

Cyberbullying

The use of digital devices (cell phones, gaming consoles, computers, or tablets) to send, post, or share threatening, mean, intentionally embarrassing, or false information to someone either privately or publicly online.

Cyberbullying can occur 24/7 in the privacy of your child's bedroom, is easily spread, can be permanent and very public, is frequently moved from one platform to another, and it can be hard to recognize or identify the bully due to platforms that allow a user to hide their name.

Most states have laws requiring schools to respond to cyberbullying and may also have criminal statutes that apply when cyberbullying and harassment intersect.

— Pew Research Center, 2022



Types of Cyberbullying and Online Slang



Harassment (*Flaming, Outing, Trolling*)
Repeatedly posting insulting and intimidating messages, chats, photos, and videos.

Rumor Spreading (*Spilling the Tea*)
Posting private or even false information online about an individual that consists of cruel rumors and gossip.

Impersonation (*Catfishing*)
Pretending to be someone you're not with the intent of hurting them.

Cyberstalking
A bully monitors a victim's online activity closely, often across platforms.

Exclusion
Posting group messages, photos, or events to intentionally hurt someone who was left out.

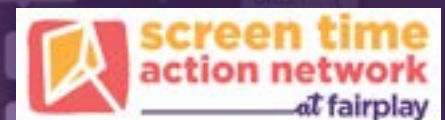
Children and young people under age 25 who were victims of cyberbullying are more than twice as likely to engage in self-harm and suicidal behaviors than their non-victim peers.

— Journal of Medical Internet Research, 2018

Scan to get
more resources
on cyberbullying.



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Protect Your Child

Use caution with devices, social media, and communication apps. Delay their use, when possible, especially by young children.

When children use these products, there are actions that can be taken to protect them including 1:1 conversations.

Have ongoing discussions that are intentional and frequent. Let your child know they can talk to you, and you will help them figure it out. **Check in often** with them and address mood swings or behavioral changes when they are using phones, tablets, or gaming systems.

It takes a village to protect your child. Talk to parents of your child's friends and/or your school community and agree on **community-wide screen-time limits.** Work with your school to **create a phone-free campus.**

Provide parental supervision and monitor your child's devices in partnership with your child.

Research the apps they have on the app store and block downloads of new apps.

Create and enforce boundaries with your child, like a **"technology contract"** before they get their first device. Set the expectation that all devices stay out of the bedroom overnight. Use an **internet filter** to allow only appropriate content, and **limit screen time and the number of platforms** they use. Be a role model and have regular times you're fully present with family without your phone.

Start a Conversation

What was the funniest thing you saw online today?
What was the worst thing?

Have you witnessed cyberbullying with friends or classmates?

What are some ways you can report cyberbullying or tell a safe adult?

What is our responsibility to help someone who is being cyberbullied?

What is the difference between snitching and helping someone in need?

Take Action if your child is cyberbullied

- Stay calm and do not dismiss it as "drama." Let your child know this is very common and you will help them get through this situation. Ask questions about how it started, who is involved, and how long it has been going on.
- Take screenshots of the cyberbullying or use a second phone to take pictures. Do not delete anything.
- Block bullying messages and report to the platform, and keep documentation of the communications.
- Report cyberbullying to your school, and work peaceably with your school administration to end the abuse.
- Report to law enforcement if you feel a crime has been committed.
- Seek advice from your pediatrician or children's mental health facility if your child is not coping well.

Illegal Online Drug Sales

Online exchange of an illegal substance for money between a dealer, known online as a “plug,” and a buyer.

Adolescents are frequent users of social media and often engage in risky behaviors because the decision-making part of their brains is not fully formed. **This makes them perfect targets for plugs.**

Plugs may “friend” a child online, build trust, and then **offer them drugs.** They also **post ads on social media**

using emojis to communicate the drugs for sale.

A child with access to social media can find, purchase, and have **drugs delivered to their front door** with a few swipes. Once a child clicks on a dealer account, the social media platform’s algorithm suggests similar drug dealer accounts to that child.

Drug traffickers have turned smartphones into a one-stop shop to market, sell, buy, and deliver deadly, fake prescription pills.

