



Namastay Healthy
Webinar Series

Coping with COVID-19

COVID-19 & The Rise of Cyberbullying: Examining Interactions During Isolation

Featuring Dr. Abhay Dandekar, MD
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Cyberbullying in Children and Teens

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Definitions

Bullying - unwanted, aggressive behavior among children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance.

Cyberbullying - bullying that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets.

Cyberbullying

★ **Can occur digitally where people can view, participate in, or share content**

- Includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation

★ **Some cyberbullying crosses the line into unlawful or criminal behavior.**

★ **The most common places where cyberbullying occurs are:**

- Social Media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter
- SMS/Text
- Instant Messages (example: WhatsApp)
- Email

Cyberbullying

- ★ Personal Information and content can be shared and may be visible knowingly and unknowingly with strangers as well as acquaintances
- ★ Cyberbullying can be **persistent**
 - Digital content and access is available 24/7, so it may be hard to find relief
- ★ Cyberbullying can be **permanent**
 - If not reported and removed, most digital content is permanent and public.
- ★ Cyberbullying can be **hard to notice**
 - Because teachers and parents may not be directly seeing content, it can be hard to recognize

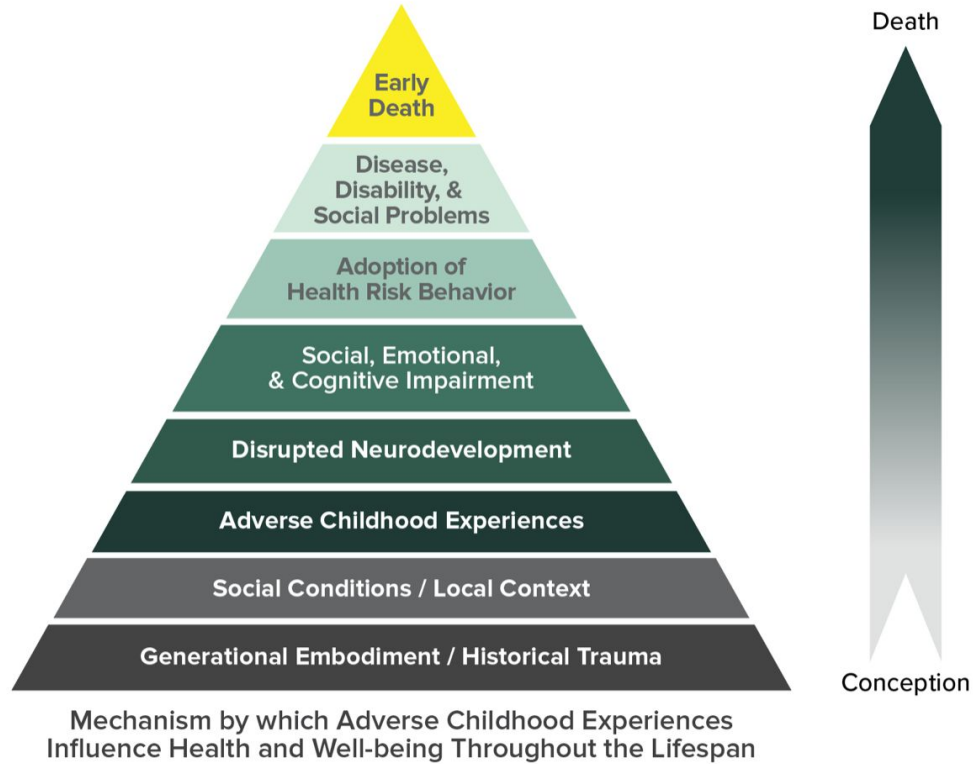
Cyberbullying- different from bullying

- ★ Cyberbullying can be **anonymous**
- ★ Cyberbullying can **occur at any time**
- ★ Cyberbullying can be **passed along quickly and shared rapidly**



Health Effects

- ★ Stress responses
- ★ Headaches
- ★ Digestive issues and abdominal pain
- ★ Muscle aches
- ★ Appetite and weight changes
- ★ Altered immune function
- ★ Mental health issues
- ★ Long term/prolonged of toxic stress
 - substance use, heart disease, etc..



