they learned about the situation.

Alignment with Standards – National Educational Technology Standards for Students© 2007
(Source: International Society for Technology in Education, 2007)

2. Communication and Collaboration
  b. communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats

5. Digital Citizenship
  a. advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology
  d. exhibit leadership for digital citizenship