Young People and Cyberbullying 2025

Experiences of bullying among 13 to 18-year-olds in digital environments

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Summary

Cyberbullying is a serious and increasingly common phenomenon among young people.

The survey conducted by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare (MLL) in 2025 reveals alarming changes in young people's experiences and perceptions of cyberbullying.

Although the use of digital media and social media has increased, most young people perceive their phones as having a neutral or positive impact on their well-being. However, cyberbullying has become more widespread and more subtle and diverse in its forms, making it harder to recognize and intervene.

According to the survey, young people encounter all forms of cyberbullying on a daily basis. Bullying is particularly prevalent on TikTok. Bullying often appears as name-calling, subtle meanness, hints, and intentionally not replying to messages or excluding someone.

The perpetrator is often an unknown individual, although cyberbullying is closely connected to bullying that occurs in school settings. Anonymity and lack of face-to-face interaction online enable bullying without significant consequences for the bully. This creates fear, frustration, and anxiety in digital environments and facilitates hate speech, the spread of misinformation, racism, and bullying-related violence.

The survey reveals that bullied young people often do not ask for help, and the number of bystanders who witness bullying without intervening is increasing. Young people are increasingly opting not to step in when they see bullying, which worsens the situation. Girls and non-binary youth intervene in bullying situations more often than boys.

It is concerning that the online environment in which boys live is harsh and fosters cynicism. They often perceive bullying as harmless, even though it causes distress for many. Some young people do not seem to recognize what counts as cyberbullying and what is harmless humor.

Young people feel they have a significant responsibility in reducing cyberbullying. They expect their parents to be present, show a caring attitude, and possess problem-solving skills.

It is important that adults understand the many forms of cyberbullying, as these forms may often go unrecognized.

The most severe consequences of cyberbullying affect a small group of young people who are consistently targeted. Bullying causes anxiety, self-esteem issues, and social isolation. Those who are continuously bullied seem to often become bullies themselves.

The survey shows that the proportion of those who have seen violent bullying-related material increases with age, and those who are continuously bullied are exposed to such content more often than average.

Young people shared their thoughts in the survey on how to prevent and resolve cyberbullying. They call for social media and gaming platforms to take responsibility in reducing bullying.

Supporting young people's well-being and providing meaningful leisure activities are key strategies for preventing bullying. Young people's own actions and peer support are especially important in preventing cyberbullying. Emotional education and early intervention in daycare and schools are essential actions according to young people.

The 'Young People and Cyberbullying 2025' survey and study was conducted as part of the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare's media education work. The report has been compiled and analyzed by Suvi Tuominen and Anniina Lundvall in collaboration with MLL's experts.

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Foreword

Milla Kalliomaa, General Secretary
Mannerheim League for Child Welfare

Hope is action – It is the responsibility of adults to support a positive media experience.

The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare (MLL) has been engaging in media education for decades, supporting the well-being of children and young people in an ever-changing and increasingly digital world.

MLL's work is based on children's rights and their participation – by listening to the voices of young people and valuing their experiences.

The goal of the 'Young People and Cyberbullying 2025' report is to provide up-to-date information on bullying that occurs online and the trends related to it.

When comparing the responses of young people to those from the previous survey conducted by MLL in 2021, many alarming changes are emerging.

The anonymity of social media platforms and aggressive algorithms make it difficult to address bullying, and fewer young people report bullying to adults.

Some of the youth responses highlight an increasingly harsh and cynical value system.

In addition to name-calling, bullying often consists of subtle hints and exclusion, as well as brutal acts of violence, racism, and hate speech.

Artificial intelligence can now be used to create bullying content, challenging media literacy in unprecedented ways.

Cyberbullying is still not being addressed sufficiently, monitoring measures are insufficient, and the consequences for bullies are minimal.

Although the use of digital media and social media among young people has increased in recent years, most respondents say that their phone affects their well-being in a neutral or positive way.

Cyberbullying often appears as isolated incidents that young people handle in various ways – either with support from others or by letting it go.

They know how to operate independently on social media and in games, utilizing various technical and social coping strategies.

The diversity of social media and gaming services makes their online experiences unique.

In their open-ended responses, young people call for decisive and persistent action from adults, platforms, and society.

They want a more responsible social media culture, more effective moderation, and concrete ways to intervene in bullying.

Solving bullying should not fall solely on the shoulders of young people.

Adults have a responsibility and duty to act. This requires knowledge, resources, open dialogue, better monitoring mechanisms, and ensuring that the voices of young people are heard in decision-making.

Hopelessness is not an option. Every small action that reduces cyberbullying is a step toward a safer childhood, increasingly experienced in digital environments.

Heartfelt thanks to every young person who participated in the survey.

Thank you also to the schools that care for and support children and young people and participate with us in the fight against bullying.

The Blue Light Generation must be protected – together.

PURPOSE AND EXECUTION OF THE SURVEY

2.1 Implementation of the survey

The responses to MLL's "Young people and Cyberbullying 2025" survey were collected via an online survey in December 2024. The aim was to gather young people's thoughts on cyberbullying and to gain information about their experiences on the internet, social media, and digital games.

Information about the survey was disseminated to schools through MLL's social media, Nuortennetti, and newsletters and email lists related to school collaboration and media education. The link was also shared by MLL's partners and various stakeholders through their own channels. The survey link was also available on Nuortennetti.

A corresponding survey focused on cyberbullying was last conducted by MLL in 2021. In this report, the responses obtained are compared to those from the previous survey where applicable. Some questions were clarified, which was taken into account in the comparison of the responses. Some question formulations were slightly different, but comparison was possible in certain respects.

