



Tri-Valley

Opportunity Council, Inc.
Community Assistance Programs

Building strong families. Connecting people and resources. Strengthening communities.

October 2020

COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Tri-Valley Opportunity Council, Inc

1-800-820-7263

• Nancy Ramon

• Maureen Hams

nancy.ramon@tvoc.org

mhams@tvoc.org

OCTOBER IS NATIONAL BULLYING PREVENTION MONTH

Dear Families and Friends of Tri-Valley Opportunity Council:

This month's newsletter is centering on Bullying. I wanted to address that fact that everyone (parents, youth, schools and communities) is needed to be involved with stopping bullying in our schools and communities.

All of us can and should be involved in preventing and assisting our youth when we are aware of bullying that is happening to our youth.

Due to what is going on in our world, I focused more on cyberbullying this time.

We are planning to work with NAMI to present a training for families. The topic is "You're the Expert: How to Successfully Advocate for your Child". Plans are to hold this in November by Zoom. More information will be sent out.

As we are approaching the colder weather!! Remember to sign up for Energy Assistance. For more information call 1-866-264-3729



RESEARCH SHOWS RISE IN CYBERBULLYING DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

([verywellfamily.com](https://www.verywellfamily.com))

For many children and teens, social distancing during the COVID-19 global pandemic means that the only contact they will have with their peers will be done virtually. As a result, they are using social media and apps like TikTok, FaceTime, and Zoom a lot more frequently than in the past. Although there is much good that can come from these online interactions—like giving kids important connections to the outside world—they are not without risks.

In fact, some the greatest online risks to kids are cyberbullying, shaming, and exploitation. Initial research indicates that cyberbullying is on the rise during the stay-at-home order. According to Light, an organization that monitors harassment and hate speech, there has been a 70% increase in cyberbullying in just a matter of months.

Why It's happening:

With social distancing firmly in place and the vast majority of schools teaching remotely, it stands to reason that kids are going to be online now more than ever. For those using distance learning, their education is pretty much dependent on the internet.

More leisure time spend online:

Aside from the increased screen time for learning, many kids just enjoy being online during their free time. Even when there wasn't a global pandemic, students tend to spend more time in front of the screen when school isn't in session. In fact a 2019 study found that when schools are out, students spend upwards of an hour a day online watching YouTube or Netflix. Of course, these numbers are self-reported and could likely be higher, but they indicate that technology is often a go-to source when kids are idle or bored.

Increase stress:

Aside from the increase in technology use, there are other factors at play that are causing an increase in cyberbullying. For instance, when there is a major crisis like the one that COVID-19 brings, this put everyone on edge, and kids are no exception. As a result, hostility toward others tends to increase with self-preserving and self-defensive behaviors. While we certainly see these behaviors among adults, it's even more likely to manifest among teens in their online interactions with their peers.

Furthermore, this pandemic is highly stressful and confusing. When kids are feeling this way, it can lead to acting out or lashing at others, misunderstandings among friends, and risk-taking behaviors in response.

(continued on next page)

Isolation and Potentially Fragmented Friendships

What's more, some friend groups are fragmented right now, especially for kids whose situation at home is less than ideal. For instance, some kids and teens may have limited access to the internet, a computer, or are severely limited in what they are permitted to do. This reality results in these kids feeling further isolated. Then, when they are online they may make or cruel comments towards their peers in frustration, especially if they feel like they are missing out or have been kept out of the loop.

Decreased Digital Supervision:

To make matters worse, parents are trying to balance working from home, helping with schoolwork, and learning how to manage the new normal. They don't always have time to supervise online gaming and social media use. This lack of boundaries and supervision also can allow for more cyberbullying.

Boredom:

Finally, kids sometimes engage in cyberbullying because they are bored, lonely, or want attention. Because this pandemic exacerbates those issues this is also leading to an increase in mean behavior online. Some kids are cyberbullying others to not only relieve stress but also because they are bored. Cyberbullying can also feed their need for attention—even if it's negative attention. To complicate matters, when kids are cyberbullied their support networks are limited. When there is no school they can't stop by the counselor's office or talk to their teacher. Often kids don't talk to their parents about cyberbullying because they are concerned their technology will be restricted.

What Parents Can do:

Because of COVID-19, many parents are at home with their children now more than ever. As a result, they have the opportunity to be especially mindful of what their kids are doing online and how they are interacting with others on social media.

Establish Guidelines: You can curb cyberbullying by limiting screen time where teens are gaming or using social media. Obviously with options for entertainment limited, accomplishing this task is not that easy, but by being creative it can be done.

Talk about Stress and Emotions: It's important to have honest and direct conversations with your kids about what they are feeling and experiencing. This time is one of extreme stress, frustration, and anxiety.

