In the Line of fire

Raising Kids in a Violent World

JAN ARNOW

Foreword by Maryum Ali

In The Line of Fire

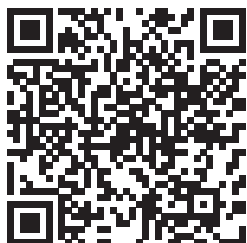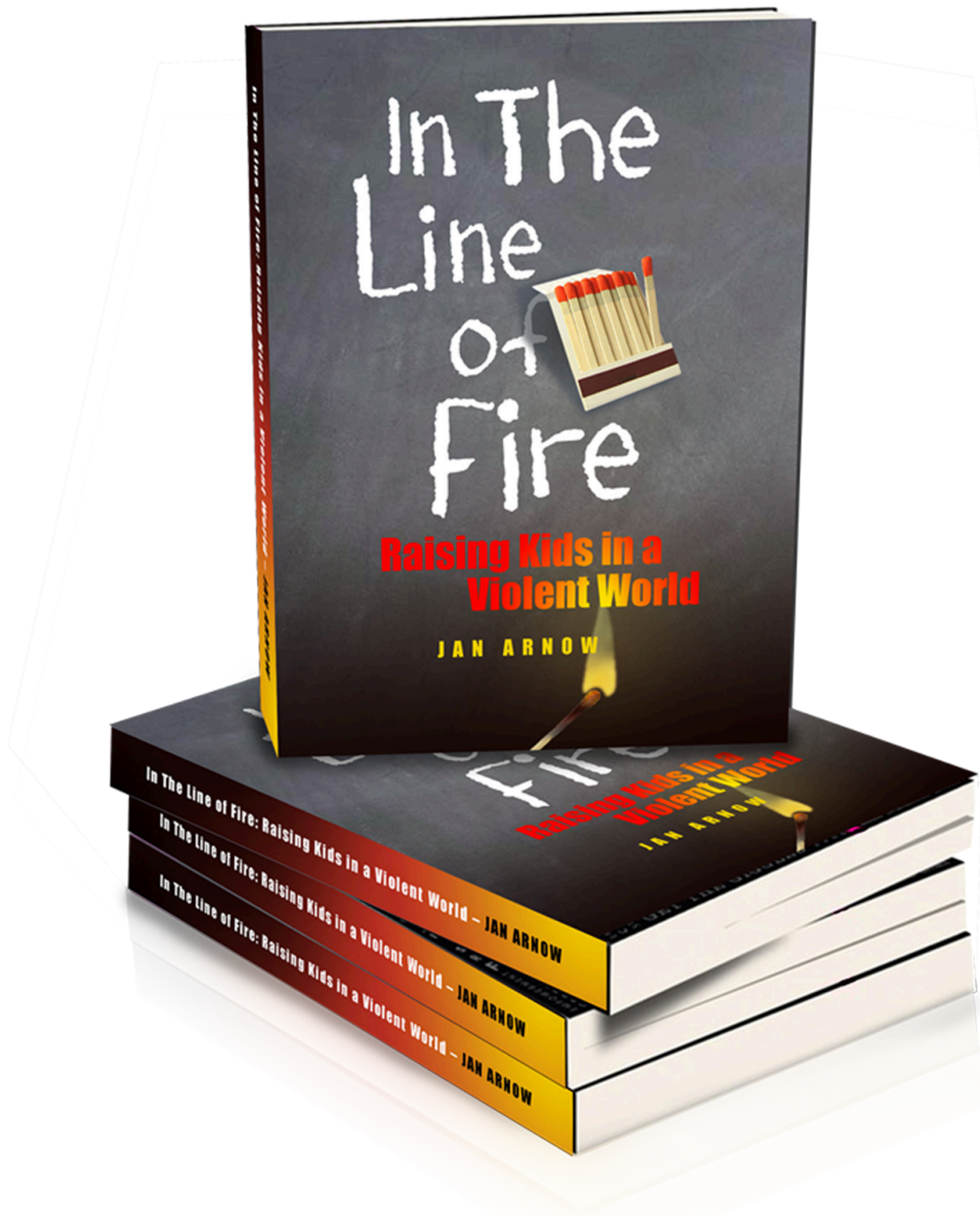## Raising Kids in a Violent World

JAN ARNOW

Use your smartphone to scan directly to order *In The Line of Fire: Raising Kids in a Violent World* from Butler Books.

http://www.butlerbooks.com/inthelineoffire.html

For children everywhere

Please note that web addresses provided in this book were current as of publication.

One of the most fascinating yet worrisome things about newborn babies is how fragile they are. People who sincerely care about their well-being work hard to keep them from harm by gingerly holding them, speaking to them with a soft tone, feeding them foods their tiny bodies can digest, and protecting them from anything or anyone that can put them in harm's way. From one stage of development to the next, children are dependent on their parents or guardians to provide the nurturing and sustenance necessary for proper growth. Yes, parental figures are on the frontlines when it comes to how children are raised and conditioned, but there are multiple agents of socialization that we must acknowledge and contend with. This blend of social forces includes families, peers, schools, communities, mass media, and everything in between. Kids are bombarded with things that can distort their self-image and the image of others. In many situations, they are inadvertently trained to handle differences with hate and aggression. Many external forces seem out of our control, because they are contributing to a world of violence that has destructive effects on children and teens. So, what should we do about it?

Jan Arnow's book *In the Line of Fire: Raising Kids in a Violent World* is a comprehensive plan of action for creating environments that will enhance the emotional, social, and physical well-being of children. Jan holistically addresses a myriad of factors that have negative and violent impacts on youth such as their exposure to war toys, books, video games, guns, and cyberspace. Unfortunately, families, institutions, and corporations are exposing younger generations to things that are toxic to their human spirit. Some do this unknowingly while others are in pursuit of financial gains. And since these forces are complex and interrelated, they can create a difficult terrain to navigate through.

Jan's book is an antidote that can mitigate societal poisons infecting our children. She thoroughly identifies the dynamics of problems that youth face and shares proven strategies and resources. This book is filled with best practices that will have long-term, positive effects on children. The broad scope of information it covers provides the knowledge base needed to create healthier environments for our youth and help equip them with the social skills and protective factors necessary to thrive well into adulthood.

Too many of us think that once children pass the infant phase of their lives we can put down our guards. In reality, this is not wise because although they may be physically stronger, they are still emotionally delicate. We must be keenly cognizant of how impressionable children and teenagers are, because too often we arrive late to the corrupt game society plays on young undiscerning minds. Too often loved ones mourn the deaths of children after suicides caused by bullying or after fatal shootings. In order for us to save our kids, we must have a comprehensive understanding of where violent thinking and behaviors originate. Being proactive at all stages of their development is the key that can unlock the door to a safer existence, but everyone must do his or her part and be held accountable for the world's children and their futures.

Maryum "May May" Ali
Peace activist, gang prevention specialist, and daughter of Muhammad Ali
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Introduction

Suppose we wanted to design a training program for children in which the primary objective was to prepare them to hate by the time they entered kindergarten, and then move on to live a life infused with violence as they grew older. What would that program be like?

It might be one in which:

There is free access to toys and games where your ability to win depends on your ability to maim and kill, and where exposure to advertising of those toys and games is the equivalent of 22 days of classroom instruction per year.[1]

There is an overexposure to video games in which the object is to solve conflicts and gain power using violence.[2]

There is easy access to drugs of all kinds, coupled with decreasing funding for substance abuse treatment.[3]

Juvenile detention centers have spent millions of dollars "warehousing" youth in juvenile justice facilities instead of providing treatment.[4]

The average child watches 22,000 hours of TV by age 18, compared to only 11,000 hours spent in the classroom, according to Nielson data.[5]

Time spent watching screens increases rapidly in the early years. Between their first and second birthdays, on any given day, 64 percent of babies and toddlers are watching TV and videos, averaging slightly more than 2 hours.[6]

By the time an average child leaves elementary school, he or she will have witnessed an estimated 8,000 murders and more than 100,000 other acts of violence on television. By the time that child is 18 years of age, he or she will have witnessed 200,000 acts of violence, including 40,000 murders.[7]

Only 10 percent of children's viewing time is spent watching children's television; the other 90 percent is spent watching programs designed for adults.[8]

The status of being the most heavily armed country on the face of the earth is fiercely maintained, with more than 300 million guns in the hands of ordinary citizens, approximately one gun per person, equaling 35 to 50 percent of all civilian-owned guns in the world.[9]

Disputes once settled with fists are now settled with guns; where during every 100 hours on our streets there is a loss of more young men than American soldiers killed in 100 hours of ground war in Iraq.[10]

A child or teenager dies or is injured from guns every 30 minutes, and more die from guns every three days than died in the Newtown massacre.[11]

Children and teenagers in the United States are 17 times more likely to die from a gun than are their peers in the top 25 other high-income countries combined. [12]

American companies manufacture enough bullets each year to fire 31 rounds into every American citizen.[13]

One in 10 children suffers from maltreatment. One in 16 children suffers from sexual abuse. Nearly one in 10 children witnesses family violence. The youngest children are the most vulnerable to maltreatment. Over 25 percent of abused children are under the age of three, and more than 45 percent of abused children are under the age of five.[14]

Children are more likely to be exposed to violence and crime than are adults, and these experiences of violence can lead to lasting physical, mental, and emotional harm, whether the child is a direct victim or a witness.[15]

Violent language has become increasingly mainstream, from "ethnic cleansing" to "takeovers" and "kill the competition."

