

Elementary School Lesson

Building a Foundation for Safe and Respectful Online Communication

Rationale

The purpose of this lesson is to encourage safe and respectful digital communication among young children, and to provide students with basic skills for responding productively to online bullying and social aggression. Students use literature, fictional scenarios and creative expression to explore the ways in which digital communication can amplify hurtful words and to practice responses to hurtful online messages. Students also focus on ways that they can use digital spaces to make others feel good and implement online kindness projects in class.

[NOTE: This lesson focuses only on the ways in which children communicate with peers online. It is not intended to be a comprehensive approach to digital safety, which should address topics such as predatory behavior, privacy and the safeguarding of identity. For resources on these broader issues, consult the organizations listed in [Cyberbullying Resources](#).]

Objectives

- Students will increase their awareness about the damaging power of digital spaces to spread hurtful words.
- Students will learn and practice strategies for responding safely and positively to online bullying and social aggression.
- Students will explore ways to use digital spaces to promote kindness and self-esteem.

Age Range

Grades 2–5

Time

Approximately 2–3 hours or 3–4 class periods

Requirements

Handouts and Resources:

- [Emojis](#) (one for teacher use)
- [How to Handle Hurtful Messages Version 1 or 2](#) (Optional; one for each student)
- [Online Bullying and Social Aggression Scenarios](#) (Optional; one scenario for each small group)
- [How Would You Respond?](#) (Optional; one for each small group)
- Internet Safety Pledge (see [NetSmartz](#), for example) (one for each student)

Other Material:

- [Yettele's Feathers](#) by Joan Rothenberg (or another story from ["Feathers" Stories: Resources for Educators](#))
- Chart paper and markers, paper, pencils, assorted art supplies for drawing pictures (optional)
- WiFi, computer and internet (optional)

Advanced Preparation

- Reproduce handouts as directed above.
- Obtain a copy of [Yettele's Feathers](#) or a similar story (see Part I #1).
- Copy the symbols from the handout, [Emojis](#), on to a large sheet of chart paper. Alternatively, copy the handout onto an overhead transparency or project the images on a smartboard (see Part II #1).

Key Words

Bullying
Email
Emoji
Gossip
Instant messaging
internet
Journal
Remorse
Reputation
Text message
Threat

- (Optional) Copy the information from the handout, [How to Handle Hurtful Messages](#), onto a sheet of chart paper or distribute to each student (see Part II #4). There are two versions of this handout; version 1 has simplified and less text. Use the one that is most age appropriate for your students.
- (Optional) Cut [Online Bullying and Social Aggression Scenarios](#) into strips, one for each small group (see Part II #5).
- (Optional) Write the poem from *Feathers* by Heather Forest on a sheet of chart paper (see Part III #4).

Techniques and Skills

analyzing literature, brainstorming, case study, cooperative group work, forming opinions, identifying feelings, large and small group discussion, reading skills, social action, using the internet, writing skills

Procedures

Part I: The Nature of Digital Communication (60 minutes)

1. Read aloud to students [Yettele's Feathers](#) by Joan Rothenberg, using the questions below to discuss the story. As an alternative, read the book [Trouble Talk](#) by Trudy Ludwig. Read the book aloud and discuss the book's meaning and themes including "trouble talk," gossip, spreading rumors and mean behavior.
 - Why did Yettele spend so much time "minding other people's business"?
 - How did Yettele get the wrong idea when she saw Yussel Farfel help himself to the apple? What happened when Yettele spread her version of the story?
 - Have you ever jumped to conclusions about someone's behavior without knowing the whole story? What happened as a result?
 - Was it enough for Yettele to say, "I didn't mean to cause trouble" and "I'm very sorry and I take it all back"? Why is it difficult to "take back" harmful words once they have been spread?
 - Did you agree with Yettele when she said that her stories are "only words, not rocks and stones" and that they can cause "no more harm than a feather"? Do you think gossip and mean words are more like rocks or feathers? Why?
 - How did the Rabbi help Yettele to understand the effect of her stories on other people?
 - How did Yettele learn to turn her fondness for talking into something positive?
 - Can you think of ways that you might use your words to make other people feel good?

NOTE: If you are unable to find a copy of [Yettele's Feathers](#), read aloud or tell another version of the story using one of the sources listed in the handout, ["Feathers" Stories: Resources for Educators](#).