Remind Them Same Rules Apply: Even though we are living through a pandemic and your kids are spending more hours online than in the past, it's important to remind them that the same rules apply as in the past when it comes to staying safe online. For instance, let your kids know not to give out their personal information and tell them to avoid talking to or playing with strangers online. Also, give them a refresher in what content should be shared or viewed online and talk to them about the harmful effects of cyberbullying, hate speech or comments, sexting, and sharing inappropriate photos.

Urge Them to Connect: The need to keep those connections with friends and family to grow, learn, and develop. Be sure to let them know that it's safe for them to be open with you.

Back to School Anxiety in Kids: What to Watch Out for This Year

(www.understood.org)

In a typical year, you might expect your child to have the jitters about going back to school. But this year back to school is anything but typical. Many kids are going back feeling more than a little nervous, especially if they're returning to a physical school. They might be feeling anxiety or a sense of dread.

Even kids who usually look forward to school might be anxious. For kids who struggle with learning or making friends, it can be even harder.

If your child is anxious about going back to school, how do you if it's a passing situation or a larger problem?

Why kids feel anxious going back to school: some of this year's back to school concerns are new and come just from the pandemic. But for kids who already struggled, these worries build on ones that already existed.

Here are some of the things kids may feel anxious about:

- Being behind and not being able to catch up
- Seeing other kids and fitting in after being away so long
- Following safety rules (or other kids not following them)
- Getting sick or family members sick
- Not being prepared for changes or not knowing what to expect
- Having to talk about things that have happened in their family, like illness, death or loss of a job.

COVID-19 isn't the only thing causing emotional stress this year. It has been coupled with the stress of protests, riots, and the national conversation on race.

What to do if your child is experiencing anxiety: Let them know that lots of people are anxious about going back to work and school. Tell your child it's OK to feel that way, and that you're always there to talk and listen.

Keep track of signs of anxiety you are seeing, and when you notice them. This can help you identify patterns in your child's behavior. Look for headaches, stomachaches or trouble sleeping. Emotional, like crying, being afraid, or constantly worrying. Behavioral, like constantly asking "what if", having tantrums, or refusing to go to school.

This year, it's especially important to communicate with your child's teacher. Many teachers are learning strategies to help reduce anxiety in students. So look for communication from the school about how they're handling this. Talk about your child's specific fears and coping strategies to try at home.

Together you can keep an eye on your child's anxiety, how your child is managing it, and if it's pointing to deeper struggles that require more support.



**OPEN ENROLLMENT
FOR HEALTH INSURANCE
THROUGH MNSURE
STARTS**

**Sunday, November 1st through
Tuesday, December 22nd, 2020**

Tri-Valley Opportunity Council has trained navigators to assist the public with the online application for health insurance in Minnesota.

There is NO cost to you for our services.

If you need assistance or more information please call Nancy Ramon at 1-800-820-7263.

**The coverage for a qualified health plan will
start January 1, 2020.**

**Medical Assistance and Minnesota Care is
open enrollment all year long**

The Minnesota Insulin Safety Program

Tri-Valley is offering free assistance for Minnesotans who need help applying for affordable insulin.

Call for more information.

Websites for your family

A lot of resources and information is available for children and families on the internet. You need to be very careful about information you find and very cautious about websites, but there are many quality sites out there. Here are a few sites you can look at :

www.pacer.org— resource and information center for families and youth with disabilities, bullying resources

www.nami.org— a mental health advocacy organization dedicated to improving the lives of individuals and families

www.macmh.org-training and resources for children and families promoting positive mental health

www.samhsa.gov— resources and information regarding substance abuse, mental health and services for children and families

www.health.state.mn.us/mcshn— a website for Minnesota children with special health needs and their families

www.fape.org-information about IDEA, special education and disability issues

www.mofas.org—Minnesota Organization on Fetal Alcohol

www.parentsknow.state.mn.us— resources and information for parents

www.how-to-stop-bullying.com— resources and activities on preventing bullying and how to handle bullying

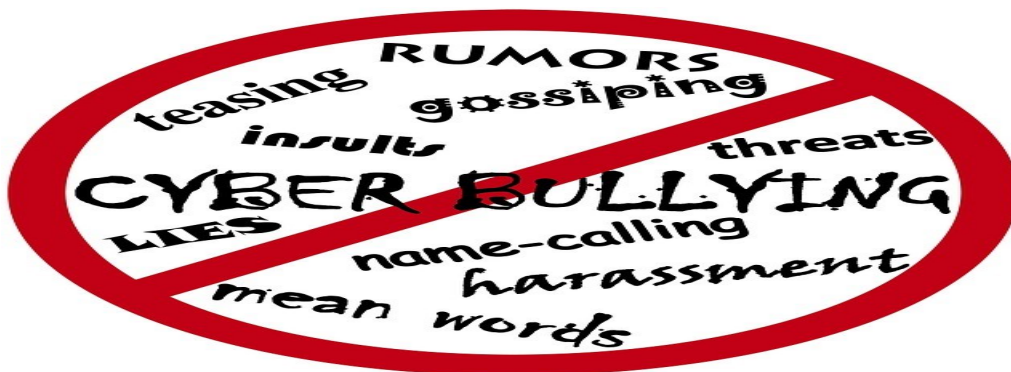
UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF CYBERBULLYING