When I lecture and conduct workshops for teachers, parents, corporations, and community leaders throughout the world, I often begin with the exercise above. After citing the statistics, I then ask, "What's wrong with this picture?"

Of course, the answer is that these appalling statistics are all current, and such a program to teach children to hate and become involved in later violence, designed around these very elements, already exists. We live it each day, in every part of this country, at every socioeconomic level.

Yet, we wonder why our children have grown so violent and so prepared to hate.

It has been said that inherent in one conflict is the beginning of another. Studies have shown that if children learn that violence, conflict, and hatred are the prevailing option, these behaviors become normal to them and they are more than likely to perpetuate them into their adult lives. To me, this is a frightening reality. It means that no matter how much effort and resources we pour into ending neighborhood and world conflicts today, there are several generations waiting in the wings to begin further conflicts tomorrow, generations of children who are already trained and more than willing, and in many cases eager, to participate.

I am not satisfied with this vision of the future. As an educator, a concerned citizen, a mother, and a grandmother, I have written this book for others who may also be apprehensive about tomorrow.

The views that I express and the suggestions that I make have grown out of several basic premises that I hold:

• We are now well into the 21st century. To help us predict how America will fare in the next decades, we must pay very close attention to some important demographic changes. These include the shift in the age structure and diversity of our population, the growing population of at-risk children and adults, the significant transfer of resources away from our children and young families to our mature workforce and aging population, and the government policy of increasingly doing less to ensure a competitive and productive future for our children.

• Those who are children today will run our world by the middle of this century, but *we* make the decisions that will affect them before they are old enough to assume leadership. As we wonder what kind of leaders they will be based on the powerful forces of violence and hatred with which they are faced, we must remember that *we* are in charge today. We have the choice of either passing on to them a legacy of sustainable coexistence, or relinquishing our considerable power and allowing the crisis of violence to increase its own destructive momentum.

• Caring for children is not the responsibility of only the parents, nor is education solely the job of school systems. Everyone raises children, regardless of whether or not we have children of our own. It is, therefore, everyone's job to address the issues in this book.

• There is no absolute truth. Each of us must search within ourselves for that which is meaningful and true to us, and the search must be ongoing. Because change is a constant, we cannot be satisfied tomorrow with what we decide today. Similarly, what is effective for one person in one situation may not be so for another in a different situation. It is normal to have conflicting feelings about the issues covered in this book. The debate will continue and the struggle for clarity on these issues will go on. In the meantime, we must continue to parent and teach. What is important is not that all people agree on all issues and all truths, but that we continue to explore options and present ourselves as thoughtful, humane role models to our children.

• Once the blow of the next school massacre, teen suicide, or drug deal gone badly has passed, and we drift back to believing in the illusion of safety and security in our lives, we become callused and indifferent to these topics. It is precisely during times of feeling shocked, vulnerable, and upset that these difficult topics should be discussed and debated. We should be talking about all of the issues contained in this book right now as well as when tragedy befalls our families and communities.

• If we begin with compassion, all activities become positive experiences.

The problems discussed in this book have taken generations to attain the position they hold in our lives today. They will not be eliminated, or even addressed sufficiently, in a sound bite. In fact, we may never see the results we want in our lifetimes, but that is not a reason to put off addressing the issues in positive ways. It is in this spirit that I welcome each of you to the pages of this book. I offer it to you in acknowledgement of our similarities, our differences, and the common bond we have in believing that children, all children, deserve a peaceful future.

Jan Arnow
jarnow@iglou.com

For Your Information
Annotated book and resource
reviews related to the chapter topic

How Do You Rate?
Topic-specific checklists

Programs that Work
Examples of proven practices,
how-to's, and so on

Expressing Your Concerns
Where to send letters and faxes

Straight Talk
Quotations from parents,
teachers, children, and experts

What Does it Mean?
Definitions of key words
in each chapter

Did You Know?
Lists of easily grasped,
pertinent facts

What You Can Do
Lists of action steps
to take, by topic

What's in This Book

With manifestations of violence in our homes, schools, and communities at an unprecedented high, we're all hungry for answers. From the earliest moments in a child's life, through the agonizing impact of gun violence and hate crime, there is a silver lining: each of us can step in and make a difference.

To help you identify the problems and issues, implement the solutions, and pursue a path toward peaceful homes, schools, and communities, *In the Line of Fire: Raising Kids in a Violent World* balances conciseness with a conversational tone, in a way that threads the ideas throughout the text.

In the Line of Fire: Raising Kids in a Violent World can be used in many ways:

- To gain in-depth knowledge of the broad scope of the dangers of violence in the lives of our children, read *In the Line of Fire: Raising Kids in a Violent World* from cover to cover. This is the best reading method to understand the dire position we're in, how interconnected these problems are, and how to fix them.

- If you're interested in a particular phase of a child's life or specific problems or issues, turn to the chapter that addresses those issues. All chapters can be read individually with no prior understanding necessary.

- Scholars, researchers, and academics can look through the extensive bibliography section and the hundreds of citations in this book for additional reading material.

- Those who prefer computer surfing can look through the Internet web addresses at the end of each chapter for the resources mentioned within each chapter.

- If you're interested in quick bits of information on a myriad of topics, open to any page of *In the Line of Fire: Raising Kids in a Violent World* and catch one of the specific pieces of information wherever you see these icons to the left.

And if you want to be on my mailing list for updates of *In the Line of Fire: Raising Kids In a Violent World* and related materials; have suggestions to include in a curriculum guide for this book; would like me to speak at your conference, school, community center, corporation, house of worship, or other gathering; want to let me know how you used *In the Line of Fire: Raising Kids in a Violent World*; or for any other reason, please contact me at **jarnow@iglou.com**.

Sticks, Stones, and Digital Damage

Tyler Clementi killed himself in 2010 after his roommate at Rutgers University filmed and distributed a video of him kissing another man.

Phoebe Prince, a 15-year-old girl who moved to the United States from Ireland, killed herself after high school classmates in Massachusetts bullied her.

The death of 15-year-old Amanda Cummings from Staten Island made headlines when her family said that relentless bullying was to blame for her suicide.

Ty Field, a pre-teen from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, was only 11 years old when he killed himself after classmates mercilessly bullied him.

Thirteen-year-old Hope Witsell of Sundance, Florida, hanged herself after a photo she sexted to a boy was leaked around school and teens bullied her.

Ashlynn Conner, a 10-year-old girl from east central Illinois, took her own life after intense bullying at school. After enduring years of teasing and being called a slut, fat, and ugly, among other insults, Conner asked her mother to be home-schooled. Her mother denied her request and the next day her sister found Conner hanging in her closet by a scarf.

Amanda Todd was found dead in Coquitlam, British Colombia, less than a month before her 16th birthday. The previous month, Todd posted a nine-minute video on YouTube featuring her holding up cue cards that chronicled the cyberbullying and cruelty she suffered, despite changing schools and cities.

William and Janis Mohat's 17-year-old son, Eric, was bullied to death at Mentor High School in Mentor, Ohio. On March 29, 2007, Mohat shot himself after relentless harassment and intimidation, which included being pushed, shoved, and hit, and being called a "fag," a "queer," and a "homo." Eric had never shown any interest in homosexuality.

Kids Will Be Kids

Day after day, many children wake up terrified, afraid to go to school, knowing they'll be the victims of taunting, teasing, threats, physical and emotional abuse, and worse—in other words, what one victim called "public humiliation followed by private torment."

