

# It's Cool to Be Kind

## The power of online positivity

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### Lesson overview

Activity 1: **From bystanders to upstanders**

Activity 2: **Upstander options**

Activity 3: **...but say it nicely!**

Activity 4: **Mind your tone**

Activity 5: **Walking the walk**

Activity 6: **Interland: Kind Kingdom**

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### Themes

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

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

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

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### Goals for students

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

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### Standards addressed

**ISTE Standards for Educators:** 1a, 1c, 2c, 3a, 3b, 3c, 4b, 5a, 5b, 6a, 6b, 6d, 7a

**ISTE Standards for Students 2016:** 1c, 2b, 3d, 4d, 7a, 7b, 7c

**AASL Learning Standards:** I.a.1, I.a.2, I.b.1, I.b.2, I.b.3, I.c.1, I.c.2, I.c.3, I.d.3, I.d.4, II.a.1, II.a.2, II.b.1, II.b.2, II.b.3, II.c.1, II.c.2, II.d.1, II.d.2, II.d.3, III.a.1, III.a.2, III.a.3, III.b.1, III.b.2, III.c.1, III.c.2, III.d.1, III.d.2, IV.b.2, IV.b.3, IV.d.2, V.a.2, V.a.3, V.c.1, V.c.3, V.d.1, V.d.2, V.d.3, VI.a.1, VI.a.2, VI.d.1, VI.d.3

# It's Cool to Be Kind

## Vocabulary



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

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

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

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

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

**Target:** The person being bullied or victimized

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

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

**Amplify:** To increase or widen participation or impact

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

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

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

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

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

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

# From bystanders to upstanders

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

## Goals for students



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

## Let's talk



### Why does kindness matter?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## **Activity**



### **Materials needed:**

- Handout: "From bystanders to upstanders" worksheet

### **Answers to "From bystanders to upstanders" worksheet:**

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

**Scenario 2:** U, B, U, U

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

**Scenario 4:** The answers are all yours!

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### **1. Read scenarios and categorize responses**

After discussing the roles, pass out the worksheet and give students 15 minutes to read the three scenarios and categorize each response. If there's time, have them create that fourth scenario together as a class.

### **2. Discuss the answers**

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

### **3. Discuss those that were hard to categorize**

If there's time, ask your students if any of the responses were hard to categorize and why. Have a discussion about that.

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## **Takeaway**

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

# From bystanders to upstanders

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

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## Scenario 1

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

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

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## Scenario 2

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

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

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## Scenario 3

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

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

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## Scenario 4

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

# Upstander options

Often students want to help out a target of bullying but don't know what to do. This activity shows them they have choices, offers examples, and gives them an opportunity to create positive responses of their own.

## Goals for students



- ✓ **See** that being an upstander is a choice.
- ✓ **Learn** there are different ways to intervene and be an upstander in a specific situation.
- ✓ **Choose** how to respond from various options that feel safe and appropriate to you.
- ✓ **Create** your own response to the situation.

## Let's talk



When you see someone being mean to another person online – making them feel embarrassed or left out, making fun of them, disrespecting them, hurting their feelings, etc. – you always have choices. First, you can choose to be an upstander instead of a bystander by helping the target. Second, if you choose to be an upstander, you have options for what kind of action you take.

The most important thing to know is that it can really help someone being targeted just to be heard if they're sad – and to know that someone cares.

Now, not everybody feels comfortable standing up for others **publicly**, whether online or in the school lunchroom. If you do, go for it! You can...

- Call out the mean behavior (not the person), saying it's not cool.
- Say something nice about the target in a post or comment.
- Get friends to compliment the target online, too.
- Offline, you can invite the person to hang out with you on the playground or sit with you at lunch.

If you don't feel comfortable helping out publicly, that's fine. You can also support the target **privately**. You can...

- Ask how they're doing in a text or direct message.
- Say something kind or complimentary in an anonymous post, comment, or direct message (if you're using media that lets you stay anonymous).
- Tell them you're there for them if they want to talk after school.
- In a quiet conversation in person or on the phone, tell them you thought the mean behavior was wrong and ask if they feel like talking about what happened.

No matter how you choose to be an upstander, you have both public and private options for **reporting**. This could mean reporting bullying behavior via a website or application interface, or reporting what's going on to an adult you trust.

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## Activity



### Materials needed:

- A whiteboard or easel with large white pad on which students can stick sticky notes
- Handout: “Upstander options” worksheet
- Sticky notes for each group of students

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In this activity, we’re going to try out what it’s like to be an upstander, so let’s assume our whole class has made the choice to help out the target.

### 1. Divide into groups of five students per group

Each group should designate a reader and a writer.

### 2. Groups read and discuss the hurtful situations together

The three situations are provided in the worksheet on the next page.

*While groups are discussing, the teacher divides the whiteboard or easel into two large spaces with the headlines “Public Support” and “Private Support.”*

### 3. Groups choose or create their two kinds of responses for each

Students can work with the sample responses in “Let’s talk” or create their own.

### 4. Students post their choices to the board and read out loud to the whole class

The teacher can then facilitate a class discussion based on the choices the students made.

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## Takeaway

Lots of times when you see somebody being hurt or harassed, you want to help but you don’t always know what to do. You now know many ways to help the target – and that you have options for supporting them in ways that you’re comfortable with. You have the power to help people in a way that works for you!

