



**Patti Agatston:** If you can have it, these conversations on the front end, asking them about what they're seeing and experiencing online, being willing to have those courageous conversations up front for any risky area online, is really important. If we wait till after the fact, it is much more reactive and our kids need those critical conversations throughout.

**Sam Fuqua:** That's Patti Agatston, and this is, Well, That Went Sideways! We're a podcast that serves as a resource to help people have healthy, respectful communication. We present ideas, tools, and techniques to help you transform conflict in relationships of all kinds. On this episode, we talk about cyber bullying with Dr. Patti Agatston. She's a licensed professional counselor, an anti-bullying trainer and co-author of the book, *Cyberbullying: Bullying in the Digital Age*.

I'm Sam Fuqua, co-host of the program with Jes Rau. Hi Jes.

**Jes Rau:** Hey Sam.

**Sam Fuqua:** And we're so pleased to be joined by Dr. Patti Agatston. Thank you for speaking with us today.

**Patti Agatston:** Thanks. It's great to be here.

**Sam Fuqua:** To start with, can you give our listeners, some of whom might not be familiar with what cyberbullying is and how it may be different from other types of bullying, can you paint a picture for us of what cyberbullying involves and the impact on young people?

**Patti Agatston:** Sure. So, I think it is helpful to understand what bullying is to understand what cyberbullying is, and so we talk about bullying as an active aggression that's typically repeated over time where there's an imbalance of power between the inva, individuals involved. So maybe there's someone who's stronger, older, bigger, stronger, has more friends. Um, and then of course that can happen online. So with cyberbullying, we're talking about the use of information and communication technologies to bully others. You know, there's a debate in the field, whether it's just a different location for bullying or a totally different phenomena. There are some unique features to cyberbullying that we do, you know, recognize that um, it is easier to, obviously to hide your identity online. And so in traditional or in-person bullying, you see typically who's targeting you, but not always. There's always been the bathroom wall that people can, you know, write on. So, um, and then there's also that opportunity to have access to a person outside of, um, being in person with them.

So students, for example, will talk about maybe having, um, bullying happen at school, but then they can go home and not have a break from it when cyberbullying occurs as well. So they can be targeted, um, very frequently, around the clock, if you will. Um, so, uh, and then of course the opportunity to have such a wide audience for the bullying. So, 'cause often for, um, when, when cyberbullying occurs, if it's, if it's in a viral situation or a large audience, it can create even more shame and humiliation for the person being targeted. And so the effects are, are, you know, similar to what we see with, um, in-person bullying, higher rates of anxiety, depression. The person who's being targeted often will end up with lower self-esteem. Um, it can affect their academic performance. And then we also see, uh, higher rates of suicidal ideation. So all of these factors we need to take very seriously and so certainly need to, um, address it when we see cyberbullying occurring.



**Sam Fuqua:** Can you give us any data that shows, uh, what is the scope of the problem and what age children are particularly impacted?

**Patti Agatston:** The newest Youth Risk Behavior survey data indicates from, and that's from 2019, it is pre-COVID, shows that, for example, with high school students, 19.5% of students reported that they, um, experienced in-person bullying and 15.7% reported that they experienced cyberbullying. And I bring that up to shed, to illustrate that, um, even though kids tend to be online a lot, we still typically see higher rates of in-person bullying than cyberbullying. But, you know, that's still a significant amount, 15.7% in two nine, 2019 reporting that they were cyberbullied. We don't know yet if that has shifted with the pandemic. Um, and then if we look at lifetime prevalence rates, that was among high school students, the Cyberbullying Research Center, they, uh, survey based on middle and high school because typically it is higher among the middle and high school ages, and what they have is the lifetime prevalence, um, from 2019 data is 36.5% of youth reporting being cyberbullied, and then 15% of youth reporting that they have cyberbullied others. Different time periods can affect the prevalence rates, but it's certainly a, a consistent issue and concern, and it does tend to peak in the, in the middle school age and stay high in high school, whereas with in-person bullying, that typically drops off some in high school. We don't see as much of a dropout, drop off with cyberbullying.

**Sam Fuqua:** Clearly impacting millions of kids around the country and around the world, I imagine.

**Jes Rau:** Yeah, so I, uh, I work with youth. That's my core, um, job is working in youth development. And I heard from some students as I was getting ready for this, uh, conversation that they experienced cyberbullying in such unique ways that I never even thought of. So for example, they talked about in the chat section of Google Docs, when they're doing their school work, the, in that chat site. And so I didn't even think about that. Where there are places that cyberbullying occurs, are there surprising places that we as adults may not have thought of, um, that we're seeing emerge more and more?

**Patti Agatston:** Well, we've heard stories of, you know, photos being embarrassingly sent out, like through the airdrop features of phones, you know, so, you know, being able to send things out that, that a lot of students see that way. I'm sure it can be in the chat sections of Google Docs. Most commonly, it still is students saying that it occurs, um, through being, you know, posted online in comments and through text messages. So those are typically the most common. Um, so when we say online, often it is through the social media sites like Instagram or Snapchat. Um, however, uh, it can happen on gaming platforms as well. So, um, I think the other piece we have to keep in mind is that just like in person, there's a difference between conflict and being rude and bullying. We have to keep that in mind online too. So one of the things that happens, I think, a little bit with, um, cyberbullying is that any negative, aggressive behavior, uh, even if it's more of a conflict, can seem, you know, it gets labeled as cyberbullying.

So sometimes we have to do a little bit of education around, okay, what's the difference between being rude and maybe just saying, you know, that's, that's an unflattering picture of you versus, you know, having a disagreement that gets hostile. You know, we both are arguing back and forth, and then we engage in a little bit of putting each other down as part of that, versus a true experience of a power differential where, you know, maybe I've asked the person to stop and he or she continues, or they get their friends involved and gang up on me. So that's another piece. It's a little bit harder to tease out the differences between, um, different forms of aggressive behavior and what, what would meet more of a bullying or cyberbullying definition. But the important thing is that, um, we always wanna treat others with respect and, and kindness. And so, um, we wanna make sure that that message is out there as well. But we do have to recognize that sometimes there's, you know, trash talking between teams and they're not handling it well.







