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A Majority of Teens Have Experienced Some Form of Cyberbullying

59% of U.S. teens have been bullied or harassed online, and a similar share says it's a major problem for people their age. At the same time, teens mostly think teachers, social media companies and politicians are failing at addressing this issue.

BY Monica Anderson

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A Majority of Teens Have Experienced Some Form of Cyberbullying

59% of U.S. teens have been bullied or harassed online, and a similar share says it's a major problem for people their age. At the same time, teens mostly think teachers, social media companies and politicians are failing at addressing this issue.

Name-calling and rumor-spreading have long been an unpleasant and challenging aspect of adolescent life. But the proliferation of smartphones and the rise of social media has transformed where, when and how bullying takes place. A new Pew Research Center survey finds that 59% of U.S. teens have personally experienced at least one of six types of abusive online behaviors.¹

The most common type of harassment youth encounter online is name-calling. Some 42% of teens say they have been called offensive names online or via their cellphone. Additionally, about a third (32%) of teens say someone has spread false rumors about them on the internet, while smaller shares have had someone other than a parent constantly ask where they are, who they're with or what they're doing

A majority of teens have been the target of cyberbullying, with name-calling and rumor-spreading being the most common forms of harassment

% of U.S. teens who say they have experienced ___ online or on their cellphone



Note: Respondents were allowed to select multiple options. Those who did not give an answer or gave other response are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted March 7–April 10, 2018.

"A Majority of Teens Have Experienced Some Form of Cyberbullying"

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¹Pew Research Center measured cyberbullying by asking respondents if they had ever experienced any of six online behaviors. Respondents who selected yes to one or more of these questions are considered to be targets of cyberbullying in this study. Throughout the report the terms "cyberbullying" and "online harassment" are used interchangeably.

(21%) or have been the target of physical threats online (16%).

While texting and digital messaging are [a central way teens](#) build and maintain relationships, this level of connectivity may lead to potentially troubling and nonconsensual exchanges. One-quarter of teens say they have been sent explicit images they didn't ask for, while 7% say someone has shared explicit images of them without their consent. These experiences are particularly concerning to parents. Fully 57% of parents of teens say they worry about their teen receiving or sending explicit images, including about one-quarter who say this worries them a lot, according to a separate Center survey of parents.

The vast majority of teens (90% in this case) believe online harassment is a problem that affects people their age, and 63% say this is a major problem. But majorities of young people think key groups, such as teachers, social media companies and politicians are failing at tackling this issue. By contrast, teens have a more positive assessment of the way parents are addressing cyberbullying.

These are some of the key findings from the Center's surveys of 743 teens and 1,058 parents living in the U.S. conducted March 7 to April 10, 2018. Throughout the report, "teens" refers to those ages 13 to 17, and "parents of teens" are those who are the parent or guardian of someone in that age range.

Similar shares of boys and girls have been harassed online – but girls are more likely to be the targets of online rumor-spreading or nonconsensual explicit messages

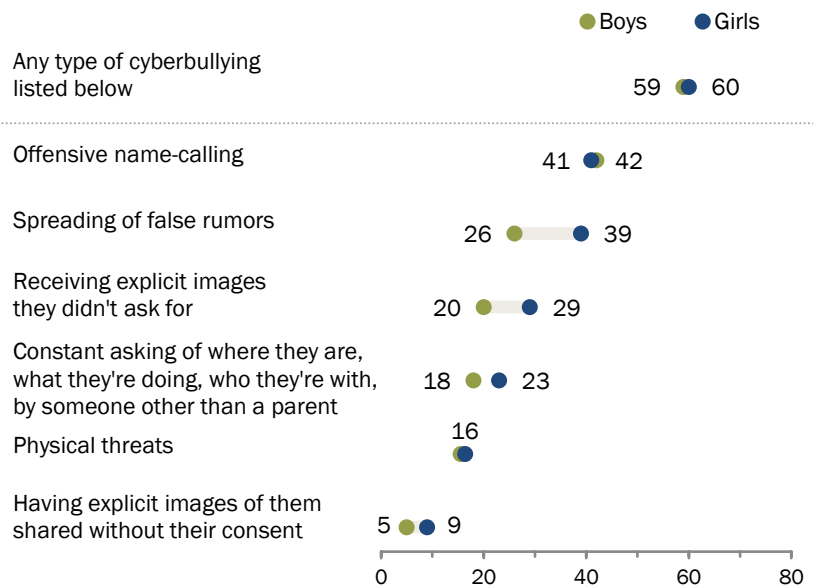
When it comes to the overall findings on the six experiences measured in this survey, teenage boys and girls are equally likely to experience cyberbullying. However, there are some differences in the specific types of harassment they encounter.