Addressing and Preventing Cyberbullying

- ★ Be attentive to physical health cues
- ★ Be attentive to behavioral cues that may signal cyberbullying
- ★ Be supportive of your child or teen
 - Talk about the incident and actively listen/engage
- ★ Report the incident or behavior (school, police)
- ★ Document the incident
- ★ Be careful not to focus on restricting or taking away a device or time, as the child or teen may feel less confident or trusting to tell a parent in the future
- ★ Seek help (for child/teen/parent)

COVID-19 and Cyberbullying

- ★ Dramatic upswing in availability and use of digital content and interaction
- ★ Dramatic changes to routine and daily life
- ★ Less structure and surveillance
- ★ Increase in xenophobia and hate crimes



COVID-19 and Cyberbullying

- ★ Stay supportive of social connections but mindful of content and method
- ★ Encourage talking on the phone and real-time visual contact
- ★ Strengthen routine and physical activity (esp as a group)
- ★ Talk about log-in habits and monitor online activity together
- ★ Exercise boundaries and rewards
- ★ Remind to “Pause before Posting”
- ★ Concentrate on building self-esteem

SCREEN TIME AND CYBERBULLYING DURING COVID-19

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TODAY'S STORY

- The context
 - Our current reality: COVID-19 and screen time
 - Life may be different, but development is continuing as usual
- Why does cyberbullying happen?
 - Vulnerabilities and risks
- Cyberbullying prevention and coping strategies
 - How caregivers can support children

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS & WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION SCREEN TIME RECOMMENDATIONS

Age range	Recommendation
Under 18 months	No screen time except video chat
18-24 months	Less than 1 hour of high quality screen activity with caregiver
3-5 years	1 hour of high quality app/TV program, supervised by adult
6-10 years	1-1.5 hours/day. Parents should be aware of content
11-13 years	Up to 2 hours/day. Parents' guidance remains important

**No specific guidelines for children 13-17 years old, but general suggestion is to limit non-educational screen time to approximately 2 hours/day

REALITY CHECK:

8-12 YEAR OLDS SPEND ABOUT 5 HOURS/DAY ON THEIR SCREENS

TEENS SPEND ABOUT 8 HOURS/DAY ON THEIR SCREENS

COVID-19 IMPACT ON FAMILIES

Distance learning

+

No group
extracurriculars/limited
outdoor activities

+

Higher parental demands

=

Even more screen time



COVID-19 IMPACT ON FAMILIES

During physical distancing, children and parents are prone to experiencing a myriad of challenging emotions

