

TEXAS EDITION

# UGLI FOUNDATION

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**“I’M BEING BULLIED ONLINE!  
WHAT CAN I DO?”**

# INSIDE ACTIONS WHEN FACED WITH AN ONLINE BULLY

**These Inside Actions are used** when you cannot control someone else's actions.

These actions will help you emotionally respond *on the inside* when confronted with an online bully.

Understanding the difference between **internal** and **external** control is important when it comes to managing our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. They are outside of our control, external, that can make us feel helpless - like when we are being bullied online.

Knowing there **are** things within our control, **internally**, moves us from feelings of helplessness to feelings of power and capability. It is important for adolescents to know there are things they can do internally within themselves that go even further beyond simply reaching out to adults for help when it comes to being bullied online!

*Over 60% of teens are bullied online. Cyberbullying can produce some profound consequences to those on the receiving end, such as the development of depression, social anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts.*

## **ACTION #1: ACCEPTING REALITY**

**People causing us emotional pain** is a part of life and is, pretty much, unavoidable. Learning to deal with that pain will help you manage your emotions when someone online attempts to bully you.

When we deny, or "act like" this bullying isn't really happening to us, it doesn't make the problem go away, it can make the situation far worse! We need to learn to **accept** the situation to help free ourselves from the emotional pain that comes from being bullied online.

**What acceptance is:** letting go of emotionally fighting what's happening to us, giving us freedom to take action to change the situation. You can't solve a problem that you do not admit that you have.

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**What acceptance is not:** giving up or giving in, approving of the situation. *Acceptance does not equal approval! Acceptance does not mean you're okay with what's happening!!*

When you accept that cyberbullying is happening to you and stop pretending it isn't, you are now set free to take the actions necessary to change the horrible pain that you're feeling into a pain that you can absolutely handle.

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

**Pain is a part of life.** It is unavoidable and what makes us human.

A lot of times when we respond to pain, we pretend pain isn't there or that it isn't as bad as it could be or feel we 'should' get over it. These attempts are to protect us from feeling the depth of our pain, in hopes of feeling better. When we deny our pain and the realities we find ourselves in by allowing bullies on the internet to not be blocked or reported, we are not actually changing the situation at all. In fact, we are turning the normal, human experience of feeling pain into **suffering**. That doesn't have to be our story!

*\*It is important to note that when we are discussing acceptance, it does not mean we approve of what is happening. In cases of abuse or violence, we are not saying accept the continued abuse. We **can** accept the reality that abuse is happening, but we do not approve of this at all. Please find a teacher, mentor, counselor, police officer - someone you trust and who can help you get out of this situation.*

## ACTION #2: YOU ARE NOT POWERLESS!

**When confronted with a bully online,** at first it may seem that they have all the power, and you are left with just putting up with it until they get bored and move on to someone else. **This is not true!** You are **NOT** powerless! You have the power within yourself to take action to change what is happening to you. The bully may have chosen to try and hurt or belittle you in front of all those people online, but **you can choose** to do something about it. You are just as powerful and just as capable as they are!

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And when the online intimidation is over and you are off your device, focus on things in your life that you are grateful for. Yeah, what just happened on social media was awful, but there are many other **very good** things in your life. Make yourself concentrate on those things to feel more gratitude, even at a time like this.

Lastly, the best thing you can do, after being attacked online, is look for ways to turn around and help other people. Helping others is a powerful way to fight against feeling as though you're powerless.

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

**Typically, a bully does not innately believe** they have any power of their own, therefore they seek out a false sense of security, power, and control by attempting to take power from someone else. Just for a moment, the bully feels powerful, but just as quickly as the power was taken, it goes away, and the bully is left once again feeling powerless and ashamed.

It is even easier for this cycle to continue online when the person being bullied, maybe unknowingly by believing they are powerless, allows the bully to steal their power. The internet may allow the bully to remain anonymous and even allow the bully to have multiple accounts for their bullying. When we see ourselves as powerless to their accounts and comments, it keeps the bully in a powerful role. For each role in the system, it is a power struggle!