To some, childhood bullying is a rite of passage that is best worked out by the children themselves. To others, it's a healthy display of aggression where those who solve problems through physical force—like Rambo, GI Joe, Ironman, Batman, and Wolverine—repeatedly come out winners and are hailed as

Did You Know?

**Signs That May Indicate
Your Child is Being Bullied**

Your children may:

- Be frightened of walking to or from school
- Change the usual route to school
- Not want to go on the school bus
- Beg you to drive them to school
- Be unwilling to go to school
- Feel ill in the mornings
- Begin cutting school
- Begin doing poorly in schoolwork
- Come home regularly with their clothes or books destroyed
- Frequently "lose" items like books, electronics, clothes, or other valuable items
- Come home hungry because the bully has taken their lunch or lunch money
- Become withdrawn, start stammering, and lack confidence
- Become distressed and anxious
- Attempt or threaten suicide
- Cry themselves to sleep
- Have nightmares
- Claim that their possessions are missing
- Ask for money or begin stealing money (to pay the bully)
- Continuously "lose" their pocket money
- Refuse to say what's wrong
- Have unexplained cuts, scratches, or bruises
- Begin to bully other children or siblings
- Become aggressive or unreasonable
- Hurt themselves by cutting, burning, or developing eating disorders
- Lose interest in friends or participating in extracurricular activities
- Feel helpless
- Exhibit low self-esteem

heroes. Some still believe that bullying is a kids-will-be-kids problem. There are many others who understand that bullying is a serious problem, but who adamantly insist it does not exist in their child's school.

The National Crime Prevention Council states:

> Although bullying was once considered a rite of passage, parents, educators, and community leaders now see bullying as a devastating form of abuse that can have long-term effects on youthful victims, robbing them of self-esteem, isolating them from their peers, causing them to drop out of school and even prompting health problems and suicide.

Bullying is not restricted to certain schools, either. It is an equal-opportunity torment: the size of a school, its location (rural, urban, or suburban), and its racial composition do not appear to have any bearing on the occurrence of bullying. Bullying is a ubiquitous and frequently devastating form of cruelty in nearly all schools and neighborhoods. According to the Risk(within)reason website:

- Every 30 minutes a teenager attempts suicide due to bullying.
- About 47 teens are bullied every five minutes.
- Cyberbullying is on the rise in dramatic numbers; it is relentless and especially frightening if the bully is anonymous.
- About 282,000 students report being physically attacked in high schools in our nation each month.
- Seventy-one percent of students report bullying as an ongoing problem.
- "Bullycide" is the new term for suicide as a result of being bullied.
- Almost half of all students fear harassment or bullying in the school bathroom.

Bullying is not a new phenomenon. It happens in all schools, and, thanks to social media, it's on the rise. The Internet vastly extends the reach of bullies.

Bullying is persistent unwelcome behavior and can be defined in many ways. Generally, the following applies:

- It is deliberate, hurtful behavior.

- It is often repeated over time.

- It is difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves.

- It is not the same as conflict or disagreement, although it may involve both.

- There is always a power imbalance that makes the ill treatment of the victim possible.

Bullying typically consists of direct behaviors—such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting, and stealing—that are initiated by one or more children against a victim or victims. In addition to direct attacks, bullying may also be indirect—such as spreading rumors that cause victims to be socially isolated through intentional exclusion. Although boys who bully typically engage in direct bullying methods, girls who bully are more apt to use subtler, indirect strategies. Whether the bullying is direct or indirect, the key component of bullying is physical or psychological intimidation that occurs repeatedly over time to create an ongoing pattern of harassment and abuse.

Some of the ways children bully another child include:

- Calling them names
- Humiliating them
- Saying or writing nasty comments about them
- Leaving them out of activities or ignoring them
- Threatening them
- Making them feel uncomfortable or scared
- Stealing or damaging their things
- Hitting, pushing, kicking, or otherwise attacking them
- Making them do things they don't want to do
- Spreading rumors about them
- Forcing them to hand over money or possessions

Bullies, Victims, and Bystanders

The Bully

The flight path of a bully, from earliest aggression to outright bullying, starts early. Some new research suggests that while only a minority of toddlers are habitual bullies, this aggressive tendency appears to emerge right along with the motor skills that make it possible—by age one. Bullies develop differently

another child, and refuse to accept responsibility for their behavior.

Bullies first establish their power base by testing the response of the less-powerful members of their peer group, watching how they react when small things happen. They will find out how the teacher reacts to minor transgressions of the rules and will wait to see if the victim complains. If there are no consequences to the bad behavior early on—if the victim does not complain and if the peer group silently or even actively colludes—the bully will continue and will escalate the behavior.

To make things more complicated, there is more than one type of bully. *Physical bullies* are action-oriented. This type of bullying includes hitting or kicking the victim, or taking or damaging the victim's property. This is the least sophisticated type of bullying because it is so easy to identify. The entire population of the school knows who the physical bullies are. As they get older, their attacks usually become more aggressive.

Verbal bullies use words to hurt or humiliate another person. Verbal bullying includes name-calling, insulting, making racist comments, and constant teasing. This type of bullying is the easiest to inflict

Did You Know?

Why don't more bystanders intervene when they see bullying happen?

They think, "It's none of my business."

They fear getting hurt or becoming another victim.

They feel powerless to stop the bully.

They don't like the victim or they believe the victim "deserved" it.

They don't want to draw attention to themselves.

They fear retribution.

They think that telling adults won't help or it may make things worse.

They don't know what to do.
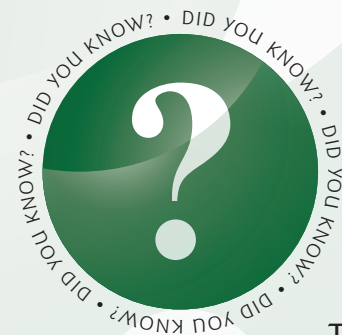
from most children. Studies have shown that these children have a distinctive cognitive makeup—perceiving hostility toward them where it does not exist, processing social information inaccurately, endorsing revenge, and favoring the use of violence to solve problems. They are experts at short-term payoffs. They become upset quickly, show distress easily, and are quick to become oppositional and defiant. They have no sense of remorse for hurting
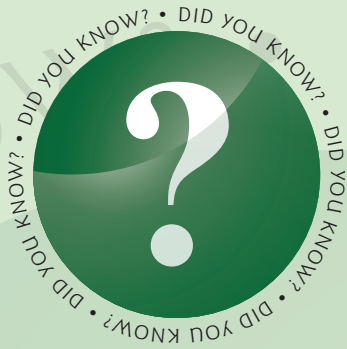
Why Is It So Hard to Tell?

Reasons for not telling an adult by students who had been bullied but had not sought help:

Fear of bully getting back at you	42 percent
Not wanting to be a tattletale	41 percent
Not wanting to worry parents	34 percent
Shame at not being able to stick up for self	31 percent
Fear of losing friends	29 percent
Hard to prove	29 percent
No confidence in adults keeping name out of it	25 percent
Fear of what parents might say	25 percent
Mixed up and confused	25 percent
Something I can't change	23 percent
Unable to put feelings into words	23 percent
Parents don't understand school life	23 percent
Accepted as something to put up with	22 percent
Feel no one will believe me	20 percent
Not wanting to get them into trouble	19 percent
Not wanting to show the victim is not popular	16 percent
Not seeing it as bullying	16 percent
Blame myself	15 percent
I deserve it	7 percent

Source: The Megan Meier Foundation

on other children. It is quick and to the point. It can occur in the least amount of time available, and its effects can be more devastating in some ways than physical bullying because there are no visible scars.

Relational or *relationship* bullies try to convince their peers to exclude or reject a certain person or people and cut the victims off from their social connections. This type of bullying is linked to verbal bullying and usually occurs when children (most often girls) spread nasty rumors about others or exclude an ex-friend from the peer group. The most devastating effect with this type of bullying is the rejection by the peer group at a time when children most need their social connections.

Whatever the type, bullying has a very long run. It may begin in childhood, but it often continues into adulthood. It is among the most stable of human behavior styles.

Why Kids Bully
Children start bullying to gain or cement status or power within their peer group. They keep bullying because they see it as a way of being popular, showing off, or making themselves look tough. Some children bully to get attention, and some just like making other people feel afraid of them. Others might be jealous of the person they are bullying, or might be being bullied themselves. They may not even realize that what they are doing is wrong and how it makes their victims feel.