Overall, 60% of girls and 59% of boys have experienced at least one of six abusive online behaviors. While similar shares of boys and girls have encountered abuse, such as name-calling or physical threats online, other forms of cyberbullying are more prevalent among girls. Some 39% of girls say someone has spread false rumors about them online, compared with 26% of boys who say this.

Girls also are more likely than boys to report being the recipient of explicit images they did not ask for (29% vs. 20%). And being the target of these types of messages is an especially common experience for older girls: 35% of girls ages 15 to 17 say they have received unwanted explicit images, compared with about one-in-five boys in this age range and younger teens of both genders.²

Teen boys and girls are equally likely to be bullied online, but girls are more likely to endure false rumors, receive explicit images they didn't ask for

% of U.S. teens who say they have experienced ___ online or on their cellphone



Note: Respondents were allowed to select multiple options. Those who did not give an answer or gave other response are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted March 7–April 10, 2018.

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² A 2017 Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults also found age and gender differences in receiving nonconsensual explicit images; women ages 18 to 29 are especially likely to encounter this behavior.

Online harassment does not necessarily begin and end with one specific behavior, and 40% of teens have experienced two or more of these actions. Girls are more likely than boys to have experienced several different forms of online bullying, however. Some 15% of teen girls have been the target of at least four of these online behaviors, compared with 6% of boys.

In addition to these gender differences, teens from lower-income families are more likely than those from higher-income families to encounter certain forms of online bullying. For example, 24% of teens whose household income is less than \$30,000 a year say they have been the target of physical threats online, compared with 12% whose annual household income is \$75,000 or more. However, teens' experiences with these issues do not statistically differ by race or ethnicity, or by their parent's level of educational attainment. (For details on experiences with online bullying by different demographic groups, see [Appendix A](#).)

The likelihood of teens facing abusive behavior also varies by how often teens go online. Some 45% of teens say they are [online almost constantly](#), and these constant users are more likely to face online harassment. Fully 67% of teens who are online almost constantly have been cyberbullied, compared with 53% of those who use the internet several times a day or less. These differences also extend to specific kinds of behaviors. For example, half of teens who are near-constant internet users say they have been called offensive names online, compared with about a third (36%) who use the internet less frequently.

A majority of teens think parents are doing a good job at addressing online harassment, but smaller shares think other groups are handling this issue effectively

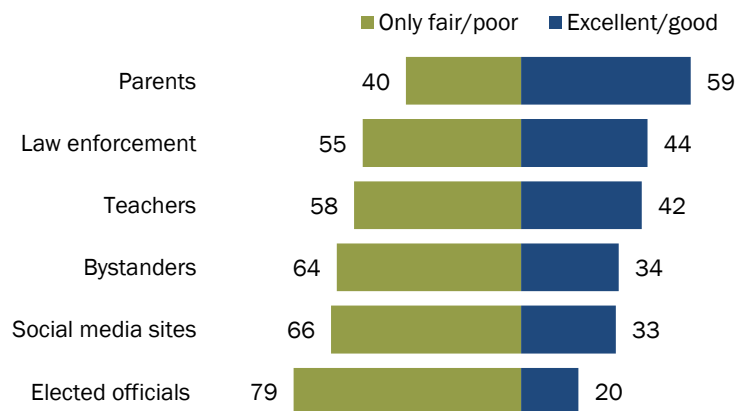
Today, school officials, tech companies and lawmakers are looking for ways to combat cyberbullying. Some schools have implemented policies that [punish students](#) for harassing messages even when those exchanges occur off campus. Anti-bullying [tools are being rolled out](#) by social media companies, and [several states](#) have enacted laws prohibiting cyberbullying and other forms of electronic harassment. In light of these efforts, Pew Research Center asked young people to rate how key groups are responding to cyberbullying and found that teens generally are critical of the way this problem is being addressed.

Indeed, teens rate the anti-bullying efforts of five of the six groups measured in the survey more negatively than positively. Parents are the only group for which a majority of teens (59%) express a favorable view of their efforts.

Young people have an especially negative view of the way politicians are tackling the issue of cyberbullying – 79% of teens say elected officials are doing only a fair or poor job of addressing this problem. And smaller majorities have unfavorable views of how groups such as social media sites (66%), other users who witness harassment happening online (64%) or teachers (58%) are addressing harassment and cyberbullying.

