

It's Cool to Be Kind

The power of online positivity



Thematic overview

Activity 1: **From bystanders to upstanders**

Activity 2: **Mind your tone**

Activity 3: **Walking the walk**

Activity 4: **Interland: Kind Kingdom**

Themes

The digital world creates new challenges and opportunities for social interaction, for kids and all the rest of us. Social cues can be harder to read online, constant connecting can bring both comfort and anxiety, and anonymity can fuel crushes and compliments as well as harm to self and others.

It's complicated, but we know that the Internet can amplify kindness as well as negativity. Learning to express kindness and empathy – and how to respond to negativity and harassment – is essential for building healthy relationships and reducing feelings of isolation that sometimes lead to bullying, depression, academic struggles, and other problems.

Research shows that rather than simply telling kids not to be negative online, effective bullying prevention addresses the underlying causes of negative behaviors. These activities encourage students to interact positively from the start and teach them how to deal with negativity when it arises.

Goals for children

- ✓ **Define** what being positive means and looks like online and offline.
- ✓ **Lead** with positivity in online communications.
- ✓ **Identify** situations in which a trusted adult should be consulted.

It's Cool to Be Kind

Vocabulary



Bullying: Purposefully mean behavior that is usually repeated. The person being targeted often has a hard time defending themselves.

Cyberbullying: Bullying that happens online or through using digital devices.

Harassment: A more general term than bullying that can take many forms – pestering, annoying, intimidating, humiliating, etc. – and can happen online too.

Conflict: An argument or disagreement that isn't necessarily repeated.

Aggressor: The person doing the harassing or bullying; though sometimes called the “bully,” bullying prevention experts advise never to label people as such.

Target: The person being bullied or victimized.

Bystander: A witness to harassment or bullying who recognizes the situation but chooses not to intervene.

Upstander: A witness to harassment or bullying who supports the target privately or publicly, sometimes including trying to stop and/or report the incident they witnessed.

Amplify: To increase or widen participation or impact.

Exclusion: A form of harassment or bullying used online and offline; often referred to as “social exclusion”.

Block: A way to end all interaction with another person online, preventing them from accessing your profile, sending you messages, seeing your posts, etc., without notifying them (not always ideal in bullying situations where the target wants to know what the aggressor is saying or when the bullying has stopped).

Mute: Less final than blocking, muting is a way to stop seeing another person's posts, comments, etc., in your social media feed when that communication gets annoying – without notifying that person or being muted from their feed (not helpful in bullying).

Anonymous: An unnamed or unknown person – someone online whose name or identity you don't know.

Trolling: Posting or commenting online in a way that is deliberately cruel, offensive, or provocative.

Report abuse: Using a social media service's online tools or system to report harassment, bullying, threats, and other harmful content that typically violates the service's terms of service or community standards.

It's Cool to Be Kind: Activity 1

From bystanders to upstanders

Children practice identifying the four roles of a bullying encounter (the person who bullies, the target of the bullying, the bystander, and the upstander) and what to do if they're a bystander or a target of bullying.

Goals for children



- ✓ **Identify** situations of harassment or bullying online.
- ✓ **Evaluate** what it means to be a bystander or upstander online.
- ✓ **Learn** specific ways to respond to bullying when you see it.
- ✓ **Know** how to behave if you experience harassment.

Let's talk



Why does kindness matter?

It's important to remind ourselves that behind every username and avatar there's a real person with real feelings, and we should treat them as we would want to be treated. When bullying or other mean behavior happens, most of the time there are four types of people involved.

- There's the aggressor, or person(s) doing the bullying.
- There's also someone being bullied – the target.
- There are witnesses to what's going on, usually called bystanders.
- There are witnesses to what's going on who try to positively intervene, often called upstanders.

If you find yourself the target of bullying or other bad behavior online, here are some things you can do:

If I'm the target, I can...

- Not respond.
- Block the person.
- Report them – tell my parent, teacher, sibling, or someone else I trust, and use the reporting tools in the app or service to report the harassing post, comment, or photo.