It is essential for those who are bullied to remember their insides are no different than their bullies! They are each looking to find power and control in their lives, and for the bullied, they need to know they are capable of taking back their power.

Some ways to take back our power is to assert our power in healthy ways and start to feel confident in our capabilities are: 1) gratitude and 2) give back and help others.

**Gratitude:** Some studies have shown that gratitude can **change your brain**, decreasing our focus on negative emotions and not ruminating on toxic experiences as much. With time and effort, counting our blessings (in addition to, not in replacement of, acknowledging our reality), can contribute to positive long-term mental health! Expressing gratitude for the good things, people, or

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experiences in our lives can help balance our negative feelings of pain. Social media can be a great tool we can be thankful for. Think of how easy it is to communicate with anyone instantly!

**Giving Back or Helping Others:** Not only does giving back and helping others take the focus off of ourselves and put it on someone or something else, but it has also been found that helping others can decrease our feelings of guilt and shame. Giving back to others builds our self-esteem and allows us to move out of feeling powerless.

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_gratitude\\_changes\\_you\\_and\\_your\\_brain](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_gratitude_changes_you_and_your_brain)

## ACTION #3: SOOTHE YOUR EMOTIONS

**If you are being bullied by someone online,** many emotions begin flooding your brain. Hurt, sadness, embarrassment, hopelessness and confusion, just to name a few. The last thing that anyone wants during a time of crisis is for their emotions to overwhelm them. Feeling these feelings is, of course, natural, but keeping them from emotionally crushing you is the goal. Here's an action you can take to soothe those negative emotions from overpowering your rational mind. Use your senses to calm your brain. It takes effort and concentration, but you can do it! Get off of your device and try some of these examples:

- ★ **Vision:** Focus your eyes on something (pictures, sunsets, imagine being at a favorite place)
- ★ **Sound:** Listen to music, sound machine, sounds in nature
- ★ **Smell:** Smell your favor scents (lavender, coffee, mint, bake some cookies)
- ★ **Taste:** Enjoy some of your favorite foods or meals, grab a snack
- ★ **Touch:** Take a shower or bath, play with your pet, ask for a hug, or wear your favorite hoodie
- ★ **Movement:** Move your body, dance, stretch, throw a ball around

These are just a few suggestions of what you could do to help yourself emotionally calm down. Go and create your own! Focusing on your senses can go a long way toward changing the channel of your brain and soothe those strong negative emotions you're feeling.

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## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

**Learning to soothe ourselves** is a crucial point in our development. When we were little, our parents soothed us when we were upset or emotionally overwhelmed. While we need other people to come alongside us when we are upset or overwhelmed, it is necessary for us to develop our own soothing abilities as we continue to grow and develop in complexity as humans.

Some of our greatest barriers when it comes to soothing ourselves can be that believe you don't deserve to self-soothe (**shame**) OR you think someone else should do it for you (**entitlement**).

**Shame is a feeling** you get when you believe you are not worthy or good enough and you believe there is something inherently wrong with you. When shame lies to us and tells us we are not worthy, not good enough or wrong, we believe it to be true and that we don't deserve to soothe ourselves. When we listen to shame's lies, we feed and water our shame, allowing it to grow and take over our garden, making it harder and harder to believe we are deserving of care and comfort. This isn't true! Everyone deserves to be cared for and comforted!

**Entitlement** says we are deserving of something, even if we are not. When we believe someone else should be soothing our internal emotions for us, research shows this leads to disappointment and not comfort - the exact opposite of what we are hoping will happen! When we are disappointed, it can lead to more suffering and pain, the exact opposite of what soothing is supposed to alleviate.

Utilizing our senses is an easy way to soothe ourselves anywhere and at any time. One additional way to soothe yourself - get offline. Turn off your socials. When we learn to self-soothe, we are telling ourselves that we are worthy of soothing, capable of doing it ourselves, and bring back power into our lives.

