

What Is Cyberbullying? Digital Drama?

The [Cyberbullying Research Center](#) reports that about 27% of the teens they have surveyed over eleven studies say they have been cyberbullied at some point in their lifetimes. When asked about specific types of cyberbullying experienced, **mean or hurtful comments (24.9%)** and **rumors spread online (22.2%)** were the most commonly-cited. It is important to note that traditional bullying is still more common than cyberbullying. Additionally, generally those who are bullied at school are bullied online and those who bully at school bully online. Many young people also experience or engage in what is known as **“digital drama.”** Though not as harmful as cyberbullying, it can still feel extremely hurtful. This lesson gives students a chance to reflect upon all of these negative behaviors.

Key Standards—Common Core ELA, 5th: RI.5, RI.5.2, RI.5.4, RI.5.8, RI.5.10, RF.5, RF.5.4, RF.5.4.a, RF.5.4.c, W.5, W.5.4, W.5.9, W.5.9.b, SL.5, SL.5.1, SL.5.1.a, SL.5.1.b, SL.5.1.c, SL.5.2, L.5, L.5.4, L.5.4.a, L.5.6. 6th: RI.6, RI.6.1, RI.6.2, RI.6.3, RI.6.4, RI.6.7, W.6, W.6.4, SL.6, SL.6.1, SL.6.1.a, SL.6.1.b, SL.6.1.c, L.6, L.6.4, L.6.4.a, L.6.4.d, L.6.6. ISTE: 2a, 2b. CASEL: 1a, 3a, 3b, 3d, 4a, 4b, 4c, 5a, 5d, 5e.

Learning Objectives

Students will...

- Learn the distinct characteristics of cyberbullying.
- Recognize the similarities and differences between in-person bullying, cyberbullying, and digital drama.
- Understand that all of these behaviors are inappropriate, hurtful, or worse.



Introducing The Lesson

Set-up this lesson by asking students if any have ever been bullied. Chances are many will have experienced some form of bullying, online or off. Guide them to share their experiences and to express how they felt, if they are willing. Next, ask how many students have witnessed another student being bullied, online or off. Encourage students to share their experiences and feelings, while maintaining the anonymity of any other students involved.

The Lesson

1. Explain that **even though good experiences are much more common online than bad ones**, being behind a screen emboldens some people to engage in cruel behavior. One of these behaviors is “cyberbullying,” an unfortunate and very serious byproduct of online life.

The Lesson, continued

2. Give students the very simple definition of cyberbullying (below). Explain that it is identifiable by four distinct characteristics. Have students record this information:

CYBERBULLYING: The use of digital tools to bully. It is:

- **ONLINE:** It happens using digital tools.
- **INTENTIONAL:** It is done on purpose.
- **REPEATED:** It happens more than once.
- **HARMFUL:** It is intended to cause harm.

3. If appropriate to your class, explain that for some children their age cyberbullying has been so severe, it has led to them to take their own lives (this is called “bullycide”). Depending upon the maturity of your students, you might scan the news for examples to share with them. Or, you can tell them about [Mallory Rose Grossman](#), a 6th grader in New Jersey who, after being bullied online by classmates, took her own life. Be sure your students understand that this is an extreme case and that if they, or anyone they know, is being bullied, online or off, they should immediately tell you, their parents, or another trusted adult.

4. Explain that there is another type of inappropriate and hurtful online behavior similar to cyberbullying. Ask students if they know what the word “drama” means. They may tell you: “It’s when little things get blown out of proportion” or “like a play that’s happening in real life.” Tell them that “**digital drama**” is very much the same. When mean things happen online that do not meet all four distinct characteristics of cyberbullying (above), but are played out online in dramatic fashion that might *feel* hurtful to those involved, **that’s digital drama**. It is mean and inappropriate behavior, but it is not cyberbullying (which is much more serious). Here is an example of digital drama to share with your class:

*Three students are participating in a group text when one of them says something mean about you. One of the students takes a screen shot of the mean comment and sends it to you. You send it to another friend to show them how mean the three have been, and then the next day at school everyone is talking about the mean comment! Although this incident feels hurtful to you, it falls just short of cyberbullying (it doesn’t meet all the criteria above), but it **has** escalated into an example of digital drama, which **is** hurtful and inappropriate online behavior.*

5. Have students record this definition in their books:

DIGITAL DRAMA:

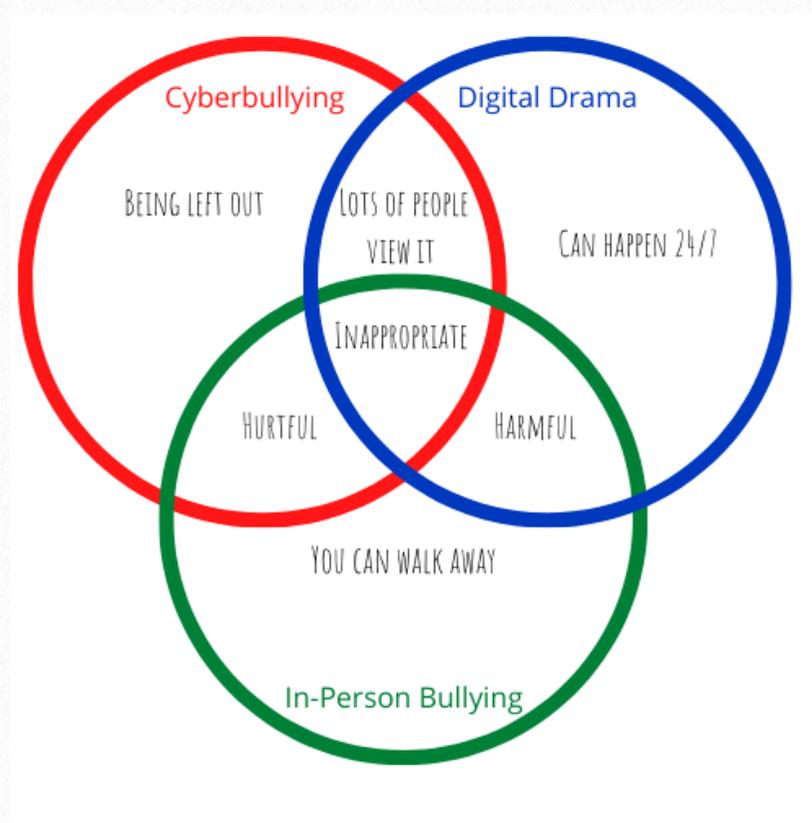
Misunderstandings, being left out, arguments, and hurtful comments shared online.

The Lesson, continued

6. Explain that it's sometimes difficult to distinguish between cyberbullying and digital drama so the following activity will help them understand the similarities and differences between cyberbullying, digital drama, and even in-person bullying. More importantly, it will help you facilitate a rich discussion about cruelty, online and off.

Activity

7. Draw a blank Venn diagram (see example) on the board or project it. Label the circles: **Cyberbullying**, **Digital Drama**, and **In-Person Bullying**. Explain that there are similarities and differences between these behaviors and ask students to help you fill in each circle appropriately (for example, for "In-Person Bullying" they might suggest you write: "You can walk away"; for "Cyberbullying" they might say: "Can happen 24/7," or "It stays online." Fill in the parts of the circles that overlap with attributes that apply to both or all three behaviors (for example, between "Cyberbullying" and "Digital Drama" they might suggest: "Lots of people view it."). Use this exercise as an opportunity for students to reflect on these behaviors and to share examples.



8. Hand out the stories that follow (or use for homework). If you do the work in class, have students work in pairs reading each real-life story and answering the questions. They should be able to distinguish which incident is cyberbullying, which is digital drama, and understand the difference. (Note to teacher: The first story is generally considered cyberbullying, the second is digital drama.)

Goal

To help students understand that **even though good experiences online are much more common than bad ones**, inappropriate and even cruel behaviors can happen. They should know what to watch out for as they learn how to deal with cruelty, online and off.

Your Team: _____

Directions: Read the true stories below. Discuss and answer the questions that follow.

Agnes' Story:

It was my birthday last month and I was so excited because my parents finally got me a phone. I immediately signed up for a social media account because it looked like so much fun. I soon got lots of friend requests and accepted them all. While on a school field trip, one of my friends took a really embarrassing photo of me, and immediately posted it on the social media site I joined. After I told her how embarrassed I was, she deleted the photo. But the damage had already been done. Several kids had taken screen shots of the picture and reposted it elsewhere with mean comments and there was nothing I could do about it. For weeks people shared these posts and even made more mean comments. I was extremely upset and depressed over what was happening. I didn't want to go to school or even do anything.

Is this an example of cyberbullying or digital drama? _____

Explain why _____

Stuart's Story:

One day after school my friends and I were supposed to meet up to play an online game, but when I went online I found no one had logged on to the game they told me we were supposed to play together. It took so much fun out of it. I mean, the whole point was to play online with friends.

It was so annoying and made me feel really down. I didn't know what to do and then I decided to tell my parents. They talked to my friend's parents about it. My friends realized how immature they'd been for tricking me like that. After that incident they made sure they included me and even apologized for not thinking about how I would be affected.

Stuart's Story, continued...

Is this an example of cyberbullying or digital drama? _____

Explain why _____

Stories adapted from <https://kids.kaspersky.com>



TERMS TO KNOW

CYBERBULLYING:

The use of digital tools to bully.

CYBERBULLYING IS:

ONLINE: It happens using digital tools.

INTENTIONAL: It is done on purpose.

REPEATED: It happens more than once.

HARMFUL: It is intended to cause harm.

DIGITAL DRAMA

Misunderstandings, being left out, arguments,
and hurtful comments shared online.