## Worksheet: Activity 2

# Upstander options

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Now that you're in your groups, each group gets to decide how you want to be an upstander. Ask for one volunteer in your group to be a writer (on the sticky notes) and one to be a reader. The reader reads the first situation out loud and then the groups take five minutes for each situation to discuss and decide how you'd support the target publicly and how you'd support them privately. The writer writes your decisions on two sticky notes and sticks one note in the Public column and one note in the Private column on the whiteboard. To make your decision, use the ideas the class just discussed together OR make up your own way to help the target. Repeat that process for situation 2 and situation 3.

*Note: There's not just one right way to support a target because each person (both target and bystander) is different and each situation is different. We're just trying out different upstander options.*

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### Situation 1

A student posts a video of themselves singing a cover to a famous pop artist's song. Other students start posting mean comments under the video. What do you do to support the student who posted the video? Work with some of the ideas previously discussed or agree on your group's own response.

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### Situation 2

A student sends another student a screenshot of a comment your friend posted and makes a nasty joke about it. The screenshot gets reposted and goes viral at school. What will you do to support the student whose comment was screenshotted and shared? Choose one of the ideas we just discussed as a class – or decide on your own response.

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### Situation 3

You find out that a student at your school created a fake social media account using another student's name and posts photos and memes that say mean things about other students, teachers, and the school. What do you decide to do to support the student who's being impersonated in this mean way? Consider some of the ideas previously discussed or come up with your own response.

# It's Cool to Be Kind: Activity 3

## ...but say it nicely!

In this activity, students work together to reframe negative comments in order to learn how to redirect negative interactions into positive ones.

### Goals for students



- ✓ **Express** feelings and opinions in positive, effective ways.
- ✓ **Respond** to negativity in constructive and civil ways.

### Let's talk



#### Turning negative to positive

Kids your age are exposed to all kinds of online content, some of it with negative messages that promote bad behavior.

- Have you (or anyone you know) seen someone be negative on the web? How did that make you feel?
- Have you (or anyone you know) ever experienced a random act of kindness on the web? How did it make you feel?
- What simple actions can we take to turn negative interactions into positive ones?

We can respond to negative emotions in constructive ways by rephrasing or reframing unfriendly comments and becoming more aware of tone in our online communication.

### Activity



#### Materials needed:

- A whiteboard or projection screen
- Handout: "...but say it nicely!" worksheet
- Sticky notes or devices for students

#### 1. Read the comments

We're all looking at the negative comments.

#### 2. Write revisions

Now let's separate into teams of three and work on two kinds of responses to these comments:

- How could you have made the same or similar points in more positive and constructive ways?
- If one of your classmates made comments like these, how could you respond in a way that would make the conversation more positive?

#### Educator note

*Younger students may need some modeling on how to revise comments. Completing one example as a class together could be a good way to ensure students' success when thinking independently.*

#### 3. Present responses

Now each team will perform their responses for both situations.

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## Takeaway

Reacting to something negative with something positive can lead to a more fun and interesting conversation – which is a lot better than working to clean up a mess created by an unkind comment.

## Worksheet: Activity 3

# ...but say it nicely!

Read the comments below. After each comment, discuss:

1. How could you have made the same or similar points in more positive and constructive ways?
2. If one of your classmates made comments like these, how could you respond in a way that would make the conversation more positive?

Use the spaces below each comment to write down ideas.

LOL Connor is the only one in class not going on the camping trip this weekend.

Everybody wear purple tomorrow but don't tell Lilly.

Sorry I don't think you can come to my party. It'll cost too much money.

No offense but your handwriting is embarrassing so you should probably switch groups for this project.

This makes me cringe – who told her she can sing??

You can only join our group if you give me the login to your account.

Am I the only one who thinks Shanna looks kinda like a Smurf?



# Mind your tone

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

## Goals for students



- ✓ **Make good decisions** when choosing how and what to communicate – and whether to communicate at all.
- ✓ **Identify** situations when it's better to wait to communicate face-to-face with a peer than to text them right away.

## Let's talk



### It's easy to misunderstand

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

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

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

## Activity



### Materials needed:

- Sample text messages written on the board or projected

### 1. Review messages

Let's take a look at these sample text messages on the board. The class probably has great examples too, so let's write some on the board for us to discuss.

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

### 2. Read messages out loud

Now, for each message, we're going to ask one person to read it aloud in a specific tone of voice (e.g., 😞 😐 😊 ).

What do you notice? How might these come across to other people? How might each "message sender" better communicate what they really mean?

## Takeaway

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

# Walking the walk

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

## Goals for students



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

## Let's talk



### What adults can teach kids – and what kids can teach adults!

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

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

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

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

### Educator note

*Consider taking this discussion to the next level by creating a "kindness campaign" at your school! At the beginning of a class period, each student writes and delivers one note of affirmation for another student, which both sets the tone for a positive class period and serves as a reminder that we can be forces for positivity both online and off. You could even start a class like this each week!*

## Takeaway

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

# Interland: Kind Kingdom

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

Open a web browser on your desktop or mobile device (e.g., tablet), and visit [g.co/KindKingdom](http://g.co/KindKingdom).

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## Discussion topics



Have your students play Kind Kingdom and use the questions below to prompt further discussion about the lessons learned in the game. Most students get the most out of the experience by playing solo, but you can also have students pair up. This may be especially valuable for younger students.

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