## ONLINE

**Soothe yourself by blocking your bullies.** Who says they get access to your socials? You do! Get receipts, block, and report. Don't follow them or allow others to follow you that are associated with your bully. You are in charge of who gets access to your social media, not the bully.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/think-act-be/201608/3-reasons-why-people-who-feel-entitled-end-miserable>

# OUTSIDE ACTIONS WHEN FACED WITH A CYBERBULLY

**Outside actions** are how you can respond to intentional acts of aggression online in the most productive way. These actions will help you physically respond, on the outside, to come to your own rescue.

## **ACTION #1: RESPOND, DON'T REACT**

**Have you ever wondered why bullies bully?** Well, as the saying goes, hurt people hurt people. They are trying to make up for their own insecurities. So, they pick on someone they perceive as “weaker” in order to get an emotional reaction out of their target. The *bully wants to see how you respond* to their intimidation and aggression. Can they provoke you into showing fear or embarrassment, so they can feel powerful and dominant? But what happens if the bully doesn't get the emotional reaction they were so looking forward to? They move on. They throw their clickbait in someone else's direction! It's weird, but what the bully is saying online is not actually about you. It's about the bully's twisted need to hurt others to meet their own toxic needs. If you don't give them what they want (respond in fear or embarrassment), they will simply move on until they find someone who will.

So, how do you deprive the bully from getting the emotional reaction that their twisted little mind so desperately craves? You **Respond** rather than **React**.

A natural reaction to being bullied might be to demonstrate those negative emotions we talked about above and fire off a comeback in self-defense. But a response is something quite different. A response is a calm, controlled, and purposeful plan of action, thought out in advance. In the case of cyberbullying, one of the first and most effective responses would be to block the cyberbully from all your social media platforms. Simply deny them access to you. But whether you block them or not, the perfect response is to ignore them totally, completely, and absolutely. That's right! **The perfect response is no response at all!**

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# OUTSIDE ACTIONS (continued from previous page...)

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

**When we are in distress** or emotionally dysregulated (when we have trouble managing our emotions and they tend to run our lives instead of us running our emotions), our body is typically in fight or flight mode and our nervous system is on high alert. When we are on high alert, we tend to react and not respond.

When we react, we are giving our power away to the bully, which is what the bully needs to feel better about themselves. When we respond, we are keeping our power, which does not allow the bully to take anything from us, leaving them empty-handed and powerless.

**Reactions** tend to be mindless (without purpose), without thought, and likely give away our power to the bully; but **responses** tend to be mindful (with purpose), do not fuel the fire, and leave the bully empty-handed and without our power.

How do you know when you are responding versus reacting online?

- ★ **Reacting might look like:** commenting back, responding to posts, posting on your private stories etc.
- ★ **Responding might look like:** blocking, deleting, getting receipts, reporting bullies to social media platforms.

A good question to ask ourselves when we are deciding between reacting versus responding is: **What is my goal in this interaction?** If our goal is to stop the bully from taking our power and continuing to hurt us, then a response is the better choice!

At the end of the day, 'hurt people hurt people,' and a bully is hurt, insecure, and feels powerless. You have the power to block people. Just because you choose to use social media does not give anyone the right or access to your online world. You can feel proud of yourself when you **respond in love** and do not **react out of fear** to this person who is also hurting inside like you are.

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## **ACTION #2: RECORD IT AND REPORT IT**

**Instead of responding back to the bully,** record everything that was said and when it was said. Take screen shots to verify that it took place. Don't leave anything out. In fact, if there is some kind of follow up bullying the next day at school, **write that down too!** These facts and details are what the legal community would call "evidence." Evidence is used to prove if something did or did not actually happen. In this case, you will be able to prove exactly what was said, when it was said, and who said it.

This evidence is going to come in handy when you, next, report what happened to you. If the bullying took place on an app like Twitter, Discord, TikTok, Snapchat, or Instagram, most likely what the bully did violated that social media platform's terms of use. Reporting what was done to you, while providing the proof of who did it, could have serious consequences to the person who bullied you. Consequences like the bully being suspended from that app! See? You're not as much of a helpless victim as you may have thought.