2. Point out that in Yettele's time, information was communicated from person to person via word of mouth. Ask students how information is communicated in their world today. Suggest that technology is increasingly one of the main ways in which people today communicate. Conduct a brief "physical survey" to determine the extent to which students utilize technology. Have students form a circle and ask them to step into the middle if they have ever sent or received an email, and then to step back out. Repeat this process using the prompts below. (If there is space or other limitations, have students raise their hands from their seats in response to each prompt).

NOTE: If you think this survey is better done anonymously, read these questions aloud and invite students to think to themselves (or record on a piece of paper) their responses to the questions.

- Step in if you've ever played games with other people online.
- Step in if you've ever chatted or exchanged messages with friends online.
- Step in if you've ever posted a blog.
- Step in if you've ever visited a website that helps you to make new friends.
- Step in if you have your own cell phone.
- Step in if you've ever used your parents' or family members' phone to text, play a game or watch a video.
- Step in if you've ever sent or received a text/picture/video message on your phone.
- Step in if you use the internet or send text messages at least once per week.
- Step in if you use the internet or send text messages every day.

NOTE: While some of the items in this survey may seem advanced for elementary-age children, the reality is that children as young as five and six are exposed to “grown-up” technologies through older siblings and marketing that seeks to market to the next generation of users. These sites introduce young children to online games, virtual shopping, social networking and buddy lists.

3. Ask students to think about how communication via the internet, email, text messaging, etc. is like the “feathers in the wind” from the story about Yettele. Have students (either individually or in small groups) write a story, draw a picture or design a cartoon that illustrates their ideas. When students are done, post their work around the room and ask for a few volunteers to share what they have created. Emphasize that messages sent out over the internet can spread instantaneously to many people and that it is often impossible to take them back once they are out there.

Part II: Responding to Hurtful Messages (45 minutes)

1. Introduce students to the [Emojis](#) prepared prior to the lesson. Describe to students how these symbols are used to convey feelings in digital communications and make sure that students understand what each one means.
2. Remind students that in the books, the main characters words and stories were hurtful to many people. Ask students if they have ever experienced hurtful words or mean behavior while playing a game, using an app, or sending text messages and allow several students to share their experiences, making sure they do not reveal the names of others who may have been involved. After each anecdote, ask how the student responded and how the incident made the student feel. Invite them to indicate their feelings by sticking a small Post-it with their names next to the appropriate emoji introduced earlier.
3. Comment that when we are sad, scared or mad, we sometimes react to hurtful messages in ways that are not helpful. Tell students that they are going to spend some time in class practicing how to respond to some made-up messages so that they will be prepared to do the right thing if such incidents occur in real life.
4. Review with students the information in the handout, [How to Handle Hurtful Messages](#). Depending on the age and ability of your students, this can be done by distributing copies of the handout to each student, writing the information up on chart paper or reviewing the information verbally.

NOTE: There are two versions of this handout; version 1 has simplified and less text. Use the one that is most age appropriate for your students.

5. Have students practice responding to the situations in the handout, [Online Bullying and Social Aggression Scenarios](#). Depending on the age and ability of your students, choose one of the following options:
 - a. **Whole Class Discussion:** Read the first scenario aloud and ask students: *What is going on? How do you think the person feels?* (After students respond with words to describe how the person feels, ask them to also name the emoji that best captures that feeling.) *What do you suggest for a positive response?* Reinforce the strategies reviewed earlier and, if students suggest inappropriate responses, explain why they are not safe or constructive or elicit from other students. Repeat this process for as many scenarios as time allows.
 - b. **Small Group Investigation:** Divide the class into groups of 3–4 students. Cut the handout into strips with one scenario on each and provide each group with one strip. Instruct groups to read their scenario and discuss positive responses, drawing upon the strategies reviewed earlier. Have groups write or draw their response on the handout, *How Would You Respond?* When groups are done, reconvene the class and allow each group to share its work. Make sure to reinforce the strategies reviewed earlier and to discourage unsafe or inappropriate ideas that may surface.

Part III: Using the Digital Spaces for Positive Purposes (time will vary)

1. Reinforce with students that although some people use technology to hurt others, most people use it for positive purposes. Suggest that the internet and other forms of digital communication can be wonderful tools for making people feel connected and cared for. Introduce students to one of the programs below and discuss how it might be implemented in their class or school using technology to enhance the effects:
 - a. **Random Acts of Kindness:** Inspires people to practice kindness and to “pass it on” to others; includes kindness ideas for kids, online and in school.