Frequently they have their own problems, specifically trouble at home. Some are victims of abuse and take out their humiliation and anger on others. Bullies often come from homes where there is a lack of affection, where one or both parents are bullies themselves, or where they have received physical punishment or abuse from the parents.
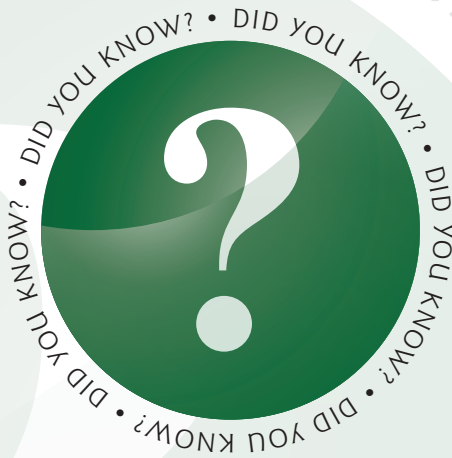
Did You Know?

There is an enormous discrepancy between what students report about teachers intervening in bullying incidents and what teachers believe happens:[160]

- Twenty-five percent of students report that teachers intervene.

- Seventy-one percent of teachers believe they always intervene.

In fact, playground observation research finds:

- Adult intervention in only 4 percent of incidents

- Peer intervention in 11 percent of incidents

- No intervention in 85 percent of incidents

The Future for the Bully

The lifelong outlook for bullies is not good. If bullies don't learn how to change their behavior, the pattern of bullying often becomes a habit as the bully gets older. Bullies have average social popularity up to approximately age 14 or 15. In fact, some children even look up to bullies in some ways because they appear to be powerful. However, by late adolescence, the bully's popularity begins to wane. By senior high school, *if* a bully is still attending school, his or her peer group includes other bullies, or more seriously, he or she has developed or is developing gang alliances.

By late high school and into their 20s, schoolyard bullying is a rare occurrence, but what takes its place is more serious. By age 24, up to 60 percent of people who are identified as childhood bullies have at least one criminal conviction. A study spanning 35 years found that children who were named by their peers at age eight as the bullies of the school were often bullies throughout their lives. In this longitudinal study of bullies, many of these children, as adults, required more support from government agencies. For example, these children later had more court convictions, more alcoholism, more antisocial personality disorders, and used more mental health services than the other children.[161]

Dr. Tonja R. Nansel and colleagues at the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development conducted a nationwide survey of 15,686 students in sixth through tenth grade in public and private schools. They found that children who bullied and their victims were more likely to engage in violent behaviors later in their lives than those who had never been involved in bullying. They found that children who bully are at risk for engaging in more serious violent acts, including fighting frequently and carrying weapons. For example, among boys surveyed who said they had bullied others at least once a week in school, 52.2 percent had carried weapons in the previous month, 43.1 percent carried weapons to school, 38.7 percent fought frequently, and 45.7 percent reported being injured in fights. The comparable statistics for boys who had never bullied others in school were 13.4 percent, 7.9 percent, 8.3 percent, and 16.2 percent.[162]

A lot of evidence suggests that the child who learns to bully at school and gets away with it will go on to be a serial bully in the workplace, if they can find work. Studies have shown that, as they grow older, their behavior becomes more abusive and unsafe. Unless new behaviors are learned and adopted early, bullies continue to bully throughout their lifetimes—bullying their friends, their spouses, and their co-workers.

Finally, people who had been bullies are more likely to have children who become bullies themselves—by modeling aggression as a solution to conflict, and physically and verbally lashing out at their children—thus beginning the cycle all over again.

Who Are the Victims?
The Victim
Anyone can be the victim of a bully, especially in the earlier years of a child's development. Studies suggest that up until about age seven, bullies pick on anyone. However, as they grow older, bullies single out certain types of children to be victimized. At the beginning of the school year, when children don't know each other well, bullies engage in what Gary Ladd of Arizona State University calls the "shopping process." The highest percentage of students report being bullied on more than a moderate level during this time. As the school year goes on, the bullies focus their attention on the most vulnerable.[163]

These victims share one or more of these characteristics:

• They are non-assertive in non-confrontational settings. They don't make overtures to others, don't initiate conversation, and don't attempt to verbally persuade their peers—no demands, requests, or even suggestions. Child psychologist David Schwartz calls them "socially incompetent," preferring to spend time in passive play, and playing parallel to their peers rather than interacting with them.

We're not even realizing the fact that suicide is bullying's quiet little secret. It's picking off our children one at a time.[164]

—Glenn Stutzky, a school violence specialist at Michigan State University

How Do You Rate?

Are You Aware?

Yes	No	
☐	☐	Is bullying acknowledged in your child's school?
☐	☐	What counts as bullying at the school?
☐	☐	How much bullying occurs in or near the school?
☐	☐	Where or when does bullying occur?
☐	☐	Does the school keep records of bullying incidents?
☐	☐	What do school personnel do about bullying?
☐	☐	Does the school have an anti-bullying policy?
☐	☐	What are the goals and contents of the anti-bullying policy?
☐	☐	Who is supposed to do what when there's a bullying incident?

- Victims tend to have fewer friends than children who do not experience bullying. In addition, victims of bullying are often perceived poorly by peers and frequently experience peer rejection. These children are often found alone at recess and lunchtime.

- They are different in some way. Children with special needs are disproportionately victims of bullying. Children with learning disorders and obvious physical or mental issues, those who are overweight or physically small, or those who are homosexual or bisexual face abuse at higher levels than do their peers.

- They are physically weak. This is particularly true for kids who look weaker at first glance; in other words, kids who are shorter, thinner, or less muscular than are their peers. Victimized children also tend to perform poorly or fail entirely at sports. Most bullies are physically strong and tend to seek out children who are ill-equipped to fight back.

- They have overprotective parents. Studies have shown that victims are likely to have close relationships with their parents and tend to come from overprotective families. Such parents avoid open disagreements with their child and try to create a sense of harmony in the household at all costs. Unfortunately, this makes the child less able to deal with conflict and more likely to be victimized by peers. In addition, parents of victims often become socially over-involved with their child to make up for peer rejection. Again, this only makes the child's problems with peers worse rather than better.

The hurt done is often considerable and long remembered. An adult learns to cope with pain, fear, rejection, loss, and loneliness, but a child is easy to wound and often has few skills to cope.[165]

—Drs. Gabrielle Maxwell and Janis Carroll-Lind

*To be nobody but yourself in a world
which is doing its best, night and day, to make
you everybody else means to fight the hardest
battle which any human being can fight;
and never stop fighting.*[166]

—e. e. cummings

The Future for the Victim

Typically, victims give in to the demands of their bullies. They easily cry and assume defensive positions. Not only do they not fight back, but they also hand over their belongings, reinforcing their attackers' behavior both psychologically and materially. This sets up a vicious circle—being victimized leads to feeling anxious, restless, and frightened of further bullying, which then increases the danger of further victimization.

No one likes a bully, but children are not partial to victims, either. Few children like them and many actively dislike them. Gradually, victims become more and more isolated from their peers. While bullying is painful, it is the social isolation that probably is most damaging to victims. An emerging body of research shows that social isolation, to say nothing of active rejection, is one of the highest forms of stress that we can experience. Rejection deprives these children of the very opportunities they need to acquire and practice social competence.

Bullying is a psychologically distinctive experience. It is painful, scary, and leaves the victim feeling powerless. This persecution leads to a host of social-psychological difficulties. Regardless of their grades, a disproportionate number of rejected kids drop out of school. These children internalize the very negative views of themselves that others hold, often for life. "That's a waste of human beings," says Gary Ladd, "and a threat to the health and wealth of the country." [167]

In some cases, victims move on with their lives, but carry emotional scars for a lifetime. Many other victims simply take matters into their own hands with self-destructive or lethal retaliation. Each year, one out of 13 kids under the age of 19 attempts suicide, a rate that has tripled over the last 20 years. Last year, more than 2,000 of them succeeded.[168]

And we are all familiar with those who retaliated outwardly; their names dominate the nightly news.

The Bystanders

While we tend to focus on the familiar dyad of bully and victim, this dance macabre includes many more participants. The effects of bullying on bystanders—those who are not directly involved in the bullying action—are becoming more and more well-known; they have even spawned their own Wikipedia page for the bystander effect:

> The bystander effect is a social-psychological phenomenon that refers to cases in which individuals do not offer help to a victim. The probability of help is inversely related to the number of bystanders. In other words, the greater the number of bystanders, the less likely it is that any one of them will help. Several variables help explain why the bystander effect occurs. These variables include ambiguity, cohesiveness, and diffusion of responsibility.