Source: DEA, 2022

Drugs commonly sold online and related emojis

Despite a decrease in drug use, the adolescent overdose death rate has skyrocketed since 2019. This is primarily caused by the introduction of **counterfeit, or “fake” pills** to the drug supply.

These pills look like real prescription drugs but may be **laced with deadly fentanyl.** Other drugs may also be laced with fentanyl, including marijuana, cocaine, MDMA, and Adderall, among others.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is up to 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine. Even in small doses, it can be deadly.

Oxycodone



Percocet



Fentanyl



Xanax



Adderall



Marijuana



Cocaine



MDMA and Mollies



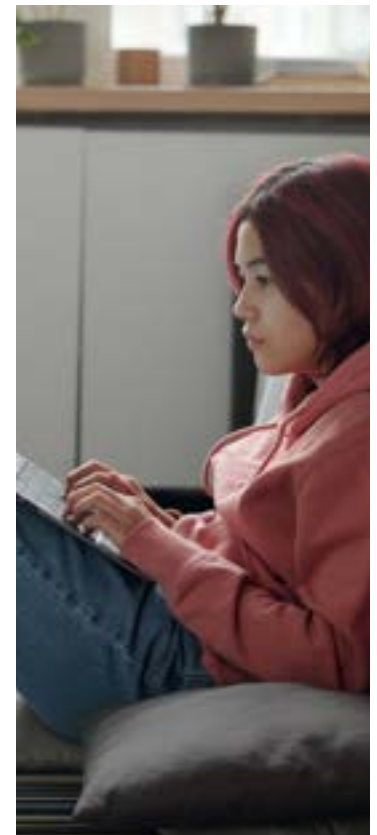
Scan to see a complete list of drugs sold online.



Counterfeit Drugs



Source: DEA



Protect Your Child

Delay social media and communication apps for children.

Create a supportive environment with open lines of communication. Build a strong support network, including trusted adults—family members, teachers, counselors—whom they can turn to for guidance.

Educate your children about the dangers of buying or accepting any drug (online or in person) that does not come from a legal pharmacy.

Stay informed and stay engaged about the trends and threats related to online drug sales, and regularly discuss internet safety with your children.

Supervise and monitor your children's internet and consider using parent control software or monitoring apps to track their online activities.

Start a Conversation



Have any of your friends been in situations where there were opportunities for drug or alcohol use?

Do you think they felt pressured?

Have you ever been in this situation?



Why do you think some teens use drugs?

What are some healthier options you can think of to deal with stress, anxiety or depression?



I've also heard that dealers lie to teens about what they're selling and sell them deadly drugs.

Have you heard about that?



I've heard the drug dealers try to connect with teens on social media. Do you know about that?

Has anything like that happened to you or your friends?



Take Action if your child is using illegal drugs

- Let them know you love them, and you want to help them stay safe. If they choose to tell you, thank them for being honest with you.
- Call the SAMHSA hotline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357).
- Search for local resources—youth/family recovery coach, therapist, pediatrician—and get help.
- Discuss harm reduction.

For more information on harm reduction, scan here.



Online Sexual Exploitation

A range of crimes and activities involving the sexual abuse or exploitation of a child using technology. This could result in financial benefit to the perpetrator.

In a rapidly evolving technological world, children are increasingly connected as they navigate the online environment. However, this also poses a harmful risk because this increased presence and exposure on the internet gives offenders an easy way to reach children. These offenders will misuse online environments to sexually exploit minors.

Sometimes the offense is initiated online and then takes place in person; in other instances, the violence takes place entirely behind screens. Even though the abuse occurs virtually, the impact on the victim, their loved ones, and the community can be just as harmful as sexual violence committed in person.

In 2023, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's (NCMEC) CyberTipline received more than 36.2 million reports of suspected child sexual abuse online.

— NCMEC, 2024

Types of Online Sexual Exploitation



CSAM (Child Sexual Abuse Material) — Any visual image of sexually explicit conduct involving a minor (a person less than 18 years old).

Human Trafficking — A crime involving the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act. Currently, social media, gaming, and apps are used to recruit children and teens for trafficking.