- b. [Pay it Forward Day](#): Encourages all people, from all walks of life to give to someone else and make a positive difference; includes ideas for teachers on how their schools can get involved in paying it forward.
2. Ask students for ideas about ways that they might implement one of the programs above, using the technology to make people feel good. List their ideas on a sheet of chart paper and come up with a plan to execute one or more of the ideas. Some examples are:
- Send an email, text or message to a far-away friend or relative letting them know that you are thinking of them.
 - Send an email, text or message to someone who is sick or needs cheering up.
 - Create a website or Web posting to raise money, goods or awareness about a special charity or for people in need of help.
 - Create a blog that celebrates students' special talents and interests.
 - Create a class "Kindness Site" and share it with other students, parents, teachers, etc.
 - Create a class "Paying it Forward" newsletter and post/distribute it online.
3. Encourage students to be good digital citizens by always being safe, responsible and respectful in their online communications. Send home a Safety and Positive Behavior Pledge for families to go over and sign together (see [NetSmartz](#), for example).
4. Conclude the lesson by posting and reading together the following poem from the story, *Feathers*, as an ongoing reminder to students:

Feathers

Words, like feathers fly
 In the wind, in the wind.
 Reaching far and wide,
 In the wind, in the wind.
 Careless words, tossed about,
 Cannot again be swallowed up.
 Tongues like swords can cut the
 heart.
 Words fly out.
 The rumors start...

Cruel words like feathers fly.
 Cruel words reach far and wide.
 They leave the mouth a bitter rind.
 May all your words,
 my friends, be kind.

Reprinted with permission from Heather Forest, *Feathers* (Atlanta, GA: August House Publishers, Inc., 2005).

Feathers Stories: Resources for Educators

There are many versions of the “Feathers” story, which uses the imagery of feathers scattered by the wind as a metaphor for the dangers of gossip and the irretrievable nature of mean and disrespectful words that have been dispersed in the community. The original story has been attributed to the Hasidic Rabbi, Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, but can be found in the folklore of various faith traditions as well as in literature on peace education and conflict resolution. Below is one version of the story as well as additional sources that are all appropriate for young children.

The Chicken Story — A Tale of Regret

Once there was a foolish woman in a small village, who spread some gossip about another woman in the village. Before long the foolish woman began to feel remorse about what she had done, so she went to the wise man of the village to ask him what she could do to make things right. The wise man listened carefully to her story, thought for a moment, and then told her to go to the market and buy a chicken. On the way home from the market she was to pluck that chicken letting the feathers fall along the path. The next day she was to come back and see the wise man again.

The foolish woman did as the wise man suggested. She bought a chicken and plucked it on the way home. When she came to him the next day, she told him that she had done what he asked her to do. The wise man said to her, “Now, I want you to go home today by the same road you took yesterday and pick up every single feather you dropped along the path.” The woman was distraught and protested that there was absolutely no way she could find and pick up all those feathers. The wind would have surely blown them everywhere!































The wise man quietly responded, “You are correct...and you see, just as you can never retrieve all those feathers, there is no way you can ever restore the reputation of the woman whom you harmed with your words.”

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Additional Sources of “Feathers” Stories

- [Feathers in the Wind](#) (video version), NetSmartz
- *Feathers: A Jewish Tale from Eastern Europe* (picture book version) by Heather Forest, August House Publishers, Inc., 2005, 32pp, ISBN: 0874837553
- *Feathers in the Wind and Other Jewish Tales* (audio version) by Susan Stone, 2001, ASIN: B00005M0U6
- *Spinning Tales, Weaving Hope: Stories, Storytelling, and Activities for Peace, Justice and the Environment*, Vol. 1 (short story version) by Ed Brody et al. (eds.), New Society Publishers, 2002, 296pp, ISBN: 0865714479
- *Wisdom Tales From Around the World* (short story version) by Heather Forest, August House Publishers, Inc., 1996, 156pp, ISBN: 0874834791
- *Yettele’s Feathers* (picture book version) by Joan Rothenberg, Hyperion Books for Children, 1995, 32pp, ISBN: 0786800976

Emojis

- 

Grinning Face
- 

Smiling Face with Open Mouth and Smiling Eyes
- 

Face with Tears of Joy
- 

Angry Face
- 

Confused Face
- 

Crying Face
- 

Kissing Face
- 

Face Throwing a Kiss
- 

Sleeping Face
- 

Smirking Face
- 

Dizzy Face
- 

Face with Stuck-out Tongue
- 

Face with Stuck-out Tongue and Winking Eye
- 

Face Savoring Delicious Food
- 

Face Screaming in Fear

How to Handle Hurtful Messages

(Version 1)

These tips can help you to make good choices when faced with hurtful online messages.