Why Kids Don't Intervene

Although most research on the bystander effect has been conducted on adults, children can be bystanders, too. Bystanders, who appear in bullying situations 60 to 80 percent of the time, play a powerful role. In a study conducted by Robert Thornberg, published in 2010, he concluded that children in whose presence bullying is occurring go through seven stages of moral deliberation:[169]
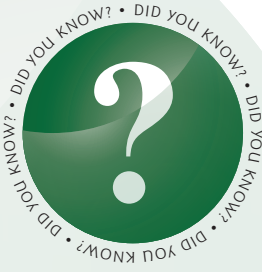
Did You Know?

Every 30 minutes a teenager attempts suicide due to bullying.

About 47 teens are bullied every five minutes.

About 282,000 students are reportedly attacked in high schools in our nation each month.

Seventy-one percent of students report bullying as an ongoing problem.

The leading cause of death among children under the age of 14 is suicide.

Teens in grades 6 through 10 are most likely to be involved in activities related to bullying.

Almost half of all students fear harassment or bullying in the bathroom.

Source: "Bullying: Some New Facts and Figures," March 6, 2012, risk(within reason)website

1. First, they notice that something is wrong. Children don't scan the playground or the classroom the way teachers do. Instead, they pay selective attention to their environment, and sometimes they don't tune in on a distressed peer if they're in a hurry or their view is obstructed.

2. Next, when they do notice something, they determine the need for help. Sometimes children think others are just playing rather than actually in distress.

3. Then, having tuned in on a situation and concluded that help is needed, children might feel sorry for an injured peer, or angry about unwarranted aggression. They then process the school's moral frames. Is this something that is condoned—or generally ignored—by the school personnel, or is there a policy in place that prohibits bullying and enforces the policy?

4. They next scan for social status. Children are less likely to intervene if they don't define themselves as friends of the victim or belong to the same social category as the victim.

5. Children then condense the motives for action, such as possible benefits and costs.

6. Then they act, which means they intervene or they do not.

The role of the bystander is rarely neutral, although they may think it is. Depending on how they respond,

We've got to dispel this myth that bullying is just a normal rite of passage.

—President Barack Obama
at a White House Conference
on Bullying Prevention, March 2011

they can contribute to the problem *or* the solution. Bystanders who exacerbate the bullying may prod the bully to begin in the first place, or encourage the bullying by laughing, cheering, or making comments that further stimulate the bully. Most bystanders passively accept bullying by watching and doing nothing, which also contributes to the problem without their knowing it. Passive bystanders provide the audience a bully craves and the silent acceptance that allows bullies to continue their hurtful, and even predatory, behavior.

However, there are some bystanders—albeit a much smaller number—who directly intervene, discourage the bully, defend the victim, get help, or redirect the situation away from bullying. These youths play a key role in preventing or stopping bullying.

The Future for the Bystander

Even if children haven't bullied others or been the target of bullying, it's likely they'll witness a bullying incident. While not the primary target, a bystander who witnesses one child bully another still suffers negative effects from having watched the bullying, including anxiety, depression, guilt, or helplessness.

"Children need to understand what bullying is and that different situations may require different kinds of actions," explains Dr. Amanda Nickerson, director of the Alberti Center for the Bullying Abuse Prevention at the University at Buffalo, State University of New

Did You Know?

McAfee, Inc., the American global computer security software company, conducted a survey in May 2012 asking parents how they monitored their teens' online behavior:

- **49.1** percent installed parental controls.

- **44.3** percent know their teens' passwords.

- **27.0** percent have taken their teens' devices away from them.

- **10.3** percent use location tracking to monitor their teens' activity online.

- **3.5** percent have consulted psychologists for help.

York. "And the most effective action may not be directly confronting the person bullying." [170]

Young people can, and must, learn that they have choices about how to respond, instead of being caught up with the group mentality or stuck in the drama of the moment.

- If they are peers of the attackers, they can learn to say, "Violence is not cool. Let's find something else to do."

- If they don't feel safe calling attention to themselves, they can leave quietly and get help. Instead of texting friends to watch, they can text a friend to call the police.

- As a parent or teacher, you should start early to establish open lines of communication with your children. Research suggests that children who defend their bullied peers are more likely to describe having an open, supportive relationship with their mothers. Establish a routine of talking about their school day in detail, avoiding yes or no questions. The more comfortable they are chatting with you, the more likely they'll share if they witness bullying.

- Help your children recognize the difference between bullying, playful teasing, and everyday conflicts. All adults need to recognize that some of what we call "bullying" may actually be developmentally appropriate conflict and is a normal part of growing up. Children go through developmental stages; with each stage, they struggle and conquer different issues. Throughout their childhood, they will experience different types of conflict. Adults can help children and teens become resilient individuals who can overcome the adversity of bullying now, and the adversity that they will surely continue to face as they grow older.

- Speaking clearly to your children about bullying and relationships is only part of the conversation. You should also include your expectations for how they treat other children. Give explicit advice: rather than telling your children to "be nice," encourage them to be sure to include everyone in their playground games, for example.

- Inspire empathy in your children. Seize everyday opportunities to model—and induce—empathic feelings for other people. By modeling empathic behavior—and pointing out situations that call for empathy—parents and teachers can generate empathic responses in their children.

For Your Information

The Cyberbullying Research Center has a number of free resources to help parents deal with cyberbullying and sexting:

Cyberbullying Incident Tracking Form: You can use this form to track individual incidents of cyberbullying at home or at school.

Network Query Tool: This will help identify the IP (Internet Protocol) address associated with a cyberbullying attempt.

Quiz: The Facts about Cyberbullying

Quiz: Dealing with Cyberbullying

Quiz: Addressing Cyberbullying

These online quizzes can be taken individually or together with your children to determine how much you know about cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying, the Anonymous Destroyer

Technology has shaped our recent history more than ever before, and, in particular, it has changed the ways in which we communicate. From real-time chat rooms to cell phones to the whole Internet, almost every aspect of a child's life has become digitized. It is not unusual to see an entire family sitting at a restaurant table, each tapping away on their separate digital device.

The digital age does have its benefits, specifically the ease with which kids can connect and communicate with their friends and family no matter where they are. However, these connections also come with a huge cost. They have moved bullying beyond in-person harassment into cyberspace, creating an entirely new form of harassment called *cyberbullying*. The American Academy of Pediatrics now calls cyberbullying the "most common online risk for all teens."

We've all seen the stories:

After years of bullying, Vermont eighth-grader Ryan Halligan took his own life in 2003 when a rumor about him spread across the Web. His father, John Halligan, says it was "like a feeding frenzy. Kids who normally didn't bully got in on the fun, both at school and online."

Soccer star Alexis Pilkington, 17, took her own life March 21, 2010, following vicious taunts on social networking sites—which persisted postmortem on Internet tribute pages, worsening the grief of her family and friends.

In April 2013, three 16-year-olds from Saratoga, a town of about 30,000 that is 13 miles west of San Jose, were arrested in connection with the September 2012 sexual assault of Audrie Pott. Pott, 15, hanged herself eight days after the alleged assault, apparently despondent after photos of the attack were posted online and shared among classmates at Saratoga High School.

Megan Meier, a 13-year-old Missouri native, started messaging a boy she had never met via MySpace. The comments posted by someone using the account name of "Josh Evans" began friendly but eventually turned aggressive and derogatory. These comments were public and other classmates could read and comment on them. Because of the cyberbullying on MySpace, Megan hanged herself in her closet. The user, "Josh Evans," was later found to have been created by a parent of one of Meier's classmates.

What Is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is willful and repeated harm—including tormenting, humiliating, harassing, hassling, embarrassing, and targeting—inflicted through electronic devices such as computers, cell phones, and other forms of digital technology. These threats, which can be serious, and other taunts are usually repeated over time, and are not a one-time occurrence. Cyberbullying, like traditional bullying, involves aggression and an imbalance of power.

Cyberbullying occurs in many forms, among which are:

Denigration, defamation, and gossip
The victim is the target of gossip or rumors online by the cyberbully to damage his or her reputation or friendships.

Exclusion, peer rejection and ostracizing
The target victim is excluded by the cyberbully from an online group.

Impersonation
The cyberbully takes on the identity of the target victim and sends posts thought to be from the target, causing damage to the target's relationships with others.

Masquerading
The cyberbully pretends to be someone who they aren't, possibly creating fake email addresses or instant messaging names or by using someone else's email or mobile phone to bully the target victim.

Password theft
Access is gained to the target victim's passwords used on the Internet, which are then used to log into the sites the target has and lock them out; also allows others to hack the account.