As in the previous survey, this time a large number of open-ended responses were received as well. The report includes selected responses that shed additional light on the topic, but the selection is not intended to represent all open responses. Many of the responses included "I don't know" type answers and also inappropriate comments.

Artificial intelligence has been used in the analysis of the survey data. Open-ended responses were input into the advanced language model Claude-3.5-Haiku-200k, which was tasked with classifying them into content themes. The accuracy of all AI-generated information has been verified from the data.

What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is repeated and intentional behavior conducted via information and communication technology intended to harm, harass, insult, or humiliate a specific individual or a target. In practice, cyberbullying can be, for example, mean comments, threats, spreading rumors, humiliation, and harassment. It can also be connected to school bullying. The rapid and vast dissemination of images and videos may exacerbate the severity and extent of cyberbullying. It is psychologically and socially detrimental for the victim when others share and endorse such material. At its most severe, cyberbullying can meet the criteria for a criminal offense. New challenges include, among other things, videos depicting violence and subjugation as well as bullying content generated using artificial intelligence.

2.2 Background information of the respondents

A total of 6,372 young people aged 10–25 responded to the survey. For this analysis and report at hand, the focus is on respondents aged 13–18, of whom there are altogether 5,990 (see Table 1). The majority of respondents are of lower secondary school age, i.e., 13–15 years old – a total of 5,373 respondents reported their age as either 13, 14 or 15. Consequently, the number of respondents aged 16–18 is approximately 600.

Karelia (7%), and Southwest Finland (7%). The rest of the respondents are relatively evenly distributed across Finland.

Background information (age, gender, region) is utilized as part of the analysis, and statistically significant differences will be highlighted in the report. For cross-tabulation purposes, the regions were grouped regionally according to Statistics Finland's major region classification into Southern Finland, Western Finland, Eastern Finland, and Northern Finland.

Table 1. Age of respondents.

Among the respondents, 3,028 (51%) identified as girls, 2,638 (44%) as boys, and 93 (2%) as non-binary. 231 young people who responded to the survey did not wish to disclose their gender.

The majority of respondents

The majority of respondents (19%) are from Uusimaa. The next largest groups of respondents are from Satakunta (9%), Northern Ostrobothnia (10%), North

YOUNG PEOPLE'S USE OF DIGITAL MEDIA

"I watched too many YouTube videos and wanted to do the same things I saw in the videos. When I played games, I didn't listen to what my parents were telling me because I was focused on the game. Also, when I was younger and the phone had to be taken away, I got upset and started acting out and yelling disruptively."

"Time goes by too fast and things are left undone if you just slack on your phone. The time spent on the phone should be managed. Of course, it's difficult even for adults, so how should children be expected to regulate it themselves?"

3.1 Smartphones are obtained at an increasingly younger age

The majority of respondents (45%) received their first smartphone at the age of 7, that is, most likely during first grade. A significant number received the device even before the age of 7, i.e., prior to school age (27% of respondents). Girls typically received their first smartphone at a slightly younger age than boys and non-binary individuals. Among girls, 29 percent received a phone already before the age of 7, while the proportion for boys is 24 percent and for non-binary individuals 21 percent. It appears that smartphones are being acquired at increasingly younger ages: 37 percent of 18-year-old respondents received their first smartphone by the age of 7, while among 13-year-olds, 77 percent already had a smartphone at that age.

The majority of respondents (78%) feel that they received their phone at just the right age. However, 11 percent of respondents feel they were too young when they got their first own smartphone, and only a couple of percent say they were too old when they received their first phone. One fifth of the respondents are unable to assess the matter.

Respondents spend several hours a day on their phones and social media (see Table 2). A quarter of the respondents estimate they spend 3–4 hours on these activities, and 22 percent spend 2–3 hours. Four or more hours are spent by

41 percent of respondents. Those who spend less than two hours are a clear minority (12%).
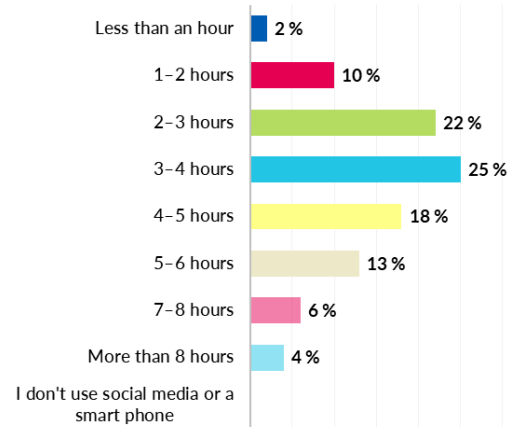
Table 2. How much time do you estimate you spend on your phone and/or social media daily? (N=5990)

Significant differences exist in the time spent on phones and social media across genders: 54 percent of non-binary individuals and 51.5 percent of girls spend over four hours per day on their phones or social media, whereas only 29 percent of boys reach that same duration. Time spent on the phone or social media increases with age.

The time spent on digital gaming is less than that spent on social media. For example, only 9 percent of all respondents play games 3–4 hours daily. 57 percent of young people play at most a couple of hours per day, and about half of those for less than an hour, which suggests that gaming may be considered casual play, such as during bus rides or recess. Heavy users, defined as those who play for at least four hours daily,

constitute a significant group, representing 10 percent of respondents.

Significant differences also exist in gaming habits across genders. Among boys and non-binary individuals, 18 percent play more than four hours daily, whereas only 4 percent of girls play the same amount. Of girls, 44 percent play less than an hour per day, while 13 percent of boys and 16 percent of non-binary individuals report playing for this limited amount of time.