1. Be careful about talking online to people you don't know. Talk with your parents or family members about people you don't know and how to stay safe.
2. If you receive a hurtful, mean or bullying message:
 - Do not answer but save it.
 - Sign off of the device right away.
 - Tell a trusted adult about the message.
3. If you receive a hurtful message from a friend or classmate:
 - Think before answering. Sometimes it is better to share your feelings face-to-face.



- If you answer online or with a text message, be careful with your words. Remember that you can't take them back.
- Keep the message private. Never pass around messages that might hurt others.

How to Handle Hurtful Messages

(Version 2)

Online bullying and hurtful messages can make us feel sad, angry, ashamed, and confused about how to respond. The following tips will help you to make positive choices when faced with online bullying and other hurtful messages.

1. Be careful about responding to messages online from people you don't know. Talk to a parent or trusted adult before responding.
2. If you receive a mean, bullying or threatening message from anyone:
 - Do not respond but save it or print it. If it is a text message, show an adult.
 - After you save the message, sign off of the website, game or messaging area right away.
 - Then tell a trusted adult (such as a parent, family member or teacher) about the message.
 - An adult can help you to block the addresses of people who are not friends and who are sending hurtful messages.
 - A trusted adult will also report online bullying to others if needed, such as the school principal, the aggressor's parents or the police.
3. If you receive an angry or hurtful message from a friend or classmate:



- Think carefully before responding. Decide if it would be better to respond face-to-face rather than use technology.
- If you answer online or through text message, be careful with your words. Remember that you can't take them back.
- If you decide to respond online or through text message, take a few minutes to think about and organize your message before sending. Remember that your message can't be taken back once sent, and that it can be saved or forwarded to others. Don't write anything that you may be sorry for later.
- Remember that the person reading the message can't see or hear you. Use emojis or signs like :- (for sad or :- / for confused to make your emotions clear.
- Don't write words in all capitals (it's like shouting) or use your words in ways that carry anger.
- Keep the message private and don't forward to others. If you need advice from a friend about how to handle a tough situation, talk in person. Never pass around messages that might hurt or embarrass others.

Online Bullying and Social Aggression Scenarios

1. You find out that some kids in your class are sending around a text message that includes some embarrassing photos of you and nasty comments about your family about being from Mexico and speaking English with an accent. It also includes your email address and encourages visitors to send mean messages to you. How do you respond?
2. You have been receiving hurtful emails for the past few weeks from an address you don't recognize. At first they just include insults about being overweight, so you ignore them. But now they are coming more often and include threats that make you feel unsafe. How do you respond?
3. Your parents agree to hold your birthday party at your favorite laser tag place, but because of the cost you are only allowed to invite five friends. One of your classmates is angry that he is not included and sends a text message about you to another friend, who sends it to someone else and it starts spreading around the school until you get it. How do you respond?
4. A group of kids have created a private message board, where they talk about what they're going to wear to school and make social plans for the weekends. You try to join, but are rejected. When you ask a friend to ask why you have been excluded, she replies that some of the others think you're weird because of the thick glasses you wear. How do you respond?
5. You are texting one evening with a friend, who asks you what you think of a classmate. At first you don't reply, but she keeps asking, writing things like, "Isn't she stuck up?" You finally write back that you agree and then get an angry message from the classmate, who looked at your friend's phone and saw the texts. How do you respond?

