LA COUNTY LIBRARY

DIY Library Program

ADULT 101: SOCIAL MEDIA AND CYBERSMARTS

COPING WITH HURTFUL ONLINE BEHAVIOR

Recommended for Ages 12 – 17

Many of us have experienced hurtful behavior online, whether it takes the form of unkind words from someone you know or harassment from a total stranger. The reality is that unkindness on the internet can sometimes be impossible to avoid. While we can't always run from it, we are not powerless against it. This program will teach you terms about hurtful online behavior, strategies to cope with it, and how you can practice kindness instead.

Questions for Discussion:

- Have you or a friend experienced hurtful behavior online? What did it look like? How did it make you feel?
- Have you ever engaged in hurtful behavior toward someone else online? What did it look like? How did it make you feel?

Online cruelty can take many forms, but there are specific behavior patterns that can be easily identified. When you're able to recognize and name the specific type of hurtful online behavior that occurs, you are in a better position to cope with it.

Flaming is a hostile interaction online that involves insults and often profanity. This form of hurtful online behavior is direct and obvious.

Trolling is an interaction that aims to get attention by aggravating people and causing disruptions online. A troll might use *flaming* to upset others, but they can also behave in more subtle ways. Trolls might argue with you endlessly about any topic. Refusing to acknowledge facts, they will put words in your mouth and will never say anything nice or agree with you.

Cyberbullying is hurtful behavior that targets you personally. Many times, a cyberbully personally knows their victim and their aim is to humiliate them and ruin their reputation. While trolls are looking to draw attention to themselves, cyberbullies aim to draw negative attention to you.

Activity for Adult Caregivers: Identify Hurtful Online Behavior

Read the following scenarios and let teens identify if they are examples of flaming, trolling, or cyberbullying. Then discuss the answers together.

1. Sandra posts an eye makeup tutorial to her vlog on YouTube. A commenter responds "Can we talk about those chipped nails, please? Yikes."

Answer: This is an example of trolling. While the commenter isn't overtly or directly insulting Sandra, they have hijacked the conversation and drawn attention to themselves and their observations at her expense. Notice that the comment has nothing to do with eye makeup and says nothing positive about the tutorial. As a result, Sandra might feel confused and self-conscious about her videos.

2. Jane posts a video game walk-through to YouTube where she explains her character's moves as she plays. A commenter responds, "Sorry, but you have the most annoying voice I've ever heard."

Answer: This is an example of flaming. The commenter is directly and overtly insulting Jane.

3. Mark and Jose are texting and Jose reveals who his crush is. Mark screenshots the text and posts it to Facebook for all his friends to see. He leaves it up for an hour, then deletes it.

Answer: This is an example of cyberbullying. Mark's actions are targeted toward humiliating Jose and ruining his reputation. Furthermore, Mark can claim that he deleted the post and was "just joking," even though the damage was already done.

Recognizing the differences among flaming, trolling, and cyberbullying can help you decide how best to act if it happens to you.

How to Respond to Trolls

What should you do if you think you are the victim of flaming, trolling, and cyberbullying? Hurtful online behavior can have serious and sometimes devastating consequences, but there are actions you can take to curb it. While you should never blame yourself for trolling, there are ways you might be unwittingly attracting trolls.

- *Oversharing* is when you share details about your personal life and relationships that open you up to gossip. Trolls can use this information against you. Avoid sharing arguments you had with your parents, comments about your teacher, or drama among your friends, and keep your posts general.

- *Subtweeting* or *Vaguebooking* is when you post about another person without mentioning them directly. People can usually figure out who you're talking about, and trolls can use your passive-aggressive posts against you.

- Engaging in heated discussions sets you up for trolling. You might be genuine in trying to convince someone of your point but remember that trolls have no interest in discussion. They want to derail the discussion and getting into a heated argument makes it easier for them.

Sometimes, "just ignore it" is easier said than done. Blocking and reporting trolls makes it easier for you to ignore their behavior because the computer does it for you. If you are being cyberbullied by someone you know, consider taking yourself out of harm's way by avoiding a relationship with that person and don't be afraid to tell a trusted adult or seek counseling.