In MLL's comparable survey conducted in 2021, time usage for social media and games was not differentiated. At that time, 60 percent of respondents (n=1123) spent more than four hours a day on weekdays on social media, the internet, and games.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF PHONE USE

When asked about the effects of phone use on their own well-being, responses indicate that the number of respondents experiencing positive effects (24%) is slightly higher than the number experiencing negative effects (20%). A significant proportion of respondents (42%) feel that the effects are neutral (see Table 3).

Girls tend to assess the well-being effects of phone use somewhat more negatively than their peers: 23 percent of girls experience negative effects, compared to 18 percent of boys and 16 percent of non-binary individuals. In contrast, 22 percent of girls, 26 percent

of boys, and 30 percent of non-binary individuals feel the effects are positive.

As they age, young people tend to recognize more negative effects. A notable 49 percent of 18-year-olds assess the well-being effects of phone use as negative, whereas among 13-year-olds only 15 percent do so.

Among residents of Northern Finland, 25 percent assess phone use as having negative effects, while in other regions the percentage ranges from 18 to 20 percent.
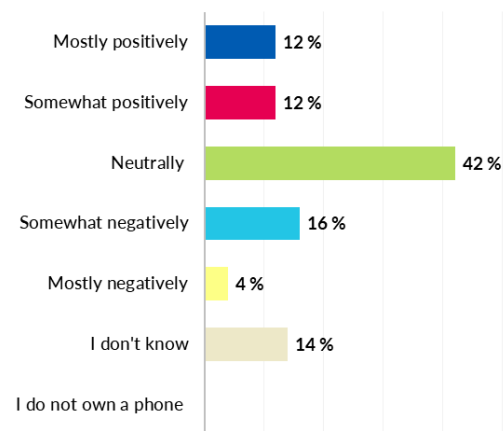
Table 3. How do you think your own phone use affects your well-being? (N=5990)

When respondents are asked to assess how they think their peers' phone use affects their well-being, the results differ from assessments related to their own well-being. As many as half of the respondents believe that phone use has at least some negative effect on the well-being of others of their peers. Eleven percent of respondents acknowledge positive effects while 25

12

percent consider the effects to be neutral.

As they age, young people tend to perceive more negative effects not only on themselves but also on their peers. As many as 70 percent of 18-year-olds assess the well-being effects of their peers' phone use as negative, while among 13-year-olds 43 percent share this view.

Among young people in Northern Finland, 56 percent assess the well-being effects of their peers' phone use as negative, this figure is 53 percent in Southern Finland, 48 percent in Western Finland, and 46 percent in Eastern Finland.

Respondents were able to describe in their own words which phone-related activities affect their well-being positively or negatively. A total of 1,578 young people responded to this question. The open-ended responses indicate that the significance of the phone for young people extends far beyond that of a mere technical device – it is a point of contact with the world, a learning environment, and a source of emotional support. On the other hand, it also reduces concentration and physical activity.

Young people's open-ended responses confirm the results of the scale questions: they recognize that phone use has both positive and negative effects on well-being. Positive effects especially highlight social dimensions – young people stay in touch with friends, share experiences, and receive peer support. In addition, the phone is an important means of communication for those who, for example, have a parent or other close relative living far away.

Young people view the phone as a limitless learning environment where one can study languages, follow the news, and search for information on personal interests. Entertainment activities such as listening to music, gaming, and watching videos help them relax and regulate their mood. For many, phone use relieves anxiety and low mood, for example through music. In addition, the phone brings a sense of security – going outside without it can feel frightening.

"Helps me focus when I can play something that doesn't require too much concentration, also listening to music helps me focus and with anxiety."

"I'm a fan of a certain band, and through social media I get information about gigs and new music, which positively affects my well-being."

"In the evenings I relax by watching videos and messaging with friends."

"I've learned English from games and my vocabulary has grown tremendously by listening to audiobooks."

The most prominent negative effects mentioned are time management issues and psychological challenges, which are also perceived to be connected. Many respondents struggle with the fact that spending excessive time on the phone takes time away from other important activities and find it hard to stop using the phone. Excessive phone use appears

to affect young people's study time and activity levels, manifesting as neglecting homework and decreasing participation in other hobbies.

The hours spent on social media and short video platforms are particularly problematic, which, according to young people's own experiences, reduce concentration and lead to passivity. TikTok is most often mentioned as the social media platform that is addictive and whose content causes bad feelings. Young people also consider the health effects worrisome. Long periods of phone use disrupt sleep, cause headaches, and decrease physical activity.

"Time I could spend on homework, preparing for exams or exercising often goes to using the phone."

"I don't go to sleep when I should. My head often hurts."

"I feel powerless and lazy after using the phone a lot."

"When I use social media and the phone way too much, it negatively affects my mood because social media is such a bad place especially since I got to know it so young. It lowers my mood and ruins my brain."

ADULTS' NEGATIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD YOUNG PEOPLE'S PHONE USE

The majority of all respondents (43%) feel that their own parents or other close adults are primarily neutral regarding young people's phone use (see Table 4). Of the respondents, 31 percent feel that phone use is viewed at least somewhat negatively. However, according to the young people's assessment, only a few parents hold a strongly negative attitude toward phone use. Eighteen percent of young people estimate that their parents have a predominantly positive attitude toward phone use.