Flaming
Fights take place online and offensive messages about the target victim are posted on blogs, social networking sites, or other websites.

Outing
The target victim is tricked into sharing secrets or embarrassing information, which is then shared online with others by the cyberbully.

Obscenity
The cyberbully posts obscene messages or photos of the target victim to social networking sites.

Cyberthreats
Violent threats are made to the target victim by mobile phone, email, or by comments on websites, social networking sites, or message boards.

A Far Cry from Traditional Bullying

While their effects are often similar, bullying and cyberbullying have many differences that can make the latter much more damaging and its containment much more challenging.

- Unlike the recognizable bully who confronts a child for lunch money, the target victim often doesn't know who the cyberbully is, or even why they're being targeted. Cyberbullies can easily conceal their identities using pseudonymous screen names and other techniques, making themselves anonymous. While the cyberbully will likely leave a digital footprint, tracking down the cyberbully's email or IP address is time consuming, usually beyond the scope of a target victim's skill, and typically requires the involvement of agencies such as law enforcement and the Internet service provider. We have seen from the tragic news reports the stories of young people who have committed suicide without their parents even knowing they'd been cyberbullied. A Microsoft News Service report found that 74 percent of teens did not try to get help the last time they were cyberbullied.

- Cyberbullying can go viral in an instant with the click of a mouse, pulling a large number of people into the cyber-attack on the target victim. The number of bystanders in the cyberworld can quickly reach into the millions. Because of the frequently anonymous aspect of cyberbullying, bystanders to cyberbullying can easily become perpetrators themselves by passing on an image or text designed to humiliate another child. Therefore, the degree and seriousness of cyberbullying, as well as possible risks and repercussions, need to be evaluated differently than in cases of traditional bullying.

Girls who have been bullied are affected very strongly by self-hatred. They're more likely to be depressed and to exhibit poor self-esteem.[171]

—John Hoover, University of North Dakota

Pack behavior online can involve far more perpetrators than a schoolyard fight. When damaging content is shared across mobile phones or posted online, it is difficult to control who might see it or have copies of it. This is also a significant difference from traditional bullying because a single incident can be experienced as multiple attacks when an embarrassing photograph, for example, is posted on many different sites. These multiple appearances that might seem to materialize out of thin air can have repeated and long-term consequences because something that is taken off the Internet can reappear or be circulated repeatedly.

- Unlike traditional bullying where the bully is in proximity to the victim and can see the immediate responses to his behavior by both the victim and the bystanders, cyberbullying is much easier to accomplish through technology because the issue of proximity is moot. Cyberbullies can wreak havoc at any time of the day or night from any location, and can intrude into spaces that might previously have been regarded as safe or personal by the target victim, such as their own home and even their own bedroom. While children are taught to walk away from someone who is trying to bully them, it's not possible to walk away from constant phone messages or from a website that has been created to harm them.

- Like traditional bullying, cyberbullying can have a devastating mental and physical affect on the target victim, including low self-esteem, plummeting academic performance, delinquent behavior, and thoughts of, and even actual suicide. According to a Harvard Medical School study, verbal abuse—even without physical abuse—acts like a neurotoxin, having serious effects on brain development, especially in students in their middle school years. But the victim of cyberbullying often feels more afraid at school than the victim of traditional bullying because of the anonymity of the cyberbully, not knowing who is—or how many are—playing a part in the bullying. According to one teenager, "It makes me hurt both physically and mentally. It scares me and takes away all my confidence. It makes me feel sick and worthless." Many parents and educators do not yet realize the tremendous harm of cyberbullying or, even if they are aware of the potential damage, don't feel technically skilled enough to keep up with the child's online life. When we ignore something as potentially dangerous as cyberbullying, the message we send

to our children is that we don't care about it. It's no wonder many children don't want to confide in adults about this very real problem.

What Can Be Done About Cyberbullying?

According to the Cyberbullying Research Center, if a youth acts in ways that are inconsistent with their usual behavior when using digital communication devices, it's time to find out why.

For example, if your child acts jumpy when an email or text message appears, is uneasy about going to school, appears to be angry, frustrated, or depressed after using the computer, or becomes withdrawn from friends and family members, a cyberbully might be victimizing her. There are also warning signs that your child might be engaging in cyberbullying. Getting unusually upset if computer or cell phone privileges are restricted, quickly switching screens or closing programs on the computer when you walk by, appearing to be using multiple online accounts or avoiding discussions about what they're doing online can all be signs of a budding cyberbully.

What Parents Can Do

• Educate your children about appropriate behavior when using their digital devices. Make sure they know what cyberbullying is, what to do if it happens to them, and how to report if they know it's happening to someone else.

• Create a contract together that you both sign designating what constitutes proper behavior, and what the consequences are of breaking the contract. Set cyber safety rules such as never giving out their email password, not sharing too many personal details, and not sharing their IM (instant message) account password with anyone. The Cyberbullying Research Center has a sample

family cell phone contract and a family Internet use contract that can be downloaded and amended for your family's use.

• Keep the child's computer in the family room or kitchen where its use can be monitored. If you notice any signs your child is being cyberbullied, or is taking part in cyberbullying another child, step in immediately and begin discussions with your child about the harm and damage this can do. Then impose the consequences written in your family's Internet use contract.

• Content blockers and filters are good tools to use with younger children. A content blocker blocks sites with explicit material or limits a child's search to a predetermined set of sites. A content filter scans sites and images, and blocks those that contain certain words, key phrases, or content. You will still need to be vigilant as these blockers and filters don't catch everything, and kids sometimes figure out how to get around them.

• Understand that Facebook isn't the only social networking site to which your child might be connected. Check sites like List of Communities, Virtual Worlds, and Social Networks for Youth, Beyond Facebook: 74 Popular Social Networks Worldwide, and Mobilizing Youth for lists of others that might be popular with your child's peers. Don't forget to check on Instagram, YouTube, and similar photo sites to which your child might be uploading photographs and videos.

• If your child is being cyberbullied, it's important to make the sites on which this is happening aware of it. The Anti-Defamation League states, "Your voice is the most powerful tool in fighting hate online." They have put together an online tool to make it easy for you to bring cyberbullying problems to the attention of some of the most popular sites.

• If you suspect your child is the one who is cyberbullying others, address the behavior immediately, but

The important thing is not the action but the effect on the victim. No one should ever underestimate the fear that a bullied child feels.[172]

—Andrew Mellor, Bullying at School: Advice for Families

Did You Know?

There are many ways kids try to hide their online activities from their parents. McAfee, Inc., the online security company, reports this information from a 2012 survey:

53.3 percent   Clear their browser history
17.5 percent   **Parents who are aware that this is happening**

45.9 percent   Minimize the browser when in view
16.6 percent   **Parents who are aware that this is happening**

22.9 percent   Lie about their behavior
10.5 percent   **Parents who are aware that this is happening**

21.3 percent   Use their cell phone to access the Internet
9.7 percent   **Parents who are aware that this is happening**

19.9 percent   Manipulate social media privacy settings to block parents' access
8.1 percent   **Parents who are aware that this is happening**

19.5 percent   Utilize private browsing
3.7 percent   **Parents who are aware that this is happening**

18.9 percent   Hide or delete inappropriate videos
5.4 percent   **Parents who are aware that this is happening**

14.7 percent   Have duplicate email addresses that their parents don't know about
0 percent   **Parents who are aware that this is happening**

12.8 percent   Disable parental controls
3.8 percent   **Parents who are aware that this is happening**

8.7 percent   Create duplicate social media profiles that their parents don't know about
0 percent   **Parents who are aware that this is happening**
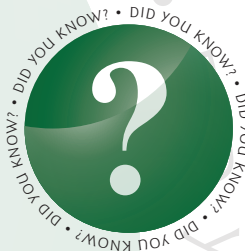
do not be confrontational or you run the risk of closing off communication with your child. Be calm, listen, and find out as much information as you can. If you haven't already established clear boundries for your child's use of digital devices, do so now. Enlist the support of school staff and teachers to determine the roots and extent of the cyberbullying behavior and to develop a plan of action to stop it. Find out if professional help is needed. Your child's cyberbullying behavior might be a clue that she might have been victimized by cyberbullying herself.

• One of the most important things you can do is keep the channels of communication with your child as open as possible. Nothing can replace a caring environment. Convey unconditional support to your child and demonstrate— through words *and* actions—that you want to help your child stop the cyberbullies together. By not stepping in and solving the problem yourself but instead coming up with a plan *with* your child to end the cyberbullying, you are giving back some power to your child, increasing the self-esteem that was lost during their experience of having been cyberbullied. David Wheeler, father of six-year-old Eric Wheeler, who was murdered at Sandy Hook Elementary School, said, "The most important thing is to provide an environment for children where they feel comfortable talking to adults."