Sextortion — When a child or teen is pressured to send nude or sexual images of themselves to someone who is pretending to be a peer, then blackmailed by the predator demanding more sexual content or money with the threat of sharing the images of them with friends, family, or their communities.

Sexting — Sharing and receiving sexually explicit messages and nude or partially nude images using digital devices. Once the image is sent, the receiver becomes the owner of the image and puts the sender at risk of extortion and humiliation. (Extortion: The practice of obtaining something, especially money, through force or threats.)

Nudify — The act of undressing a person using their image and AI (artificial intelligence). These images can be shared to make money or used to coerce the victim. (Deepfake: Refers to the image of a person that has been generated using AI software.)

“13% of Instagram users aged 13-15 self-reported having received unwanted sexual advances via the platform within the previous 7 days.”

—Written testimony of Meta employee and whistleblower Arturo Bejar, before the Senate Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology, and the Law, November 7, 2023

Scan to get more resources online. →



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Protect Your Child

Use caution with devices, social media, and communication apps. Delay their use, when possible, especially by young children.

Have ongoing discussions that are intentional and frequent. **Role-play specific scenarios:** “Do I share my school, age, or grade?” “Do I share my name and image?” “Do I share videos of myself?”

Educate your child. Teach them about healthy, age-appropriate sexual relationships, and the difference

between sharing public and private information while communicating online.

Provide parental supervision and monitor your child's devices in partnership with your child. Turn off chat settings on apps and games for younger children so they cannot interact with strangers online. Keep any device your child has access to out of the bedroom overnight.

Start a Conversation

Has someone ever asked you to send them money?

Share with your children that unsafe people are tricking children into sending nudes and then threatening to send out the pictures if the child doesn't send money. It's called sextortion. It's a crime. It's not a child's fault, but it is important to be aware of it.

“Even if you slip up, you can always come to me, and I will help you.”

What would you do if anyone sent you pictures or asked you to send pictures or videos of yourself that make you feel uncomfortable?

Share with your child that they don't have to and should not send them and they can let you know about it without getting in trouble.

Is your account set to public or private?

Do you communicate with people online that you don't know?



Take Action if your child has been exploited

- Communicate to your child that they can come to you no matter what and you will help them.
- Don't delete anything. Take screenshots of messages, threats, and maintain accounts connected.
- Report to NCMEC CyberTipline (report.cybertip.org) and your local law enforcement. This is a crime!
- Reach out to NCMEC's Take it Down service (takeitdown.ncmec.org/) to have the content removed from circulation.
- Make sure your child is getting professional emotional support as needed.

Scan to learn about the CyberTipline.



Scan to learn about Take It Down.



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Harmful Online Challenges

A viral trend that uses videos on social media platforms to motivate viewers to repeat an activity witnessed in the video, without regard to potential consequences, even if it risks harming or potentially killing the participant. Viewers are encouraged to record themselves doing the challenge and then upload the video with trending hashtags for others to find.

Online Challenges can be deadly, especially for children and teens. They may try challenges out of curiosity, for competition, peer pressure, a quick thrill, or due to boredom. However, given children's brains are not fully developed until the age of 25, they are unable to predict the potentially grave outcomes of these harmful challenges.

“The blackout challenge has been linked to the deaths of at least 15 kids age 12 or younger in the past 18 months”

— Bloomberg News, 2022

Types of Online Challenges



Often challenges are transmitted from peer-to-peer, fed to users' social media feeds through algorithms, or disseminated by social media influencers. They are also prevalent in gaming chat rooms. The viral nature of this phenomenon normalizes the dangerous activity, creating a perception that harmful challenges are “safe” and/or “fun”. Besides physical harm, some challenges can take a toll on the user's mental health as some involve humiliation, bullying, or self-harm.

Harmful online challenges include:

- **Choking Challenge (aka Blackout, Tap Out, Knockout, etc.)**
- **Tide Pod Challenge**
- **Benadryl Challenge**
- **NyQuil Chicken Challenge**
- **Fire Challenge**
- **Car surfing**
- **Chroming**

Scan here for more information related to specific harmful Online Challenges.