- Boredom
- Overwhelm
- Sadness
- Fear
- Grief

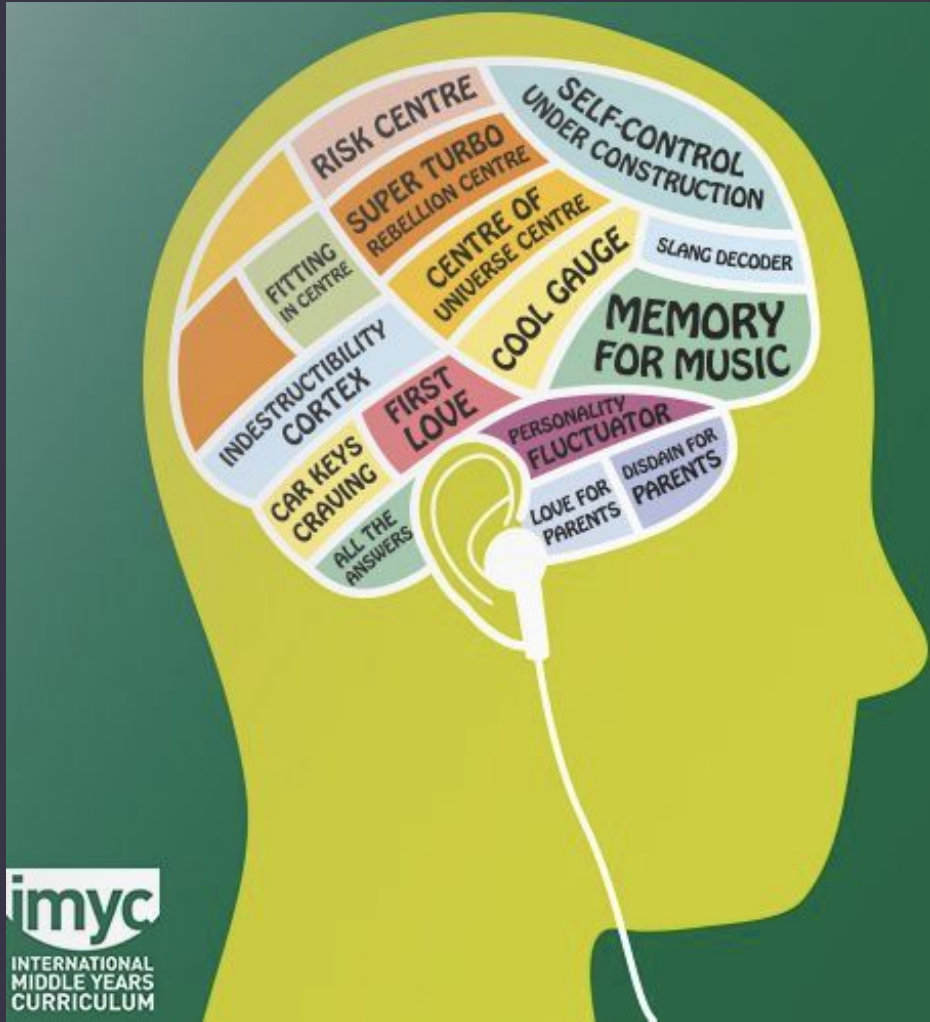


- Worry
- Irritability
- Frustration
- Resentment
- Loneliness

HOW TO INTERPRET AAP RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS UNPRECEDENTED TIME?

- Remind children we are in a unique situation: screen time “rules” are different
- Use guidelines flexibly; make allowances for additional screen time that is:
 - Educational - homework/teacher-led activities
 - Interactive - *quality* time talking with family or friends
 - Stress Relieving - guided mindfulness, coloring apps
- Do not “count” social video calls or family movie night in total screen time
- Emphasize non-screen activities to offset increase in screen time

The adolescent brain



CHANGES DURING ADOLESCENCE

Biological

- Period of immense neuronal pruning and refinement in the brain

Psychological

- Cognitive and emotional control are on different wavelengths
- Still developing good judgment and decision making skills
- Challenges inhibiting impulsive behavior

CHANGES DURING ADOLESCENCE

Social

- Increasing reliance on peers for support
- Natural time for disagreements with authority figures

Cultural

- A time for children to take risks, experiment, make mistakes, and define selves
- Pressure from schools and family to succeed
- Expectation to be increasingly independent

WHY DO CHILDREN ENGAGE IN CYBERBULLYING?

Cognitive limitations due to the brain “under construction”

- Lack of perspective taking
- Belief they will not be caught

Desire to be noticed

Desire to fit in with certain peers

- Some children may “join” bullies to avoid being bullied themselves

Desire to be in charge or have power over a situation

- Children bullied at home are more likely to bully

WHY DO CHILDREN ENGAGE IN CYBERBULLYING?