For Your Information

In addition to the other anti-bullying websites mentioned in this book, here are a few more in which you can find additional tools to address bullying.

• Delete Digital Drama
• Enough is Enough
• Olweus Bullying Prevention Program
• Peacebuilders
• StopBullying.gov

(See the website list at the end of this chapter.)

What Kids Can Do

WHAT YOU CAN DO • WHAT YOU CAN DO • WHAT YOU CAN DO • WHAT YOU CAN DO •

- Every child should have access to at least one adult whom she or he trusts. Having high levels of love and support from at least one adult will increase the likelihood that a child will report either their own online victimization or that of a friend. Dealing with cyberbullying on their own is a recipe for depression, failing in school and, potentially, suicide.

- If your child is the targeted victim of a cyberbully, she should keep a record of all evidence of the online harassment—dates, times, copies of the emails or texts—to show the pattern and to help determine who started the cyberbullying and who else is involved. She should then change her user names and email addresses, sharing them with only close friends whom she trusts.

- The role of the bystander is significant in the world of cyberbullying. It is so easy for kids to forward the hurtful messages and other types of harassment to their own friend lists with the click of the mouse. However, unlike a traditional bullying situation where the bystander isn't directly taking part in the damage, when they click that key and send the messages along, they directly collude with the cyberbully against the targeted victim. Bystanders can make a big difference on behalf of victims by not forwarding missives or photos from a cyberbully and by standing up for the victim by telling a trusted adult what is going on.

- Older children can change the privacy settings on sites like Facebook, MySpace, and other social media networking sites themselves, creating a barrier against unwanted messages and limiting their chances of being victimized. Most social media websites allow users to block those people from whom they don't want to receive messages. Telephones can also be programmed to block certain numbers.

- Kids should be well aware of their school's anti-bullying and harassment policies, and should know the consequences for infringement of the rules. If they don't, they should receive a written copy of the policy. If the policy does not include cyberbullying, they can make a formal request to the school administration that the policy be amended to include cyberbullying. Spending some time to gain a solid understanding of the issues surrounding cyberbullying will be helpful to convince school officials to change their policies.

- Careful and smart use of digital devices should be a young person's first rule. Not opening unidentified messages, not sending inappropriate photographs or videos, protecting their passwords, logging out of online accounts when finished with them, and generally pausing before they post are all part of safe use of electronic devices.

- In 2008, 52 percent of teens had given out personal information online to someone they didn't know offline. Keeping private information private should go without saying.

- Broadcasting their location by "checking in" through sites such as Foursquare, Loopt, and Facebook Places shares locations with everyone, potentially making children vulnerable to unwanted contact from others with whom they'd rather not interact. Similarly, revealing their "status" in instant messaging makes them visible to everyone—not just their friends—unless they select "invisible."

If you're horrible to me, I'm going to write a song about it, and you won't like it.

That's how I operate.

—Taylor Swift, singer, on Quotatious.com

What Schools Can Do

- Cyberbullying and school climate are closely related. The benefits of a positive school climate have been discussed elsewhere in this book. These benefits include more consistent attendance and higher student achievement. All students should have access to a safe learning environment, and comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policies are one resource believed to contribute toward this goal. Such policies may also provide school staff with the guidance needed to intervene appropriately when students report incidents of harassment, assault, and cyberbullying. Because cyberbullying is increasing as a threat to our children in our schools and communities, it is important that schools make certain their anti-bullying and harassment policies include up-to-date information on this type of bullying behavior.

- As of July 2013, nearly every state had an anti-bullying law on their books. Only about half of those laws, however, include cyberbullying, and many of these laws do not include off-campus behavior. In those states that do include cyberbullying in their laws, it can be argued that school districts are well within their legal rights to intercede in cyberbullying where it can be shown that the episode resulted in a substantial disruption of the educational environment. Specific wording in your school's anti-bullying policy should be included to cover intervention for off-campus harassment. Check into bullying and cyberbullying laws for your state to determine the correct language for your policy.

- Just as parents should be educating their children at home about appropriate use of digital devices, so should school staff and teachers be making sure their students know that cyberbullying is unacceptable, whether initiated on or off campus. Students need to know that infractions of the school's anti-bullying and harassment policy will not be trivialized. Of course, the more serious the threat to the target victim, the more serious the response should be. It isn't necessary to call in law enforcement each time a student is flamed or excluded online, but all students should be made aware that bullying of any kind will not be tolerated, and that includes cyberbullying.

The Dangers of Sexting

As if harassment and threats to your child via cyberbullying weren't enough to deal with as a parent or caregiver, there is another related hazard putting them in peril: *sexting*. Combining the words "sex" and "text," the courts in the 2010 case *United States v. Broxmeyer* defined sexting as "an act of sending sexually explicit materials through mobile phones." This is sending a text message that contains a nude or semi-nude photograph. And while we usually associate sexting with photographs, please note that the term "sexting" includes both images *and* messages.

This is important: sexting is illegal.

Children—and their parents, as most phones are in their names even if they are used exclusively by their children—could face jail time if they participate in sexting.

Yet it is estimated that more than 20 percent of children have participated in sexting at some point, and that estimate is low because many children do not admit to it. Whatever the number, it is clear that there is a growing number of teenagers and, yes, middle schoolers, who take nude or partially nude photos of themselves and send them to each other in text messages. There is so much wrong with this, it is difficult to know where to begin.

Recent studies report that as many as 39 percent of all teenagers and 59 percent of young adults have sexted at least once. As a parent or school administrator, however, it might be difficult to read the text portions because young people frequently use acronyms. Here are some to look for:

8	Oral sex
143	I love you
ASL	Age, sex, location
BEG	Big evil grin
CD9/Code 9	Parent/adult around
CU46	See you for sex
DOM	Dirty old man
DUM	Do you masterbate?
FUD	Fear, uncertainty, and doubt
GNOC	Get naked on cam
GYPO	Get your pants off
GNRN	Get naked right now
IIT	Is it tight?
ILY	I love you
IPN	I'm posting naked
JO	Jerk off
IWS	I want sex
KOTL	Kiss on the lips
LMIRL	Let's meet in real life
MTF	More to follow
NIFOC	Naked in front of computer
PAW	Parents are watching
PIR	Parents in room
POS	Parents over shoulder
Q2C	Quick to come
RUH	Are you horny?
SOMY	Sick of me yet?
TDTM	Talk dirty to me
WTGP	Want to go private?

A Hypothetical Example

Let's examine an imaginary example, based on true cases.

Step 1: A female first-year high school student, age 14, wanted to be well liked by her peers. She had her eye on a particular boy in her school she really wanted to like her. Believing that sending him a nude photograph of herself would get his attention, she photographed herself in the nude and sent a text message to the boy's cell phone with the photo attached.

Step 2: The photo got the boy's attention, although not the kind the girl wanted. He thought it was funny and circulated the photo and text to a large number of his peers at school. It was broadcast even further as some of those friends sent it on to people they knew at other schools.

Step 3: It seemed like the entire school had a copy of her text and photo. She was subjected to unrelenting verbal cruelty and humiliation, and she endured vicious name-calling for weeks. No one at the school intervened, and although her parents noticed that she appeared depressed and non-communicative, they had no idea what was causing her downward spiral.

Step 4: It became too much for her to handle and she committed suicide by hanging herself in her basement before she had even finished her first year of high school.

Not every instance of sexting ends in suicide, of course. The above is a worst-case scenario. However, the severity of each individual step shown above is rarely completely understood by the children involved, their parents, or school officials.

Every state has some type of legal enforcement against sexting. In states that have not specifically addressed sexting, the state will defer to its child pornography laws. Typically in these laws against child pornography:

- Anyone in possession of a sexually explicit image of a minor is committing a crime.

- Distribution (sending a sexually explicit image of a minor to others) is a crime.

For Your Information

Here are a number of good video resources you can watch with your children.

We Stop Hate: *WeStopHate* is a nonprofit program created by 17-year-old Emily-Anne Rigal featuring 10 powerful videos from real teens.

"Growing Up Online": This PBS *Frontline* special takes viewers inside the very public private worlds that kids are creating online, raising important questions about how the Internet is transforming childhood.

"Bullying: Words Can Kill": A CBS *48 Hours* special on bullying in the digital age.