Girls and non-binary individuals perceive their parents' attitudes to be somewhat more negative than those of boys: 34 percent of girls and non-binary individuals feel their parents' attitude is somewhat or very negative, while the corresponding percentage for boys is 26. Similarly, 16 percent of girls and non-binary individuals and 20 percent of boys believe their parents' attitude is positive.

Among 18-year-olds, 57 percent estimate that their parents are neutral toward phone use. When excluding 18-year-olds from the data, age correlates with a more negative attitude from parents. Among 13-year-olds, 28 percent feel that their parents have a negative attitude toward phone use, and the percentage increases with age,

reaching 45 percent among 17-year-olds.

Mostly positively	8 %
Somewhat positively	10 %
Neutrally	43 %
Somewhat negatively	27 %
Mostly negatively	4 %
I don't know	8 %
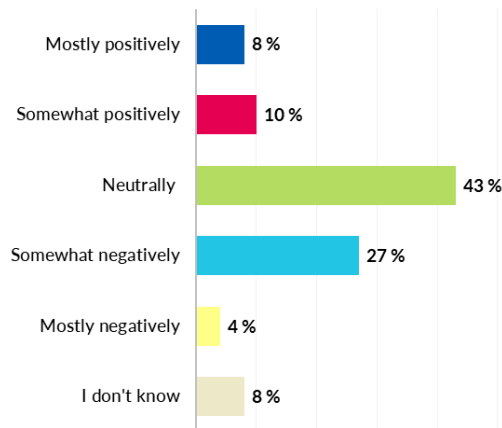
Table 4. How do you think adults close to you, such as your parents, view your phone use? (N=5990)

Young people were also asked how they believe adults in general view young people's phone use. Young people's experience of the attitudes of adults, excluding their close ones, is significantly more negative: as many as 58 percent feel that adults have at least a somewhat negative attitude, with 14 percent describing it as very negative. Twenty-five percent perceive the attitude as neutral, while 8. The perception of adults' negative attitude becomes stronger as the age of the young people increases.

Girls perceive adults' general attitude as somewhat more negative than those of other genders: 64 percent of girls, 58 percent of non-binary individuals, and 52 percent of boys experience generally negative attitudes from adults. Similarly, 3 percent of non-binary individuals, 6 percent of girls, and 10 percent of boys

believe that the general attitude of adults toward young people's phone use is positive.

GENDER AFFECTS THE CHOICE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The social media platforms favored by young people have varied somewhat in recent years, but familiar and established platforms still retain a strong position.

Table 5 compares the results of MLL's 2021 survey with those of the current survey, to illustrate changes in platform usage. It should be noted that the question format in the previous survey was slightly different, and the percentage results are not fully comparable. In 2021, the question was which services young people use, while in December 2024 the question asked was which services are currently important to them.

However, it can be interpreted that most significant changes relate to Instagram and YouTube usage: the rankings of both have declined. In contrast, TikTok's ranking has increased.

Legend: ■ 2025 ■ 2021

Platform	2025	2021
Snapchat	80 %	84 %
Whatsapp	74 %	72 %
TikTok	71 %	69 %
YouTube	65 %	78 %
Instagram	58 %	78 %

Table 5. The most important (2025, n=5990) and most used (2021, n=1123) social media platforms among youth.

Other social media platforms considered important by young people include Pinterest (28%), Discord (24%), and Steam (17%). Young people use a variety of different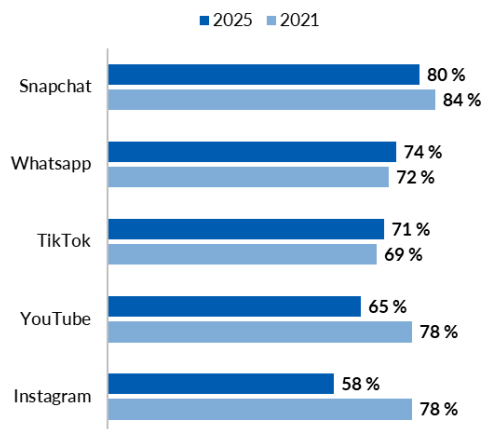 platforms alongside well-known social media giants, as the survey received a total of 527 responses to the "Other" option. Among games, the block puzzle game *Blockblast*, comic-style action game *Brawl Stars*, shooting and survival-based *Fortnite*, and block-building game world *Roblox* were frequently mentioned in this category. The streaming service *Netflix* and music platform *Spotify* were also favorites for many, as was the game streaming platform *Twitch*. The AI-based application *Character.ai* is an important app for about 15 young people.

In a separate question, young people were asked about their favorite game, and this question received 4,115 responses. There was a wide spread among games, with approximately 400 different games mentioned. *Fortnite* emerges as the favorite with nearly 300 mentions. *Block Blast* received more than 200 mentions as well. *Hay Day*, *Brawl Stars*, and *Roblox* each received around 100 mentions. *Minecraft* had slightly fewer mentions than those mentioned above.

Shooting games like *Counter-Strike 2*, *Call of Duty*, *Apex Legends*, and *PUBG* were mentioned several dozen times. Among racing games, *BeamNG.drive*, *Forza Horizon*, and *Assetto* were the most frequently mentioned. These games also received at least 10 mentions: *GTA V/GTA Online*, *Valorant*, *Among Us*, *FIFA*, *Rocket League*, *Clash Royale*, *Overwatch*, and *League of Legends*.

There are significant gender differences in the most important applications. Among girls, the top five applications are clearly defined: *Snapchat* (86%), *TikTok* (77%), *WhatsApp* (73%), *Instagram* (68%), *YouTube* (53%). In addition, *Pinterest* ranks just outside the top five for girls (47%).