If you find yourself a bystander when harassment or bullying happens, you have the power to intervene and report cruel behavior. Sometimes bystanders don't try to stop the bullying or help the target, but when they do, they're being an upstander. You can choose to be an upstander by deciding not to support mean behavior and standing up for kindness and positivity. A little positivity can go a long way online. It can keep negativity from spreading and turning into cruelty and harm.

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If I'm the bystander, I can be an upstander by...

- Finding a way to be kind to or support the person being targeted.
- Calling out the mean behavior in a comment or reply (remember to call out the behavior, not the person), if you feel comfortable with that and think it's safe to do so.
- Deciding not to help the aggressor by spreading the bullying or making it worse by sharing the mean post or comment online.
- Getting a bunch of friends to create a "pile-on of kindness" – post lots of kind comments about the person being targeted (but nothing mean about the aggressor, because you're setting an example, not retaliating) .
- Reporting the harassment. Tell someone who can help, like a parent, teacher, or school counselor.

Activity



Materials needed:

- Handout: "From bystanders to upstanders" worksheet

Answers to "From bystanders to upstanders" worksheet:

Scenario 1: B, U, B (because not helping the situation), U, U

Scenario 2: U, B, U, U

Scenario 3: U, U, B, B, U

Scenario 4: The answers are all yours!

1. Read scenarios and categorize responses

After discussing the roles, pass out the worksheet and give your children 15 minutes to read the three scenarios and categorize each response.

2. Discuss the answers

Before or at the end of the discussion, ask them if they can tell you why it can be nice to have upstanders around at school and online.

3. Discuss those that were hard to categorize

Ask your children if any of the responses were hard to categorize and why. Have a discussion about that.

Takeaway

Whether standing up for others, reporting something hurtful, or ignoring something to keep it from being amplified even more, you have a variety of strategies to choose from depending on the situation. With a little kindness, anyone can make a huge difference in turning bad situations around.

Worksheet: Activity 1

From bystanders to upstanders

So now you know that a bystander can use their powers for good and be an upstander by helping someone out who's being bullied. Below are three scenarios that are examples of online bullying or harassment. If you want, create a fourth scenario that happened with people you know, and come up with responses that include both upstanding and basic bystanding. Each of the three scenarios already created has a list of responses. Read each response and decide whether it's what a bystander would do or what an upstander would do, then put a "B" for "bystander" or a "U" for "upstander" in the blank next to the response.

Scenario 1

A friend of yours dropped her phone by the drinking fountain near the school soccer field. Someone found it and sent a really mean message about another student to a bunch of people on her soccer team, then put the phone back by the drinking fountain. The student who was targeted told your friend she was a terrible person for sending that message, even though she wasn't the one who sent it. No one knows who sent the mean message. You...

- Feel sad for your friend but do nothing because no one knows who did that mean thing to her.
- Go find the person targeted and ask them how they feel and whether you can help.
- Spread the drama by sharing the mean message with other friends.
- And your friend get everybody on the soccer team to post compliments about the person who was targeted.
- And your friend anonymously report the incident to your principal, letting them know that everybody needs to talk about good phone security and locking their phones.

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Scenario 2

Your teacher created a class blog for language arts, giving the class the ability to write, edit, and post comments. The next day she's out sick and the substitute doesn't notice that things are going south in the class blog – someone is posting seriously mean comments about one of the students in the class. You...

- Comment on the comments by saying things like, "This is so not cool" and "I am _____'s friend, and this is not true."
- Ignore it until your teacher gets back.
- Get other students to post nice comments and compliments about the student being targeted.
- Tell the substitute that mean behavior is happening in the class blog, and they might want to let the teacher know.

Scenario 3

There's an online game that a bunch of your friends play a lot. Usually game chat is mostly about what's actually happening in the game. Sometimes it gets a little nasty, though that's usually more like friendly rivalry than anything really bad. But this one time, one player starts saying really nasty stuff about one of your friends who's playing, and they just won't stop. They even keep it up the next day. You...