A majority of teens think parents are doing a good job in addressing online harassment, but are critical of teachers, social media companies and politicians

% of U.S. teens who say each group does a/an _____ job in addressing online harassment and online bullying



Note: Excellent/good and only fair/poor responses are combined. Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted March 7–April 10, 2018.

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Teens’ views on how well each of these groups is handling this issue vary little by their own personal experiences with cyberbullying – that is, bullied teens are no more critical than their non-

bullied peers. And teens across various demographic groups tend to have a similar assessment of how these groups are addressing online harassment.

About six-in-ten parents worry about their own teen getting bullied online, but most are confident they can teach their teen about acceptable online behavior

Parents believe they can provide their teen with the appropriate advice to make good online decisions. Nine-in-ten parents say they are at least somewhat confident they can teach their teen how to engage in appropriate online behavior, including 45% who say they are very confident in their ability to do so.

But even as most parents are confident they can educate their child about proper online conduct, notable shares are concerned about the types of negative experiences their teen might encounter online.

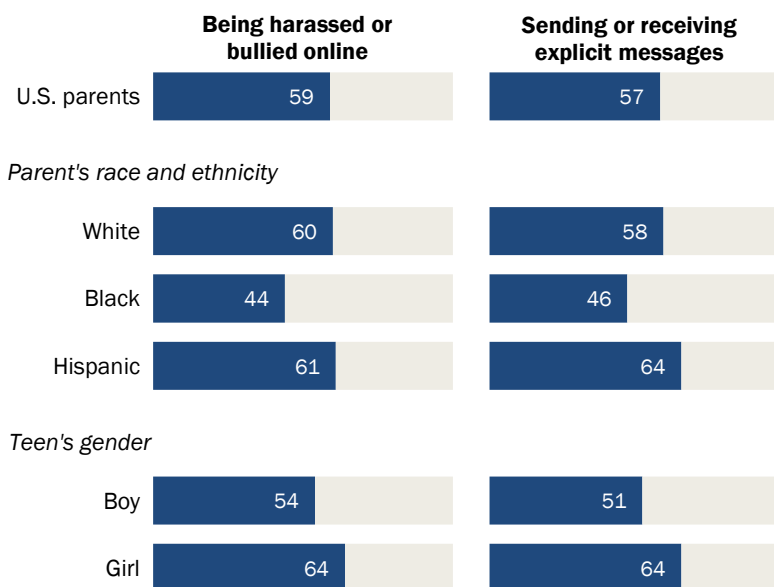
Roughly six-in-ten parents say they worry at least somewhat about their teen being harassed or bullied online (59%) or sending or receiving explicit images (57%). In each case, about one-in-four parents say they worry a lot about one of these things happening to their child.

These parental concerns tend to vary by race and ethnicity, as well as by a child's gender. Among parents, whites and Hispanics are more likely than blacks to say they worry about their teen being cyberbullied.

Hispanic parents also are more inclined than black parents to say they worry about their child exchanging explicit images. At the same time, parents of teen girls are somewhat more likely than

About six-in-ten parents worry about their teen getting bullied online, exchanging explicit images, but this varies by race, ethnicity and the child's gender

% of U.S. parents of teens who say they worry "a lot" or "somewhat" about their teen ...



Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. Respondents who did not give an answer or gave other responses are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted March 7- April 10, 2018.

"A Majority of Teens Have Experienced Some Form of Cyberbullying"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

those with a teenage boy to say they worry about their teen being bullied online (64% vs. 54%) or exchanging explicit images (64% vs. 51%). (For details on these parental concerns by demographic group, see [Appendix A.](#))

Acknowledgements

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Methodology

This Pew Research Center analysis is based on surveys of parents and teens that were conducted using the NORC AmeriSpeak panel. AmeriSpeak is a nationally representative, probability-based panel of the U.S. household population. Randomly selected U.S. households are sampled with a known, nonzero probability of selection from the NORC National Frame, and then contacted by U.S. mail, telephone and field interviewers (face to face). More details about the NORC AmeriSpeak panel methodology are available [here](#).

This particular survey featured interviews with 1,058 parents who belong to the panel and have a teen ages 13 to 17, as well as interviews with 743 teens. Parents who have multiple teenage children were asked to provide information about each of these teens. The panel randomly selected one of these teens, and parents were instructed to respond to all survey questions with this teen in mind. Interviews were conducted online and by telephone from March 7 to April 10, 2018.