Among boys, mentions of the most important app are spread across more platforms, although the five most popular social media platforms seem relatively similar to those of girls. The most important apps for boys are *YouTube* (78%), *WhatsApp* (76%), *Snapchat* (74%), *TikTok* (65%), *Instagram* (48%). *Discord* also ranks close to the top for boys (41%).

The most important apps for non-binary individuals are *WhatsApp* (74%), *YouTube* (69%), *TikTok* (69%), *Snapchat* (67%), and *Pinterest* (44%). For non-binary

respondents, *Instagram* (41%) does not quite make it into the top five.

The biggest gender differences in the most important applications:

Girls ■ Boys ■ Non-binary ■

	Girls	Boys	Non-binary
Pinterest	47 %	5 %	44 %
Discord	8 %	41 %	38 %
Steam	3 %	33 %	27 %
YouTube	53 %	78 %	69 %
Instagram	68 %	48 %	41 %
Snapchat	86 %	74 %	67 %
Reddit	7 %	11 %	19 %
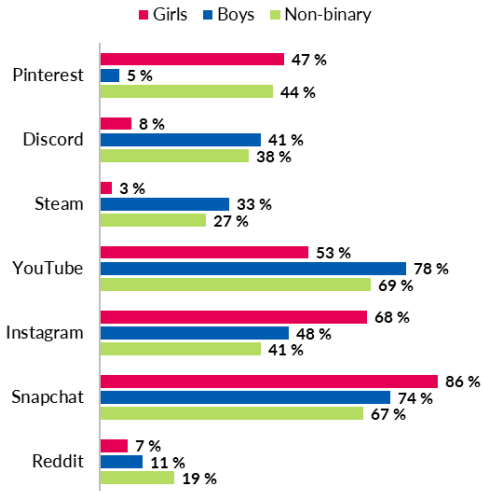
Age also affects the perceived importance of social media platforms, although not as much as gender. The biggest age-related difference is with Instagram, which is important to 67 percent of 18-year-olds, while among 13-year-olds it is important to only 51 percent.

In regional comparisons, the biggest difference also pertains to Instagram usage. In Eastern Finland, it is important to 64 percent, whereas in Southern Finland it is important to 55 percent of respondents. Other regions fall between these figures.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND CYBERBULLYING

"For example, there are a lot of hate comments in TikTok comment sections. They are often racist or related to appearance. Bullying, image sharing, and exclusion can also happen in a group chat among one's own group of friends."

"I don't really think some pathetic name-calling counts as real bullying. If someone takes it personally, that's kind of strange. Of course, there are a lot of different kinds of people, and sure, bullying isn't okay, but nobody is actually being bullied there. Usually someone just doesn't like the topic of a video or picture and throws out some lame comment, like 'what if you go build yourself a sawed-off shotgun and point it straight at your skull' — but that's more of a meme than actual bullying. Or maybe I'm just a little different."

4.1 Prevalence of Cyberbullying

Young people were asked how often they had noticed four different forms of bullying online (see Table 6). For all the bullying forms asked about, 'Never' was the most common response among the youngest respondents and the least common among the oldest. Boys reported seeing all forms of bullying less frequently than girls and non-binary respondents.

For all four types of bullying inquired about, the proportion of respondents who had noticed them has increased since 2021 (see Table 6). The increase is particularly significant in the case of mean comments.
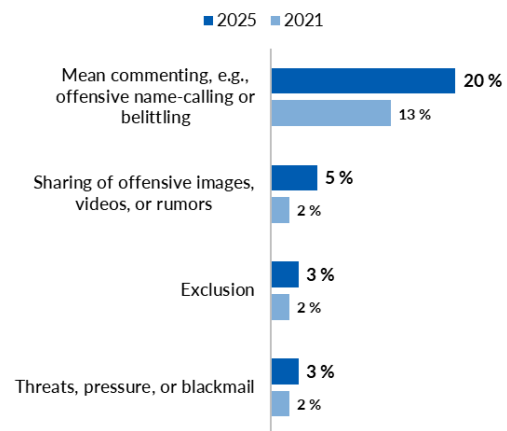
Table 6. How often have you noticed the following forms of bullying targeting another young person online?

Percentage of respondents who notice them *daily*, in the 2024 (n=5990) and 2021 (n=1123) surveys.

FORMS OF BULLYING OBSERVED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

Nearly 80 percent of respondents have at least occasionally seen offensive name-calling and belittling targeting another young person, and 20 percent see it daily. As age increases, the frequency of daily witnessing mean comments rises steadily: whereas 15 percent of 13-year-olds have seen mean

commenting daily, as many as 32 percent of 18-year-olds report seeing this type of bullying daily.

61 percent of respondents have witnessed the spreading of offensive images, videos, or rumors at least occasionally. Five percent have seen such content daily. Exclusion of another young person has been observed at least occasionally by 56 percent, with 3 percent witnessing it daily. Among non-binary respondents, as many as 8 percent have seen exclusion daily. Threats, coercion, or blackmailing of another young person have been witnessed at least occasionally by 44 percent, and 3 percent daily.

One in four respondents has seen videos or images online of serious or violent bullying situations. The share of those who have seen this type of material increases linearly with age: among 13-year-olds only 18 percent have seen such content, whereas among 18-year-olds the figure is as high as 43 percent.

