

Cyber Abuse

Cyber abuse is a general term for abuse that happens on the Internet, or through texts, email, and social media. If someone is teasing or harassing a child or someone else online or with technology, this is called cyberbullying. Some types of cyberbullying even cross the line into unlawful or criminal behavior and most states have anti-bullying laws that include cyberbullying because it can be a form of emotional abuse. Just because these things happen through technology, the behavior is not any less abusive.

Teens will learn about the nature of abuse. Many times an abusive relationship starts out as a good relationship. But if one person begins to cross boundaries or make the other feel uncomfortable, and they repeatedly do not respect personal boundaries, the relationship can become abusive. Sometimes abuse is obvious. They know about it, but they have difficulty trying to stop it or avoid it. Other times, abuse is subtle or hard to see and they don't recognize that it is happening. Sometimes abusers trick people into trusting them. When abusers use gifts and emotional support to manipulate their victim into a relationship, it's called *grooming*. Grooming can occur both in person and online. Students will watch a video explaining what grooming is.

Teens will learn that in an abusive situation, the abuser is usually someone the child knows. Abuse and violence, especially sexual assault, perpetrated against young people happens most frequently at either the victim's or perpetrator's home, but it also happens at school and other locations.

Students will learn about online safety in regards to abuse. One of the times it can be hard to recognize abuse is when students are online. There is a certain type of abuser called an Internet Predator. The FBI estimates that at any given time, there are a half million Internet Predators online. These predators use the Internet to find children whom they can trick into an abusive relationship. Young people often let their guard down while online, allowing strangers into their lives and openly discussing things they would not openly discuss in person. Teens will learn the ways in which online predators target their victims.

Teens will learn the Speak Up Be Safe safety principles:

- The first principle is "I decide what to do with my body."
- The second principle is "It's okay to ask for help to keep yourself and others safe."
- The third principle is "I have choices." (options or strategies to resist or get away from abusive situations)
- The fourth safety principle is "Tell someone in authority."
- The fifth, and perhaps the most important, safety principle is "Abuse is NEVER my fault."

Students will work together in small groups and asked to think critically by analyzing scenarios representing potentially abusive situations.

Students will watch a video to learn about human trafficking. Human trafficking is a crime in which an abuser uses a person for their own benefit. The person taking advantage is called a human trafficker. When the trafficker uses a child for their benefit, it's called "child trafficking." People who traffic children look for youth with vulnerabilities, which can be any life circumstances that open children up to be a target. But having vulnerabilities isn't the problem. We all have them. The problem is the person who takes advantage of a child with vulnerabilities, and ANYONE can be a child trafficker. These days, trafficking, in one form or another, can happen anywhere.

People often think of human or child traffickers as kidnappers, but victims usually have some kind of relationship with the trafficker, whether it's online or in their physical life.

Teens will learn the acronym RESIST in order to help themselves if they encounter potentially abusive situations. Having a plan ahead of time is always a good idea.

R - Run (immediately get away from the situation; find a safe place or person)

E - Escape (if you can't leave immediately, remove yourself from the danger as soon as possible)

S - Scream (get someone's attention; get help, make an excuse)

I - Ignore (avoid the issue now; take action later)

S - Stay Away (if you know a problem exists, don't go back to it)

T - Tell (find someone you trust or someone in authority and tell them what happened)

Students will break into small groups and discuss potentially abusive situations and how to apply the RESIST strategies. Then they will have a class discussion about each scenario and the how RESIST strategies work.

One scenario the students will discuss includes the term sextortion. Sextortion is a crime and a form of child sexual exploitation in which children are threatened or blackmailed. Sextortion happens when a child shares an image with someone they thought they knew or trusted. In many cases children are targeted by a person they met online who obtained a sexual image or sexual content from the child through deceit, coercion, or some other method in order to get money or additional sexual content. Believe it or not, sextortion happens to thousands of young people and even adults every year. Law enforcement can intervene and stop the harassment, arrest the person or people behind the crime and help get the support the victim needs.

Teens will discuss the reasons it can be hard to tell an adult or authority figure about unsafe or abusive situations.

- are afraid no one will believe you
- are worried friends and family will judge you
- don't want to get anyone in trouble
- are scared you will get in trouble
- are afraid someone will hurt you or someone you care about
- think there is no solution to the problem
- feel alone, think no one cares, believe no one will help or understand
- are worried you will embarrass your family once you tell

Students will learn that adults understand abuse can be subtle or hard to detect, and teens can become involved in unhealthy situations or relationships without realizing what is happening. No matter how a child ended up in a situation where abuse was taking place, abuse is never their fault and it's never too late to tell.