The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 5.0 percentage points for the full sample of 743 teen respondents and 4.5 percentage points for the full sample of 1,058 parent respondents.

The data were weighted in a multistep process that begins with the panel base sampling weights. Panel base sampling weights for all sampled housing units are computed as the inverse of probability of selection from the NORC National Frame (the sampling frame that is used to sample housing units for AmeriSpeak) or address-based sample. The sample design and recruitment protocol for the AmeriSpeak Panel involves subsampling of initial nonrespondent housing units. These subsampled nonrespondent housing units are selected for an in-person follow-up. The subsample of housing units selected for the nonresponse follow-up (NRFU) have their panel base sampling weights inflated by the inverse of the subsampling rate. The base sampling weights are further adjusted to account for unknown eligibility and nonresponse among eligible housing units. The household-level nonresponse adjusted weights are then post-stratified to external counts for number of households obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. Then, these household-level post-stratified weights are assigned to each eligible adult in every recruited household. Furthermore, a person-level nonresponse adjustment accounts for nonresponding adults within a recruited household. Teen panelists carry over the parent's panel weight.

Finally, panel weights were raked to external population totals associated with age, sex, education, race/Hispanic ethnicity, housing tenure, telephone status and census division. The external population totals were obtained from the Current Population Survey. The weights adjusted to the external population totals are the final panel weights.

Study-specific base sampling weights are derived using a combination of the final panel weight and the probability of selection associated with the sampled panel member. Since not all sampled panel members respond to the survey interview, an adjustment is needed to account for and adjust for survey nonrespondents. This adjustment decreases potential nonresponse bias associated with sampled panel members who did not complete the survey interview for the study. Thus, the nonresponse-adjusted survey weights for the study were adjusted via a raking ratio method to general population totals associated with the following socio-demographic characteristics: age, sex, education, income, race/Hispanic ethnicity and census division for the parent respondents, and the following socio-demographic characteristics for the teen respondents: age, sex, race/Hispanic ethnicity, highest level of education associated with teen's parents and census division associated with the teen's household. The weights adjusted to the 2017 March Current Population Survey population totals are the final study weights, which were used to produce the estimates in this report.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for teens and parents in the survey:

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Teens sample	743	5.0 percentage points
Boys	348	7.2 percentage points
Girls	393	6.8 percentage points
13-14 Boys	134	11.7 percentage points
13-14 Girls	166	10.5 percentage points
15-17 Boys	214	9.2 percentage points
15-17 Girls	227	9.0 percentage points
<i>Household income</i>		
Less than \$30K	199	9.6 percentage points
\$30K-\$74,999K	266	8.3 percentage points
\$75K or more	278	8.1 percentage points
Parents sample	1,058	4.5 percentage points
White, non-Hispanic	545	6.3 percentage points
Black, non-Hispanic	165	11.4 percentage points
Hispanic	274	8.8 percentage points
<i>Teen's gender</i>		
Male	523	6.4 percentage points
Female	530	6.4 percentage points

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

The parent survey had a survey completion rate of 83% (1,058 completed interviews out of 1,274 screened eligible panelists). Taking account of the combined, weighted response rate for the recruitment surveys (34%) and attrition from panel members who were removed at their request or for inactivity, the weighted cumulative response rate for the parent survey is 8%.

The teen survey had a survey completion rate of 69% (743 completed interviews out of 1,075 screened eligible panelists for whom parental consent was granted). Taking account of the combined, weighted response rate for the recruitment surveys (34%) and attrition from panel

members who were removed at their request or for inactivity, the weighted cumulative response rate for the teen survey is 18%.

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Appendix A: Detailed tables

Teens' experiences with online harassment and bullying, by demographic group

% of U.S. teens who say they have experienced ___ online or on their cellphone

	Offensive name-calling	Spreading of false rumors	Receiving explicit images they did not ask for	Constant asking of where they are, what they're doing, who they're with, by someone other than a parent	Physical threats	Having explicit images of them shared without their consent	Experience any type of cyberbullying
U.S. teens	42	32	25	21	16	7	59
Boys	42	26	20	18	16	5	59
Girls	41	39	29	23	16	9	60
White	48	33	25	21	16	8	62
Black	31	30	25	19	14	5	61
Hispanic	38	33	28	24	18	8	56
Ages 13-14	39	34	20	18	11	8	56
15-17	44	31	27	23	19	6	62
Less than \$30K	46	41	37	25	24	11	64
\$30K to \$74,999	38	28	22	19	16	7	54
\$75K or more	42	31	19	20	12	4	61
<i>Parent's level of educational attainment</i>							
High school or less	46	32	26	20	19	11	61
Some college	48	38	31	26	15	8	64
College graduate+	34	29	18	17	15	4	55

Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. Parent's level of educational attainment based on highest level of education obtained by a teen's parent.