A total of 752 respondents provided more detailed descriptions of the violent situations they had seen recorded on video. The open responses reveal a stark picture of the online environments where some young people spend their time. The responses emphasized hitting, beating, kicking, and group attacks on a single victim. Videos were seen on platforms such as Snapchat, Reddit, TikTok, and Telegram. Several responses described racist acts. Respondents also reported that viewing these videos was distressing for them. It appears that bullying meets the criteria of pure

violence, where the digital and physical dimensions blend.

"Usually a big group bullies one victim. The victim is kicked or hit, and in the background others laugh and record."

"There was a video recently that was being sent around everywhere and everyone had it, where some girls started fighting seriously and there was all kinds of drama between them."

"I remember about two years ago, I was shown a video where a boy about my age was first bullied and verbally abused, and then he was beaten. That video was very traumatic for me to watch."

"I have seen videos where people are beaten, killed, someone commits suicide, nude photos of others are spread, videos secretly recorded during sex, and hidden photos of people."

"A video where the victim is assaulted but an AI filter has been added so the video won't be removed and the platform won't detect the violence."

Artificial intelligence can be used for bullying, for example by creating deepfake videos or manipulating images. Thirteen percent of respondents have encountered this type of AI-generated bullying content. The number of uncertain respondents is relatively high; as many as 28 percent were unable to answer this question. Boys are somewhat more likely than respondents of other genders to respond "no," as are the youngest age groups in the survey, i.e., 13–14-year-olds.

A total of 341 respondents provided more detailed descriptions of the types of AI-generated bullying content they had seen. A common example is image manipulation in which the bullied person's face is inserted into a nude image or video. Responses also described videos where the bullied person is made to say or sing something offensive. AI bots that send offensive messages were also reported. Respondents also reported mocking videos targeted at public figures — in fact, several said they had seen AI bullying aimed at celebrities rather their peers.

"Fake nude pictures made with AI."

"For example, made someone sing something offensive about others, like racist songs."

"Political stuff related to celebrities, like a photo of a celebrity made to look like they support Trump when they don't."

Young people were also asked to describe in their own words what bullying among young people typically looks like on social media, in games, or online. Around 1,800 young people answered this question. The responses illustrate that bullying is not random but rather systematic and multidimensional behavior that affects young people's well-being in various ways.

The open responses reinforce prior findings that the most common form of cyberbullying is verbal abuse and name-calling. According to the responses, bullying typically targets a young person's appearance, gaming skills,

sexuality, or ethnic background. Some responses highlight boys' dismissive attitudes towards girls, manifesting in mean messages and insults.

"For example, especially in games, insecure boys insult girls and women as bad even if they are much better. They may also use offensive terms or make hurtful jokes."

"Insults, jokes, or threats about appearance, way of speaking, video content, etc. Common insults/jokes include things like using vomiting emojis, calling someone fat or flat-chested in different ways."

"Criticism of gaming skills, appearance, or the quality/content of a video. In videos with several people/youngsters, one person is singled out and insulted compared to others in the video."

"All boys my age are misogynistic and make jokes like 'a woman belongs in the kitchen' and so on."

A significant aspect of bullying is anonymity and the ability to hurt others under the guise of humor. Young people find it particularly distressing when bullying includes encouragement of suicide.

*"Bullying can be verbal abuse, like this: F*** off, nobody wants you, you fat f***, your parent doesn't love you, go kill yourself you f***ing slur."*

One way to bypass anti-bullying filters on social media platforms is to use special characters. Filtering systems are programmed to detect certain words and expressions, but by using various symbols, users can communicate in a

way that the systems do not recognize as bullying. As platforms develop new blocking mechanisms and rules, young people may adapt their behavior to find ways to bypass them.

"It's most common on TikTok these days — every day you see messages with really offensive things and weird characters added at the end so TikTok won't remove them."

TikTok Seems to be the Most Toxic Platform

Young people were asked to name social media platforms or games where bullying occurs particularly frequently. A total of 3,430 young people responded to this question.

TikTok received by far the most responses and was mentioned by approximately one third of respondents. According to young people, bullying on TikTok primarily occurs in the comment sections, where they encounter insults, appearance-related comments, and negative feedback. In MLL's 2023 media survey as well, TikTok received the most mentions as a place for bullying and harassment. Notably, the platforms where bullying is observed are the same ones where young people spend the most time and identify as most important.

"The hate comments on TikTok are just awful, especially on videos made by young people."

"On TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube bullying happens in the comment sections. While some of it may be jokes, there are

many who genuinely just want to hurt others."

"TikTok and Instagram. The comment sections are full of the N-word and really defamatory comments. That's what happens when you let young people communicate without faces."

The second most common platform for bullying is Snapchat, mentioned approximately 400 times in young people's open responses. On this platform, bullying is often covert: typical forms include anonymous messages, image sharing, and indirect bullying via peer pressure. Instagram also plays a notable role, especially in the comment sections of Reels videos. Features such as the sticker tool (familiar from both Snapchat and Instagram) were mentioned multiple times: a sticker is made from the bullied person's face, which is then used like an emoji and sent around for others to laugh at.

"Bullying on Snapchat is dangerous because there's no evidence left behind."

"On TikTok, for example, it's often about appearance and there are also racist comments, but I know that on Snap, for example, mean pictures and stickers about others are spread around — and the same happens on Discord, Reddit, etc."

Alongside social media, bullying is also encountered in popular online games. In particular, Fortnite, Counter-Strike 2, and Roblox are mentioned by young people as significant spaces for bullying. According to them, bullying especially occurs in voice chats and text chats. Respondents highlight misogyny, yelling

into microphones, insults, blame, and rampant racism in international game environments. Bullying appears to be most common in competitive games. The responses also indicate that bullying is normalized in gaming culture to the point where it becomes expected.