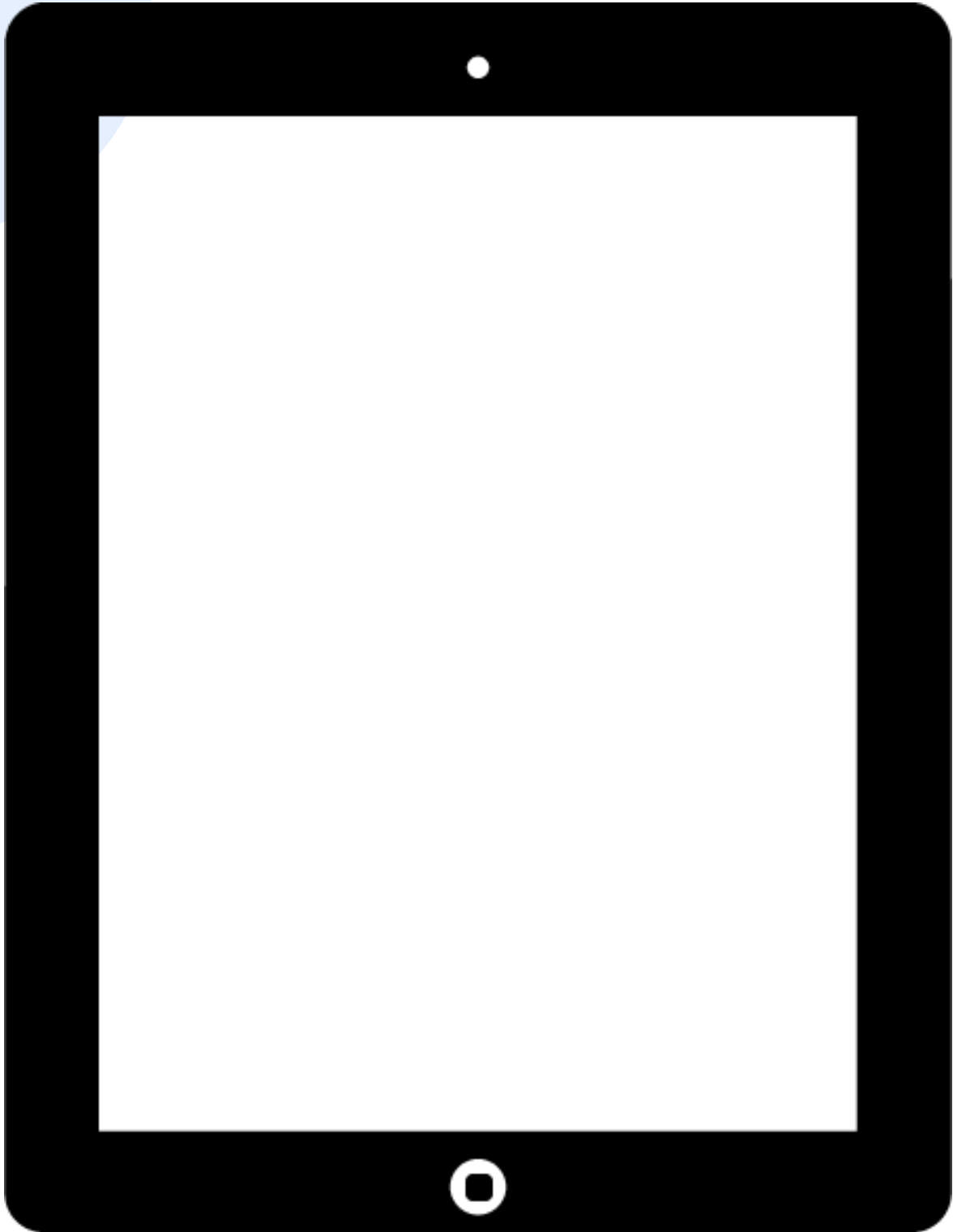
6. You get a message from an unknown user with an embarrassing photo of you. You can tell that the picture was taken during recess when you were trying out some silly dance moves, but it has been changed to make you look ridiculous. A classmate tells you the name of an older student who he says took the picture with a cell phone. How do you respond?

7. After telling your friend a personal secret in a text message and making her swear not to tell anyone, you find out that she took a screen shot of it and sent it to someone else. How do you respond?

8. You get an angry direct message through a gaming site from a friend who accuses you of spreading rumors about him. You deny it and he forwards messages from your account, saying that he is poor, dirty and wears the same clothes every day. You know that you never sent the messages and figure that someone must have stolen your password and pretended to be you. How do you respond?

9. You have a disagreement with a teammate at practice, and the coach ends up benching your teammate for the next game. That night you receive furious texts from the teammate, calling you names and telling you that you've ruined everything. At first you don't reply, but the texts keep coming and get more and more angry. How do you respond?

How Would You Respond?



Cyberbullying Resources

Print and Online Publications

Common Sense Media. *K-12 Digital Citizenship*. www.commonsense.org/education/digital-citizenship.

Hinduja, Sameer and Justin Patchin. *Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2008.

Kowalski, R.M., S.P. Limber, and P.W. Agatston. *Cyber Bullying: Bullying in the Digital Age*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, John & Sons, 2008.

Media Smarts. *Classroom Resources to Counter Cyber Bullying*. <https://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/classroom-resources-counter-cyberbullying-portal-page>.