(www.pacer.org)

While bullying is characterized by intentional, often repetitive, hurtful behavior toward another person or group, there are distinguishing elements when it happens online or via smartphone.

- ⇒ Persistent: Most students have access to some form of technology at all times, which means cyberbullying can happen any time—in the morning, afternoon, and evening—not just while children are at school. It happens while at home or in the community.
- ⇒ Hard to detect: While some bullying is very overt, such as pushing or damaging belongings, cyberbullying happens through phones and on computers or tablets, making it much more difficult for adults to detect.
- ⇒ Anonymous: Cyberbullying can be done anonymously. Those being bullied might not even know who is perpetuating the behavior, which makes it easy for one child to hurt another and not be held accountable.
- ⇒ Capable of spreading to a much larger audience: Information online can be shared easily and quickly, which makes it difficult to contain or stop negative messages.
- ⇒ Easier to be hurtful: It is often easier to bully using technology because of greater physical distance. The person bullying doesn't see the immediate response from the person being targeted. They might not recognize the serious harm caused by their actions because technology distances them from the real-life pain they could be causing.
- ⇒ Permanent: Once something is shared on the internet, it is often available to everyone, everywhere. It can be challenging to completely delete information once it is on the internet.

(Note: the one advantage to “permanence” is that online bullying does leave tangible evidence. Unlike physical or emotional bullying, online bullying leaves a digital footprint; the words, images, or videos posted can be documented through screenshots or saving URLs and texts, which can be helpful.)



Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

This is an Equal Opportunity Program. Discrimination in this program is prohibited by Federal law. It is illegal to discriminate against any person because of race, color or national origin. To file a complaint of discrimination, write to: USDA Director, Office of the Civil Rights, Room 326-W Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Ave S.W., Washington, DC, 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964.

ENGAGE PARENTS & YOUTH

(www.stopbullying.gov)

School staff can do a great deal to prevent bullying and protect students, but they can't do it alone. Parents and youth also have a role to play in preventing bullying at school. One mechanism engaging parents and youth, a school safety committee, can bring community together to keep bullying prevention at school active and focused.

Benefits of Parent and Youth Engagement

Research shows that school administrators, such as principals, can play a powerful role in bullying prevention. They can inspire others and maintain a climate of respect and inclusion. But a principal cannot do it alone.

When parents and youth are involved in the solutions:

- * Students feel safer and can focus on learning
- * Parents worry less
- * Teachers and staff can focus on their work
- * Schools can develop more responsive solutions because students are more likely to see or hear bullying that adults.
- * School climate improves because students are engaged in taking action to stop bullying
- * Parents can support schools' messages about bullying at home. They can also more likely to recognize signs that a child has been bullied or is bullying others

How Parents and Youth can Contribute

Schools can set the stage for meaningful parent and youth involvement, but it doesn't happen overnight. Parents and youth need to feel valued and be given opportunities to contribute their expertise.

To sustain parent and youth involvement, schools need to provide meaningful roles for them:

- * Students can contribute their views and experiences with bullying. They can take leadership roles in school to promote respect and inclusion, communicate about bullying prevention with their peers, and help develop rules and policies.
- * Parents can contribute to a positive school climate through the parent teacher association, volunteering, and school improvement events.
- * School staff can keep parents informed, make them feel welcome, and treat them as partners. Schools can identify a school coordinator to support parent and youth engagement strategies.



APPLE SPINACH SALAD

(University of Minnesota Extension)

Ingredients:

4 cups of spinach leaves

2 tablespoons canola oil

2 1/2 tablespoons cider vinegar

1 tablespoon sugar

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/4 cup red onion, chopped

1 medium tart apple, cut into bite-sized chunks

1/4 cup raisins or dried cranberries

1. Wash spinach thoroughly. Pat dry or spin in a salad spinner.
2. Tear spinach into bite-sized pieces and place in a large bowl. Set aside.
3. In a small bowl mix oil, vinegar, sugar, and salt.
4. Add the apple, onion, and dried fruit to the oil mixture and toss to coat apples. Let stand 10 minutes.
5. Combine ingredients together in the large bowl of spinach and serve.