"Overwatch 2 is quite toxic. After a loss, teammates may send nasty messages."

"Call of Duty voice chat can be pretty brutal sometimes."

"In every 18+ game it's totally normal, I'm used to it."

"CS2 but it's just humor, humor — everyone on the team understands."

"Bullying on social media feels much more real because it targets someone you know or think you know. In games, bullying/name-calling is normal and kind of part of it, and it shouldn't be taken seriously."

Personal Experiences of Those Who Have Been Bullied

"In connection with school bullying, pictures were taken of me and shared in the bully group just for laughs. There was also a voice message being spread that contained false information about me. What felt the worst was that the school staff never really intervened. I felt very wronged and also angry at everyone involved."

"I know them. I never did anything to them, but they added me to a group, and I didn't know most of the members. They started

to take turns insulting, threatening, and mocking me. I have no idea what to do. It happened about six months ago, but I still think about it every single day."

Thirty-six percent of respondents report being bullied online at least once. Of all respondents, 3 percent (n=151) experience repeated or ongoing online bullying. Among non-binary respondents, 7 percent (n=6), boys 3 percent (n=75), and girls 2 percent (n=70) report experiencing repeated or ongoing bullying online.

The frequency of being bullied was also asked separately regarding a few specific types of cyberbullying. The most common experience was mean commenting: 44 percent of all respondents have been the target of insulting name-calling, mockery, or belittling at least once. Seven percent of young people have faced mean commenting at least once a week. In the 2021 survey as well, mean comments were the most common form of bullying: 39 percent of respondents had experienced them at that time.

Exclusion in online groups or platforms has been experienced by 38 percent of youth. Five percent have been excluded at least once a week. This form of bullying has become more common since the 2021 report, when the rate was 23 percent.

24 percent of young people have been targeted by the spreading of offensive videos, images, or rumors at least once. Two percent have experienced this type of bullying at least once a week. This form has also slightly increased since

2021, when 21 percent of respondents reported experiencing offensive material about themselves being shared.

Threats, coercion, or blackmailing have been experienced by 20 percent of young people. Two and a half percent have faced this type of bullying at least once a week. In the 2021 survey, 16 percent of youth reported experiencing threats, coercion, or blackmailing at least once.

Non-binary youth stand out as a distinct group: they have experienced all forms of bullying more often than girls and boys (see Table 9). Girls have experienced exclusion more frequently than boys, while boys have faced mean commenting more often than girls.

Form	Daily / Nearly Daily	1–3 times /Week	1–3 times /Month	Less Than Monthly	Never
Mean commenting (e.g. insults, mockery, belittling)	Girls 2% Boys 4% Others 8%	Girls 3% Boys 4% Others 7%	Girls 8% Boys 8% Others 16%	Girls 30% Boys 29% Others 36%	Girls 58% Boys 54% Others 34%
Offensive images, videos, or rumors	Girls 1% Boys 1% Others 3%	Girls 2% Boys 2% Others 1%	Girls 5% Boys 3% Others 9%	Girls 20% Boys 18% Others 20%	Girls 73% Boys 77% Others 67%
Exclusion from groups/chats	Girls 3% Boys 1% Others 9%	Girls 4% Boys 2% Others 3%	Girls 10% Boys 5% Others 10%	Girls 29% Boys 22% Others 31%	Girls 55% Boys 70% Others 47%
Threats, pressure, blackmail	Girls 1% Boys 1% Others 5%	Girls 1% Boys 1% Others 3%	Girls 4% Boys 3% Others 8%	Girls 16% Boys 13% Others 9%	Girls 78% Boys 81% Others 75%

Table 9. How often have the following forms of bullying targeted you personally? (N=5990)

Respondents were asked about the types of bullying acts they had experienced in the past year. The most common forms experienced were indirect bullying behaviors: indirect mean behavior and suggestive comments, as well as intentionally

ignoring messages — both reported by 13 percent of all respondents (see Table 8). The third most common form was

bullying disguised as a joke or humor, which also qualifies as indirect bullying.

Indirect mean behavior or suggestive comments — 13 %
Intentionally ignoring messages — 13 %
Bullying disguised as a joke or humor — 11 %
Sharing offensive or embarrassing images/videos without your permission — 9 %
Being added to a group or channel against your will — 9 %
Tagging your profile for negative purposes — 5 %
Being included in unpleasant or questionable social media trends — 3 %
Other — 3 %
None of these — 53 %
I don't know — 23 %

Table 8. In the past year, have you experienced any of the following bullying acts online? (N=5990) (*Multiple selections allowed*)

There are some gender differences in the types of bullying experienced in the past year. Non-binary youth have experienced all types of bullying significantly more often than girls and boys. Among non-binary respondents, 19 percent experienced bullying disguised as humor and 17 percent indirect mean behavior or suggestive comments.

Girls were more frequently subjected to bullying than boys. For girls, the most frequently mentioned forms were intentionally ignoring messages (18%) and indirect mean behavior or suggestive comments (16%). For boys,

indirect mean behavior (10%) and bullying disguised as humor (9%) were most commonly experienced.

When analyzed by age group, sharing offensive and embarrassing pictures without permission appears to be more common among younger respondents. Notably, 26 percent of 13-year-olds do not know whether they have experienced online bullying in the past year, whereas among 18-year-olds, only 9 percent were unsure.

Bullying Leaves Long-Lasting Traces

Respondents were asked about the effects of bullying through an open-ended question. 1,500 young people responded to this question.