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Protect Your Child

Be aware of dangerous online trends and discuss them with your child. Go outside of your family's comfort zone and have "hard talks" with your child. Ask if they've seen/participated in online challenges and explain the dangers to them.

Use caution with devices, social media, and communication apps. Delay when possible, especially by young children.

Create guidelines for your child's usage. Keeping devices out of your child's bedroom or the bathroom is a great start.

Provide parental supervision. Monitor your child's device with parental restriction (screen time) settings.

Start a Conversation

Let your children know they can always talk to you about anything, you will not judge them, and you are always there for them. As much as possible, be calm and grounded, and stay neutral as you talk to your child.



"I've heard about kids doing challenges they find online, like stunts/pranks/dares. Have you ever heard of any?"

"What were the people doing?"



"Have you or any of your friends tried an online challenge? What would you do if you received one?"

Share with your child that they should not participate and discuss possible negative outcomes and consequences.



Take Action if your child has or is considering doing a challenge

- **Remain non-judgmental and loving.**
- **Keep the lines of communication open.** Continue to bring this topic into conversation with your child as more than one talk is required.
- **Report any harmful challenges** within the online platform, document, and take screenshots.
- **Seek help from a professional** who understands challenges.



Scan to learn more about dangerous online challenges.



Screen Overuse

The compulsive and problematic use of digital devices for social media, streaming platforms (like YouTube), texting, gaming, pornography, online shopping, and seeking info/entertainment.

Screen overuse is linked with loneliness, decreased motivation, anxiety, obesity, sleep problems, reduced play time, poor attention, decreased learning, and poor physical and mental health.

This can look like:

- Losing interest in hobbies, sports, etc.
- Relationship problems.
- Emotional outbursts when screen time is reduced.
- Problems at school or work.
- Increased anxiety, fear, sadness, and hopelessness.

46% of teens say they are online “almost constantly.”

— Pew Research Center, 2023



Design Features that Manipulate Children into Overusing Screens

Screen overuse is not an accident. In the past 25+ years, tech companies have employed armies of scientists and PhDs to use psychology and gambling science to develop addictive technologies to keep us on our devices. Young people are particularly vulnerable. Tech companies manipulate users with:

- **Hard-to-ignore notifications**
Alerts that pull users back into apps.
- **Interaction streaks**
Display how many days in a row a user has interacted with another user or used the app.
Example: Snapstreaks.
- **Variable rewards**
Trigger extra dopamine in users. Ex: refreshing a newsfeed, slot machines.
- **Ephemeral content** Content displayed for only a limited time to create “fear of missing out,” which pressures users into frequent use.
- **Parasocial relationships**
When trusted characters/influencers pressure children to take an action. For example, a character might cry if a child does not buy a product.
- **Quantified and named popularity**
Showing the number of likes/reactions and who liked/reacted to a post, which Meta’s own research, “Project Daisy,” suggests has harmful mental health effects.
- **Gamification**
Use of points, loot boxes, trophies, and other rewards to increase use.
- **Dark patterns**
User interface designs that coerce, steer, or deceive users into making harmful decisions including giving away personal information, spending money, and more.

Scan to get more resources on dark patterns. →



Protect Your Child

Use caution with devices, social media, and communication apps

Delay their use when possible, especially by young children. To start, consider a Light Phone or flip phone.

Think early about what age you will give your child a smartphone/video games and what limits you'll put in place. We recommend:

- No screen-based devices in the bedroom.
- Create a screen-time curfew.
- No phones at dinner.
- Use parental controls.
- Create a screen-time contract. See "Resources" below.
- Unless they're necessary, put screens in another room while your child is doing homework.

Look for like-minded parents among your child's friends and classmates.

Assure your child they are not the only one with tech rules.

Model good behavior with your screens:

- Be present with your child—put your phone down, look at them, and give them your full attention.
- Do phone-free activities in front of and with your children.
- Turn off notifications and alerts.
- Do not text and drive.

Encourage outdoor time, exercise, in-person social interaction, sleep, and healthy eating.

Ask for homework on paper (not on screens).