Source: Survey conducted March 7- April 10, 2018.

"A Majority of Teens Have Experienced Some Form of Cyberbullying"

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Parents' concerns about their teen experiencing cyberbullying, by demographic group

% of U.S. parents of teens who say they worry "a lot" or "some" about their teen ...

	Being harassed or bullied online	Receiving or sending explicit images
U.S. parents of teens	59	57
Male	56	55
Female	62	59
White	60	58
Black	44	46
Hispanic	61	64
Less than \$30K	60	58
\$30K to \$74,999	56	55
\$75K or more	61	59
High school or less	54	51
Some college	61	59
College graduate+	62	62
<i>Teen's age</i>		
13-14	63	60
15-17	56	55
<i>Teen's gender</i>		
Boys	54	51
Girls	64	64

Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 10, 2018.

"A Majority of Teens Have Experienced Some Form of Cyberbullying"

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Topline questionnaire: Teens survey

2018 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S Teen Survey

TOPLINE

March 7 – April 10, 2018

Teens ages 13-17 N=743

ASK ALL:

OH1 Thinking of some experiences that might happen to people your own age when they use the internet or cellphones...

How much of a problem, if at all, are each of the following? **[RANDOMIZE ITEMS]**

	<u>Major problem</u>	<u>Minor problem</u>	<u>Not a problem</u>	<u>DK/Refusal</u>
a. People being harassed or bullied March 7-April 10, 2018	63	27	10	1

[ITEMS b-d NOT SHOWN]

ASK ALL:

OH2 As far as you know, how good of a job are each of the following groups doing when it comes to addressing online harassment and online bullying? **[RANDOMIZE ITEMS]**

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>DK/Refusal</u>
a. Social media sites March 7-April 10, 2018	7	26	36	31	1
b. Elected officials March 7-April 10, 2018	4	16	37	42	1
c. Law enforcement March 7-April 10, 2018	10	33	34	21	1
d. Parents March 7-April 10, 2018	20	38	27	13	1
e. Teachers March 7-April 10, 2018	10	32	34	23	1
f. Other users who witness behavior March 7-April 10, 2018	5	29	44	21	1

ASK ALL:

OH3

Still thinking about your experiences online or on your cellphone, which of the following, if any, has ever happened to you personally? **[RANDOMIZE 1-6 WITH ITEM 7 LAST]**

	<u>Selected</u>	<u>Not selected</u> <u>/No answer</u>
1. Been called offensive names March 7-April 10, 2018	42	58
2. Been physically threatened March 7-April 10, 2018	16	84
3. Had someone spread false rumors about you March 7-April 10, 2018	32	68
4. Had someone share explicit images of you without your consent March 7-April 10, 2018	7	93
5. Had someone send you explicit images you did not ask for March 7-April 10, 2018	25	75
6. Had someone, other than a parent, constantly ask you where you were, who you were with or what you were doing March 7-April 10, 2018	21	79
7. None of these March 7-April 10, 2018	40	60

Topline questionnaire: Parents survey

2018 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S Teen Survey

TOPLINE

March 7 – April 10, 2018

Parents of teens ages 13-17 N=1,058

ASK ALL:

PAR2 How much, if at all, do you worry about your teen... **[RANDOMIZE OPTIONS]**

	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not too much</u>	<u>Not at all</u>	<u>DK/Refusal</u>
b. Receiving or sending explicit images March 7-April 10, 2018	28	29	26	17	*
c. Being harassed or bullied online March 7-April 10, 2018	27	32	24	17	*

[ITEMS a, d-e NOT SHOWN]

ASK ALL:

PAR4 In general, how confident are you in your ability to... **[RANDOMIZE OPTIONS]**

	<u>Very confident</u>	<u>Somewhat confident</u>	<u>Not too confident</u>	<u>Not at all confident</u>	<u>DK/Refusal</u>
b. Teach your teen about how to engage in appropriate online behavior March 7-April 10, 2018	45	46	8	1	*

[ITEMS a, c-f NOT SHOWN]