- Call up your friend and tell them you don't like this any more than they do and ask them what they think you two should do.
- Call everybody you know who plays with you guys (making sure your friend knows you're doing this) to see if you can get everybody's agreement that it's time to call out the nastiness.
- Decide to wait and see if the kid stops, then maybe do something.
- Walk away from the game for a while.
- Look for the game's community rules and if bullying isn't allowed, report the nasty behavior using the game's reporting system.

Scenario 4

Create a real-life scenario as a class, based on a situation one of you has heard about, then come up with both bystander and upstander responses to show you definitely know what we're talking about now!

It's Cool to Be Kind: Activity 2

Mind your tone

Children interpret the emotions behind text messages to practice thinking critically and avoiding misinterpretation and conflict in online exchanges.

Goals for children



- ✓ **Make** the right decisions when choosing how and what to communicate.
- ✓ **Identify** situations in which waiting until you are face-to-face with someone is a better way to communicate than sending a text or message that may be taken the wrong way.

Let's talk



It's easy to misunderstand

Young people use different types of communication for different kinds of interaction, but messages sent via chat and text can be interpreted differently than they would in person or over the phone.

Have you ever been misunderstood in text? For example, have you ever texted a joke and your friend thought you were being serious – or even mean?

Have you ever misunderstood someone else in a text or chat? What did you do to help clarify the communication? What could you do differently?

Activity



Materials needed:

- Sample text messages written or on one of your home devices

1. Review messages

Let's take a look at these sample text messages on the board. Your children probably have great examples too, so let's write some more to discuss.

- "That's so cool".
- "Whatever".
- "I'm so mad at you".
- "CALL ME NOW".
- "Kk fine".

2. Read messages out loud Now

For each message, you are going to ask your children to read it aloud in a specific tone of voice (e.g., 😞 😐 😊). What do you notice? How might these come across to other people? How might each "message sender" better communicate what they really mean?

Takeaway

It can be hard to understand how someone is really feeling when you're reading a text. Be sure you choose the right tool for your next communication – and that you don't read too much into things that people say to you online. If you are unsure what the other person meant, find out by talking with them in person or on the phone.

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It's Cool to Be Kind: Activity 3

Walking the walk

Children discuss how kids can model behavior for adults, too.

Goals for children



- ✓ **Reflect** on the online behavior of adults.
- ✓ **Consider** how the way adults act can model behavior for younger generations.

Let's talk



What adults can teach kids – and what kids can teach adults! It's important to teach kindness. But it's just as important to model the thematic of kindness that we teach. There are plenty of examples of how bullying and harassment aren't just issues for kids. Just look at how adults sometimes treat each other online, in the news media, or in traffic jams.

We've been talking about how important it is to be kind to your classmates and friends online and off. Have you ever seen adults act meanly toward each other, in your everyday life or in the media? Have you seen adults bullying each other? (Remember, we don't need to name names – let's just talk about the behaviors.)

Do you think your generation can build an Internet that's kinder and more positive than the environments some adults have created for themselves? (A lot of adults think you'll probably be better at this too.)

Do you think some kids start bullying or making unkind comments because they see adults around them or in the news doing these things? Yes to all the above? Please give examples. What would YOU do instead – how would you be a better role model for adults?

Takeaway

How you and your friends treat each other online will have a big impact on the digital world your generation builds – not to mention the offline world too.

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It's Cool to Be Kind: Activity 4

Interland: Kind Kingdom

Vibes of all kinds are contagious, for better or for worse. In the sunniest corner of town, aggressors are running amok, spreading negativity everywhere. Block and report the aggressors to stop their takeover and be kind to other Internauts to restore the peaceful nature of this land.

Open a web browser on your desktop or mobile device (e.g., tablet), and visit https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en_be/interland/kind-kingdom.

Discussion topics



Have your children play Kind Kingdom and use the questions below to prompt further discussion about the thematics learned in the game.

- What scenario in Kind Kingdom do you relate to most and why?
- Describe a time when you've taken action to spread kindness to others online.
- In what situation would it be appropriate to block someone online?
- In what situation would it be appropriate to report someone's behavior?
- Why do you think the character in Kind Kingdom is called an aggressor? Describe this character's qualities and how their actions affect the game.
- Did playing Kind Kingdom change the way you plan to behave toward others? If so, how?