Teens spend **9** hours/day on screens.

— American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 2020



Start a Conversation



What are ways you've seen tech companies manipulate users?

Why do you think they do that?

How does that make you feel?

How do you feel about your relationship with technology?

Do you feel dependent on it?

Are you controlling it or is it controlling you?

How often are you receiving notifications from social media apps? Which app sends the most notifications?

Have you noticed how notifications affect your emotions, concentration, and habits of checking your device?

Take Action if your child is overusing technology

- **Reach out to a healthcare or mental healthcare provider** for suggestions on how to help them learn healthy coping strategies. Individual therapy can help teens recognize and work through feelings and experiences that contribute to problematic use.
- **Download apps** designed to help curb use (e.g., BreakFree and Mental).
- **Practice mindfulness and adaptive coping strategies** like exercise, deep breathing, and progressive muscle relaxation.
- **Encourage creative outlets,** exercise, in-person socializing, and hands-on activities.

Scan to access more resources on screen overuse. →



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Gaming Overuse

The steady and repetitive use of the Internet to play games frequently with different gamers, potentially leading to negative consequences in many aspects of life.

Video gaming is a popular form of entertainment for kids and allows them to have fun and connect with their friends. For some kids, gaming can become a problem if it starts to cut into time spent doing other activities.

Excessive gaming can negatively affect their mental and physical health and relationships with family and friends. It may cause them to eat poorly, lose sleep, become more sedentary, and spend less time outdoors.

90% of U.S. teens aged 13-17 years reported they played video games on a computer, game console, or cellphone.

— Pew Research Center, 2018

Source: PEW, 2023

Is It Gaming “Addiction”?



Gaming disorder or gaming “addiction” occurs when someone plays video games too much and it causes problems for a year or more. For example:

- A person has trouble controlling how much they play. They might feel sad or irritable when they stop playing.
- A person stops doing other things—like spending time on hobbies, sports, or other activities—to play online games.
- Gaming causes serious problems with family and friends.
- A person appears obsessed with gaming and hides gaming activity.

Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) can “hook” people because there is no “end” to these games. Many are designed to have different characters and challenges as new players enter the game, encouraging longer game play.

6.4% of children aged 10-14 years reported “I’ve tried to play video games less, but I can’t.”

— Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development (ABCD) Study®, 2021

Scan to access resources on gaming addiction.



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Protect Your Child



Set Boundaries and Healthy Time Limits

- Set a timer if you have to, and give verbal time warnings.
- Only allow video games to be played in common areas.
- Keep phones and consoles out of bedrooms.
- Only allow your child to play with real-life friends.
- Balance time spent gaming with plenty of offline activities and in-person connections.
- Block purchases without parent or guardian approval.

Delay Exposure to Social Media and Apps

Use caution with devices, social media, and communication apps. Delay their use, when possible, especially by young children.

Understand How Online Gaming Works

Gaming includes messaging features, in-game purchases, and exposing minors to gamer influencers that may impact your child in negative ways. Do your best to understand how these may impact your child or family. Read game reviews and consider age ratings.

Build a Relationship Around Gaming

Play with your child frequently and know how they are interacting with others. Have conversations around high emotion gaming and chatting features that may get out of hand. Be on your child's team when it comes to finding joy in gaming.

Start a Conversation

Explain to me how this game works and what you like about it. Are you good at it?

Do you ever feel like you need to play rather than you just want to play for fun?

What do you do if you get into a heated argument with another player and they say something really mean to you?

Do you follow any gamers on YouTube or Discord so that you can get better at the game?

Do you ever feel like you spend money to get better or look cooler in a game?

Take Action if your child has problematic game use

- **Reach out for a medical evaluation** through your pediatrician, therapist, or children's mental health facility. There are therapies such as cognitive behavioral therapy and group therapies that may be beneficial.
- **Seek help as a parent or guardian** if you are having a difficult time with putting limits and boundaries on your child's gaming habits.
- **Offer your child** fun alternative activities that can be done together as a family or one-on-one.
- **Ensure daily activities** and responsibilities are completed before allowing any gaming.

Scan here to learn more about gaming overuse and "addiction".