Netiquette: The Three Cs of Online Behavior

Internet safety advocate and author of *Shame Nation*, Sue Scheff, recommends teens follow the three C's of online behavior:

1. *Conduct.* Control your own behavior. Always be mindful of who might see your activity.
2. *Content.* Place limits on what you share. Does your content have the potential to hurt you or others?
3. *Caring.* Make sure that all of your online activity is done with empathy and kindness.

Tip: If you see someone experiencing flaming, trolling, or cyberbullying, there are ways you, a bystander, can help.

- Report the troll on the website
- If you think the victim is being cyberbullied, show a trusted adult
- Reach out to the victim with kind and encouraging words

Activity: Conduct a Social Media Audit

Go through your social media accounts and look at what you have posted, liked, and shared. You can go as far back as you want, but aim for at least a month's worth of activity. Does your activity still reflect who you are and what you want to say to the world? Delete any material on your social media feed that does not. It's a good idea to do this once a month.

Recap (3 things to remember about hurtful online behavior):

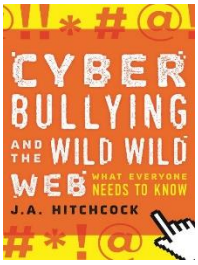
1. Recognizing the differences among *flaming*, *trolling*, and *cyberbullying* empowers you to decide how best to respond to hurtful online behavior.
2. Your behavior matters. Control yourself, limit your content, and post with care.
3. Remember that bystanders can help, too.

DIGITAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE THROUGH LA COUNTY LIBRARY

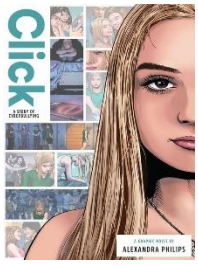
eBooks & Audiobooks

LA County Library offers numerous resources that can help you learn more about social media and cybersmarts. Here are just a few, all of which are available as eBooks on OverDrive and Libby:

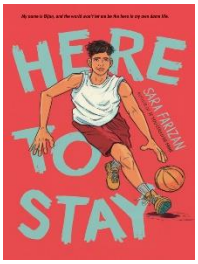
***Cyberbullying* by Tracy Brown**
This guide to coping with cyberbullying helps readers define the issue and then teaches them valuable ways to effectively deal with a bully, both personally and within the law. It is a must-read for anyone who feels he or she is a victim of cyberbullying.



***Cyberbullying and the Wild, Wild Web* by J.A. Hitchcock**
Hitchcock explains how someone can become victim to cyberbullying and how they can stay safer online. Offering victims, and parents, the chance to be able to relate to and truly understand the unfortunate reality of cyberbullying through real-life examples of what happened to someone who had been through a similar situation.



Click: A Story of Cyberbullying by Lexi Philips and Anthony Zuiker
Click is the heroic story of a young girl who was terrorized by schoolmates with merciless online harassment and her brave effort to overcome her tormentors. Her powerful, compelling story is told in brilliant graphic novel form.



Here to Stay by Sara Farizan
What happens when a kid who's flown under the radar for most of high school gets pulled off the bench to make the winning basket in a varsity playoff game? If his name is Bijan Majidi, life is suddenly high fives in the hallways and invitations to exclusive parties—along with an anonymous photo sent by a school cyberbully that makes Bijan look like a terrorist.

Databases

- *Opposing Viewpoints* features essays, articles, and primary sources on contemporary social issues. In the database, click on "View All" under the Science, Technology, and Ethics Tab. There are many relevant topics to choose from, including: Cyberbullying, Cybercrime, Cyberpredators, Digital Media, Hacking and Hackers, Internet, Social Media, Technology and Society, and Twitter.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Websites

- National Children's Advocacy Center – www.nationalcac.org/internet-safety-tips
- NetSmartz Teens – www.nsteens.org
- ConnectSafely.org – www.connectsafely.org
- KidsHealth.org – kidshealth.org/teen/safety/safebasics/internet_safety.html

Report Cyberbullying

- Stopbullying.gov – https://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/how-to-report