



# **Cyberbullying**

## **Understanding and Addressing Online Cruelty**

Students Handouts and  
Supporting Materials for Teachers

### **Secondary Level Lesson: Cyberbullying and Online Cruelty: Challenging Social Norms**

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# Online Behavior: What Do We Think?

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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 |

# If the Internet was a Neighborhood



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# Background for Educators: Social Norms Theory

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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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.

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<sup>1</sup> From Higher Education Center. Social Norms and Social Marketing, [www.edc.org/hec/socialnorms](http://www.edc.org/hec/socialnorms) (accessed January 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

# Challenging Social Norms at Rutgers University

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**Yes, 2/3 of Rutgers Students Stop at 3 or Fewer Drinks.  
Almost 1 in 5 Don't Drink at All.  
*We got the stats from you!***

# Challenging Social Norms at University of Missouri-Columbia

*Making good choices  
can be*  
**LOTS OF FUN!**

Smart RMC  
429-2961

*Life* **SKILLS**

**A.D.A.P.T.**

Most MU students don't drink and drive  
Most MU students drink 0-4 drinks per week

**MISSOURI**

*It's a great time to be a Tiger.*

# Internet Safety Strategies for Students



## Before going online...

- Make some rules with your parents/guardians before you go online, like the time of day and length of time you can be online, and sites you are allowed to visit. Don't bend the rules or visit other Web sites without their permission.
- Try to limit your cell phone and Internet use to a reasonable amount of time, and make sure you are keeping a healthy balance between online and in-person activities.
- Keep in mind that no message is completely private, including texts and e-mail. Your school and adult family members may be watching your online activity, and the police can recover all messages—even if you deleted them. If you are using the Internet to embarrass, threaten, harass or hurt others, chances are you will be caught.
- Be aware that many Internet and cell phone service providers have rules about 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.

## While online...

- Never share private information about others and never say things that might make them feel unsafe or uncomfortable, even if you mean it as a "joke."
- Don't share personal or private information online—like your full name, school name, home address, phone number and personal photos—in places where strangers or people you don't trust can find them.
- Keep passwords and PINs to yourself—don't even tell your best friend—but never hide this information from your parents/guardians. They'll trust you more if you're open with them, and if a serious problem occurs, they made need this information to help you.
- Don't leave cell phones or other electronics out of sight. Keep them where you can see them at all times.
- Don't talk to strangers online, where it is easier for people to lie about their identity. A friend you meet online may not be the best person to talk to if you are having problems.

- ☑ Don't send your picture or personal information to strangers or people you only know online, and don't arrange to meet them without a parent's/guardian's permission.
- ☑ Don't open messages or attachments from people you don't know.

### **If you experience online bullying...**

- ☑ Don't respond to bullying or inappropriate messages, but save them as evidence.
- ☑ Talk about problems you experience online with an adult that you trust, like a family member, teacher or school counselor.
- ☑ Always report online bullying, hate messages, inappropriate sexual activity and physical threats (including possible suicide attempts) to an adult family member, school authorities or the police.
- ☑ Block the e-mail addresses and cell phone numbers of people who are sending unwanted messages; change your phone numbers, e-mail addresses, screen names and other online information if necessary.
- ☑ For serious or continuing problems, file complaints with e-mail services, Internet Service Providers, Web sites, cell phone companies, etc. They can find the offenders, cancel their service and report them to the police if necessary.
- ☑ If you don't feel comfortable reporting problems yourself, ask a friend or adult to do it for you. Keeping the people close to you aware of what's going on will make you feel safe and supported.
- ☑ When in doubt about what to do, log off the computer and ask for help from a trusted adult.