### **WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

**While your child may hesitate to report bullying** out of fear, it is the evidence and protection they need. Having any bullying incident documented is a form of protection in itself. Reporting may cause the bully to lash out again, but once there is already proof there it will be much harder for them to get away with it. In school bullying situations, this also creates a way for administration to offer and provide protection to you.

## **ACTION #3: TELL A TRUSTED ADULT**

Even after you ignore the cyberbully, record, and report what happened, you still need to get a trusted adult involved in the situation. Getting help is not a show of weakness, it is a demonstration of strength.

Going to tell a teacher, coach, parent, whoever - can be difficult! One way to help you in this situation is to plan ahead. Try these three steps:

★ **Show the adult** what you recorded about what happened. The evidence.

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- ★ **Let the trusted adult know** how you are feeling. Using 'I' statements like 'I feel...' can help get your message across.
- ★ **Be direct** and ask for what you want or need to happen!

You may not always get all that you want or need, but **you have shown yourself, and others**, you can take action and stand up for yourself!

Not comfortable chatting with an adult? You can anonymously report bullying through Safe School Helpline®. Call 1-800-418-6423 ext. 359 or text TIPS to 66746.

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

**It is difficult to have hard conversations**, especially when we are emotional or embarrassed, but it is essential that we have people who can do something about the situation at a higher level than we can do with just our peers.

Leadership affects culture. If we are in a culture that does not promote safety and security when we need it, that does not promote confidence and power when interacting with bullies. There are times we need people in our corner and on our team that can do more than we can do. That is what community and leadership is for. Part of regaining and stepping into the power inside of us is asking for help when we need it.

That is what the report button on our social media is for! If you don't report this happened, how are the people in charge going to know? Use your report button and BLOCK them. Make your voice heard.

These conversations can be difficult, and it might be hard to stay focused enough so we are able to ask for what we want and need. Writing down our action steps will likely make us more direct and clearer in expressing our wants and needs to those who can help address them. Remind students that they are advocating for themselves because **they are worthy**.



# DAVID'S LAW

**All 50 states have anti-bullying laws** but each state addresses bullying in schools differently. **Texas anti-bullying laws and regulations include SB 179 – David's Law.**

The law is named and honors David Bartlett Molak, who took his own life on January 4, 2016, in San Antonio, Texas. In the last few months before his death, David was the target of relentless cyberbullying.

David's law expands authority to school districts, allowing public and charter schools to address cyberbullying off-campus and outside of school-related or school-sponsored activities based on specific criteria.

"Cyberbullying" as defined in David's Law, means bullying arising from a pattern of acts or one significant act that is done through the use of any electronic communication device, including a cellular or other type of telephone, a computer, a camera, electronic mail, instant messaging, text messaging, a social media application, an Internet website, or any other Internet-based communication tool.

## WHERE THIS LAW APPLIES

Because of David's Law, "cyberbullying" is now more specifically included in the definition of "bullying" in the Education Code.

The bullying provisions in the Education Code (including pre-existing law and changes made by David's Law) apply to:

- ★ Bullying that occurs on or is delivered to a school property or to the site of a school-sponsored or school-related activity on or off school property;
- ★ Bullying that occurs on a publicly or privately owned school bus or vehicle being used for transportation of students to or from school or a school-sponsored or school-related activity;
- ★ Cyberbullying that occurs off school property or outside of a school-sponsored or school-related activity if the cyberbullying interferes with a student's educational opportunities or substantially disrupts the orderly operation of a classroom, school, or school-sponsored or school-related activity.

## WHO IS COVERED BY THIS LAW?

Public schools, as well as open-enrollment charter schools. Private schools are not included.

# RESOURCES

Cuddy, Amy. "Your Body Language May Shape Who You Are." *TED*, June 2012,  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/amy\\_cuddy\\_your\\_body\\_language\\_may\\_shape\\_who\\_you\\_are](https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_may_shape_who_you_are).



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