Submit: The Documentary: *Submit* is the first award-winning educational film to tell stories of families affected by cyberbullying. The shared experiences and testimonials of victims, survivors, and experts expose the growing world of cyberbullying.

See the website list at the end of this chapter.

• Promoting (the act of taking the picture of a minor who is engaged in a sexual act, even if the person taking the photo is the object of the photo), coercing, or soliciting (requesting a minor or tricking a minor into sending a sexually explicit image) is a crime.

So, the young girl in step 1 above who took the photo and sent it to her potential boyfriend in step 2, who then distributed it to others in step 3, could technically be convicted of three felony crimes: (1) possessing, (2) distributing, and (3) promoting child pornography, even though the image was of herself.

The young boy, who received the sexually explicit image even though it was not requested, could be charged with possession and distribution, both felony crimes.

If the boy who received and distributed the photo was 18 and the girl who sent it was 17 or younger, which she was in our example, there would be much greater risk of more vigorous prosecution as he would be tried as an adult.

If convicted, the boy would be required to register as a sex offender, a designation that would follow him wherever he goes through a sex offender registry. The information in the registry is available to the public and in many jurisdictions, registered sex offenders are subject to additional restrictions, including restrictions on housing, being in the presence of minors, living in proximity to a school or day care center, owning toys or other items of interest to minors, or using the Internet.

Some states have specifically addressed sexting, designating it as a misdemeanor rather than a felony, enacting legislation to deal with offenders by charging fines, requiring counseling to be paid by the parents of the sexter, assigning community service hours, and other less punitive sentences. The United States Sexting Laws site has a state-by-state list of sexting laws. Whether convicted of a felony or a misdemeanor, young people who are caught possessing, distributing, or promoting sexually explicit images of a minor on their cell phones will be subject to the criminal process.
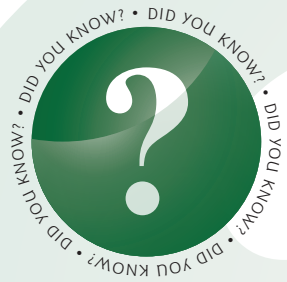
Did You Know?

- One out of five teenagers uses his or her cell phones to go online.

- Of those who do, one out of five reports his or her parents don't know that they do this.

- One half of all teenagers post their real age on social networking sites.

- Two out of five post the city where they live.

- Two out of three teenagers say that cyberbullying is a serious problem.

- One out of three says that online bullying is worse than being bullied in person.

Source: "Teens, Social Media, and Privacy," Berkman Center for Internet and Society[173]

It Doesn't End There

Arrests are made, lawyers are hired to defend, and parents take time off from work. Sexting can be a financially costly mistake, but the criminal and financial components of sexting are not the only costs.

- Most youth do not pay for their own cell phone plans. The account is usually held in a parent's name and, as such, there can be a civil liability for the parents. They can be held monetarily liable for their child's actions because the phone was used in a manner for which it was not intended. Invasion of privacy, defamation, and even death from suicide could all come up in a suit against parents whose child sexts.

- Many sexting images that are distributed to more than one person eventually find their way to the

What Does It Mean?

Anonymizer: An intermediary that hides or disguises the IP address associated with the Internet user. Generally, this allows a person to engage in various Internet activities without leaving a digital footprint that can be tracked.

Bash board: An online bulletin board on which individuals can post anything they want. Generally, posts are malicious and hateful statements directed against another person.

Cyberbullycide: Suicide stemming directly or indirectly from cyberbullying victimization.

Cyberspace: A term used to describe the electronic universe created by computer networks in which individuals interact.

Cyberstalking: Harassment that includes threats of harm or is highly intimidating and intruding upon one's personal privacy.

Cyber threats: Electronic material that either generally or specifically raises concerns that the creator may intend to inflict harm or violence to another or self.

Digital footprint: Evidence of a person's use of the Internet. This includes anything that can be linked to his or her existence, presence, or identity.

Filtering: The applying of a set of criteria against which Internet content is judged acceptable or not. For example, a filter might check the text on a web page against a list of forbidden words. If a match is found, that web page may be blocked or reported through a monitoring process. Generally speaking, a filter lets data pass or not pass based on previously specified rules.

Flaming: Sending angry, rude, or obscene messages directed at a person or persons privately or in an online group. A "flame war" erupts when flames are sent back and forth.

Happy slapping: An extreme form of bullying where physical assaults are recorded on mobile phones and distributed to others.

Harassment: Unsolicited words or actions intended to annoy, alarm, or abuse another individual.

IP address: An "Internet protocol address" is a unique address assigned to a computing device that allows it to send and receive data with other computing devices that have their own unique addresses.

IRC: Internet relay chat, a network over which real-time conversations take place among two or more people in a "channel" devoted to a specific area of interest.

ISP: Internet service provider, the company that provides an Internet connection to individuals or companies. ISPs can help identify the individual who posts or sends harassing or threatening words.

Monitoring: Recording and reporting online activity through software. A monitor may record a history of all Internet use or just of inappropriate use. A person can also serve this function.

Network: Two or more computers connected so that they can communicate with each other.

Offender: The person who instigates online social cruelty; also known as the "aggressor."

SMS: Short message service, a communication protocol that allows short (160 characters or less) text messages over a mobile phone.

Trolling: Disingenuously posting information to entice genuinely helpful people to respond (often emotionally). Often done to inflame or provoke others.

Reprinted with permission from DoSomething.org, a website for youth about causes they can do something about.

Internet, becoming available to anyone trolling for photographs of children, including pedophiles and other sexual predators. There have even been cases of predators contacting the subject in a photograph and attempting to blackmail the youth to get additional photos.

- Eventually, those who have been caught sexting might apply for college or for a job. Increasingly, employers and admissions counselors check the Internet for background information on their applicants. Regardless of the applicants' standing in their high school classes, grade point averages or test scores, if they are found to have been convicted of a misdemeanor for sexting or, worse, of a felony, it is unlikely that they will be accepted or hired. Similarly, finding a nude photograph on the Internet when searching for further background on the applicant would also almost certainly nix that application. Employers and admissions counselors have thousands of applicants from which to choose. They are not likely to consider a candidate who has used the kind of bad judgment that it took to engage in sexting.

Seventeen percent of kids who receive nude messages pass them along to others, and of those 17 percent, 55 percent will share it with more than one person; it's only a matter of time before one or more of the consequences of sexting spoil a childhood or, worse, ravage a future.[174] If you haven't yet talked with your children about all types of bullying and digital usage, now is the time.

As Michael Helfand, a Chicago attorney wrote in an article on the ParentFurther blog, "As with drug use, unprotected sex, etc., these conversations are never comfortable, and you hope your child is not participating in the activity. But it is better to have open communication than face harsh consequences down the road from ignoring the problem."[175]

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American Academy of Pediatrics: **http://www.aap.org**

Anti-Defamation League: **http://www.adl.org, and ADL Cyber-Safety Action Guide: http://www.adl.org/combating-hate/cyber-safety/c/cyber-safety-action-guide.html#.UeLdwhZIirc**

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Cyberbullying Quizzes / Facts about Cyberbullying Quiz: **http://www.cyberbullying.us/quiz.php?QUIZNUM=1**; Dealing with Cyberbullying Quiz: **http://www.cyberbullying.us/quiz.php?QUIZNUM=2**; Addressing Cyberbullying Quiz: **http://www.cyberbullying.us/quiz.php?QUIZNUM=3.**

Cyberbullying Research Center resources, including family cell phone contract and Internet use contract: **http://www.cyberbullying.us/resources.php**

Delete Digital Drama: **http://www.seventeen.com/entertainment/features/delete-digital-drama**

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ParentFurther: **http://www.parentfurther.com/teens-and-sexting**

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Submit: The Documentary: **http://www.submitthedocumentary.com**

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University of North Dakota: **http://www.und.edu**

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The problem with cyberbullying is everything.
If you have something mean to say,
look in the mirror and say it to yourself.
Maybe you'll think twice next time.

—Anonymous

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It is, rather, a force in people's hearts, a force of impressive power. It may be inspired by an idea, but once it goes further—if it is compelling enough to acquire the support of more than one person—then it is no longer an abstraction. It is palpable. People begin to see it as if it exists. Few, if any, forces on human affairs are as powerful as shared vision.[265]

—Peter Senge

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—James Bevel

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—Thomas Carlyle

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We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. . . . Procrastination is still the thief of time . . . Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words 'Too late.'[268]

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Think of many things. Do one.[269]

—Portuguese saying

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