OnGuard Online. *Net Cetera: Chatting With Kids About Being Online*. https://consumer.ftc.gov/sites/default/files/articles/pdf/pdf-0001-netcetera_0.pdf

Shariff, Shaheen. *Confronting Cyber-Bullying: What Schools Need to Know to Control Misconduct and Avoid Legal Consequences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Willard, Nancy. "CyberbullyNOT: Stopping Online Social Aggression." *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Online Social Aggression, Threats, and Distress*. Champaign, IL: Research Press, 2007. www.embracecivility.org/wp-content/uploadsnew/2012/10/appL.pdf.

Willard, Nancy. "Educator's Guide to Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats." Eugene: Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use, 2007. <http://www.embracecivility.org/wp-content/uploadsnew/Educators-Guide-Cyber-Safety.pdf>.

Videos and DVD Resources

Cyberbullying – Cruel Intentions. Howell, MI: ABC News, 2006.

Diane Sawyer reports on how cell phones, digital cameras and personal Websites combine in new ways that seems to encourage and amplify the meanness of teenage behavior; www.abcnewsstore.com. (For clips and description, see Gray, Keturah (September 12, 2006). "How Mean Can Teens Be?," <https://search.worldcat.org/title/Cyberbullying--cruel-intentions/oclc/709673224>

Kitchen. 50 sec. Arlington, VA: National Crime Prevention Council, 2006.

This public service announcement is part of the "Cyberbullying: Don't Write It. Don't Forward It" cyberbullying prevention campaign. It appeals to students to avoid saying anything online that they wouldn't say in person; www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbtajOvAU10.

Let's Fight it Together. 7 min. London: Childnet International, 2007.

This film, available via the internet, was produced in the United Kingdom to help sensitize young people to the pain and hurt which can be caused by cyberbullying; www.youtube.com/watch?v=dubA2vhllrg, www.childnet-int.org.

Sticks & Stones. 43 min. Montvale, NJ: Chase Wilson, 2009.

Funded by the office of the Bergen County Prosecutor with money seized from criminals, this film stars actual high school students from NJ. It tells the story of a teen who is driven to suicide after a compromising picture he thought was private is sent out for everyone to see. The film is accompanied by a comprehensive Teacher's Guide; www.youtube.com/watch?v=61E8RMCry-M.

Talent Show. 50 sec. Arlington, VA: National Crime Prevention Council, 2006.

This public service announcement is part of the "Cyberbullying: Don't Write It. Don't Forward It" cyberbullying prevention campaign. It appeals to students to avoid saying anything online that they wouldn't say in person; www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdQBurXQOeQ.

Online Resources: Websites on Cyberbullying and Online Safety

Anti-Defamation League

<https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/tweens-digital-spaces-and-cyberbullying>

Provides resources, strategies and tips on bullying and cyberbullying prevention.

Embrace Civility in the Digital Age

www.embracecivility.org

Provides effective strategies to assist young people in developing the skills to behave in a safe, responsible and legal manner when using the internet.

Common Sense Media

www.commonsensemedia.org

Provides trustworthy information and tools, as well as an independent forum, so that kids and families can have a choice and a voice about the media they consume.

Cyberbullying.us

www.cyberbullying.us

Explores the causes and consequences of online harassment; includes fact sheets and resource lists.

Cybersmart!

www.cybersmart.org

Provides online professional development and free curricular resources on cyber safety, internet ethics, creativity and critical thinking.

iKeepSafe

www.ikeepsafe.org

The Internet Keep Safe Coalition is a partnership of government, public health, education, law enforcement and industry professionals that provide information and tools for the safe and healthy use of technology and the internet.

i-SAFE

www.isafe.org

A non-profit foundation that incorporates classroom curriculum with community outreach to empower students, teachers, parents, and law enforcement to make the internet a safer place.

National Crime Prevention Council's Cyberbullying Pages

www.ncpc.org/resources/cyberbullying/

Dedicated to keeping children, families and communities safe from crime, NCPC offers research, information, tips and public service announcements on cyberbullying.

NetSmartz

www.netsmartz.org

Run by The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, this site offers information and resources on Internet Safety for educators, parents/guardians, teens, younger children and law enforcement.

OnGuard Online

www.onguardonline.gov

Provides practical tips from the federal government and the technology industry to help guard against internet fraud, secure computers and protect personal information.

Stop Bullying

www.stopbullying.gov

Provides information from various government agencies on what bullying is, what cyberbullying is, who is at risk, and how you can prevent and respond to bullying.

A Thin Line, MTV

<https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/a-thin-line-fliers>

MTV's campaign to empower youth to respond to and stop the spread of digital abuse; includes a Digital Bill of Rights, informational and video resources and ways to take action.