Low self-esteem

“I’m not a good enough friend/daughter/student”

“I’m not worthy of others’ attention”

Underlying symptoms of depression or anxiety

Retaliation or inaccurate assessment of others’ intentions

- May misinterpret others as hostile or aggressive (could be due to past trauma)

COMMON MENTAL HEALTH CONSEQUENCES

Depressive symptoms

- Poor mood: can resemble irritability in children
- Lack of interest in activities previously enjoyed
- Poor concentration: can affect academic performance
- Changes in sleep/appetite
- Feelings of guilt
- Suicidal thoughts



COMMON MENTAL HEALTH CONSEQUENCES

- Social and General Anxiety

- Fear of engaging with others

- Posttraumatic Stress symptoms

- Nightmares
- Seeming “lost” in thought or “zoned out”
- Having negative views about the world/no longer seeing it as a “safe place”
- Difficulty experiencing positive emotions



**DURING PHYSICAL DISTANCING, THE
INSTRUCTIVE AND PROTECTIVE CLIMATE OF
FACE-TO-FACE PEER INTERACTIONS IS NO
LONGER AVAILABLE**

WHY DO CHILDREN WHO ARE CYBERBULLIED HIDE IT FROM PARENTS?

- Embarrassment or humiliation
- Dismiss their own feelings/reactions as unimportant
- Desire to appear tough, strong, or independent
- Worry their parents will overreact or not believe them
- Concern about losing their electronic devices/online privileges

**STRATEGIES TO LOWER CYBERBULLYING
RISK AND TO HELP CHILDREN COPE**

1. ENCOURAGE SAFE AND MODERATE USE OF DEVICES

- Collaborative technology “contract”
- Screen-free “zones” in the house
- Screen-free hours
- Get to know what apps are popular with your child
- Visit the safety center of mobile apps and social media sites for support
- Model moderate use and admit when you break the rules

2. BE DIRECT, POSITIVE, AND PROACTIVE

“We are all spending more time on the screen lately...and that makes it more likely that cyberbullying can occur. *I trust you*, and I need to know if there is something happening online where you or others can be hurt.”

“If something happens online, *come to me* and we’ll figure out how to respond. Don’t delete the post right away, even if it is humiliating or something you don’t want anyone else to see.”

“People who bully are usually waiting for you to react. Don’t give them that satisfaction and fuel their fire; *you’re stronger than that.*”

3. CREATE ALTERNATIVES TO SCREEN TIME

- “Ban” devices during mealtimes, sit down together and talk face-to-face
- Engage in other leisure activities
 - Cooking/Baking (use a good old-fashioned recipe book!)
 - Exercise
 - Gardening
 - Board games or cards
 - Arts and crafts
 - Jigsaw puzzles, model cars/planes, legos
- Go for a car ride together - no devices allowed except for emergencies!
- Drop everything and read
- Write snail mail to friends/family

WHAT TO DO WHEN CYBERBULLYING OCCURS: ADVICE FOR CHILDREN

- **Ignore** the bully
 - Exit the site, put your phone/device down
- **Document**, *don't* delete
- **Reach out**, *don't* retaliate or respond
 - Seek support from a trusted adult and peers

WHAT TO DO WHEN CYBERBULLYING OCCURS: ADVICE FOR PARENTS

- Avoid overreacting, and respond empathically and quickly
- Gather the facts
- Consider reporting the incident
- Partner with teachers and school administrators if appropriate
- Seek guidance from a counselor/therapist as needed
- Aim to stop the bullying

A GENTLE REMINDER TO PARENTS:

“WHEN YOUR CHILDREN LIVE UNDER YOUR ROOF,
YOU’RE IN CHARGE OF HOW MUCH SCREEN TIME
THEY GET.”

-JUDY KIVOWITZ, PEDIATRIC ADVICE NURSE

A NATURAL COROLLARY:

PARENTS ARE ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR THE
AMOUNT OF SCREEN TIME *PARENTS* GET!

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- Child Mind Institute: www.childmind.org
- Cyberbullying Research Center: <https://cyberbullying.org/>
- Elizabeth Englander: <https://www.englisherelizabeth.com/>
- OnlineSchools.org: <https://www.onlineschools.org/student-bullying-guide/>
- Stop Bullying: www.stopbullying.gov
- Tech Talk Tuesdays newsletter: <https://www.screenagersmovie.com/>
- Teen Line: <https://teenlineonline.org/>

For educators:

- <https://www.common sense.org/education/articles/teachers-essential-guide-to-cyberbullying-prevention>