Approximately one-fourth of respondents feel that bullying had little to no effect on them. The responses also reflect various coping strategies – indifference, distancing, and even compassion toward the bullies.

"Nothing, because it's kind of my own fault. You can just put the phone away and block the 'bully' like I've done. That's the easiest and you shouldn't victimize yourself over small things."

"I don't feel bullying has affected me at all, I'm used to it. When you beat someone in a game, of course you get some hate speech from the opponent."

"Nothing special. Mostly I just feel sorry for the bullies – they must be having a hard time too."

Other responses describe impacts on mental health, self-esteem, and social life. Reported effects include suicidal thoughts, anxiety, insecurity, feelings of loneliness, self-harm, and appearance-related pressures. Young people identify both immediate and long-term effects.

"My self-image has turned negative. It took quite a while to realize that it wasn't my fault and there was nothing wrong with me."

"I've become depressed and anxious about it, and it left a permanent mark because the cyberbullies are people I know and see almost weekly in public places."

"Social situations give me anxiety, and I no longer dare to speak freely about things."

Some young people note that bullying also affects those who witness it. Others acknowledge the broader communal effects of bullying – how it shapes the culture and atmosphere of all social media.

"I'm 100% sure that everyone who uses TikTok daily and reads comment sections sees hundreds of hate comments a day — that definitely triggers some kind of emotional response in everyone."

The Most Common Response of a Bullied Youth Is to Do Nothing

In situations where a young person themselves had been bullied, the most common response was to let it go, indicating that the youth took no action (see Table 10). Blocking or banning the bully was almost as common. Only 9 percent reported bullying to a trusted adult – either a parent or a professional. In the "Something else" category, young people mostly mentioned insulting back or leaving the platform. It is noteworthy that 4 percent of respondents did not know what they should have done.

Non-binary individuals and girls employed all listed coping strategies more frequently than boys. Boys, on the other hand, more frequently provided open responses where they described

insulting back and leaving the service on their own initiative.

In the 2021 survey, the question phrasing and response options were slightly different, so the percentages are not directly comparable. Nevertheless, the most common actions at that time were blocking the bully, telling a friend, and asking the bully to stop. Thus, doing nothing was not among the top strategies, as is in this current survey.

Response	Percentage
I let it go / did nothing	19 %
I blocked or banned the bully on the platform	15 %
I told a friend about it	11 %
I asked the bully to stop	9 %
I reported the bullying to the platform moderators	6 %
I told my parents	6 %
I contacted the police	2 %
I told another trusted adult (e.g., teacher, youth worker, school nurse)	3 %
I reported the bullying to a support service (e.g., MLL's Children and Youth Phone or Chat)	1 %
I tagged a trusted adult or authority in the bullying content	1 %
I didn't know what to do	4 %
Something else, what?	5 %
I haven't experienced bullying online	59 %

Table 10. Recall what you did in a situation where you experienced bullying online. (Multiple selections allowed.) (N=5990)

YOUTH WHO ARE CONTINUOUSLY BULLIED

From the data, a group of 160 young people was identified who are continuously or repeatedly bullied. Their situation was examined in more detail through selected questions.

5.1 Continuously Bullied Are Most Often Boys

Boys are slightly overrepresented among those continuously bullied. Among the continuously bullied, 47% are boys, 44% girls, and 4% non-binary.

Continuously bullied youth have experienced all forms of cyberbullying asked about in the past year more frequently than the overall respondent group. The most common experiences

include indirect meanness or suggestive comments (51%), bullying disguised as a joke or humor (47%), and intentional ignoring of messages (39%).

Continuous bullying leads to a variety of problems for many of these young people. In open responses, they mention eating disorder behaviors, distorted body image, difficulty forming safe attachments, nightmares, increased anxiety, depressive symptoms, and loneliness. However, some youth also express the perspective that bullying is simply part of being online and attempt to dismiss it.

"For example, being called fat and ugly stuck with me. I started dieting and wearing more makeup. Now I weigh under 40 kg at age 14. I know I'm underweight, but the bullies' words keep playing in my mind. So even though people try to help me, I can't stop dieting or calling myself names."

"I've started to believe some of the things the bullies say. That's why I don't use social media the same way anymore."

"You learn to filter it — like, 'Oh, more suicide commands, just because I share my weird life.'"

"It hasn't bothered me much because in the end, it's just social media, and you can block people."

5.2 Continuously Bullied and Intervention in Bullying

Continuously bullied youth employ more intervention strategies than other respondents. For example, 9% have contacted the police, while the rate among all respondents is only 1%. The most used intervention strategies are the same as for others. However, it's notable that 44% of continuously bullied youth take no action, compared to 18% of all respondents. Among the bullied, 16% didn't know what to do, compared to 4% among all youth. Those who chose "something else" often mentioned insulting back as their response.

Open responses indicate a sense of cynicism regarding their situation. Some youth have come to accept that hostile language is a normal part of online environments, feeling there is nothing they can do. This attitude may explain why many continuously bullied young *people choose not to act.*

"No matter what platform you're on, you'll either see bullying or experience it yourself. You can't do much about it. I just say: don't be sensitive or take it personally."

"Nowadays, if you go into a chat, you just have to expect that someone's having a bad day."

Continuously bullied youth observe others being bullied much more frequently than those with no bullying experience. It appears that bullied youth end up in channels and groups where bullying is more normalized. They also report seeing far more AI-generated bullying content and violent videos than others.

"I've seen dozens of videos where people are beaten, forced to lick shoe soles, etc.

Unfortunately, that's pretty everyday stuff nowadays."

"At my old school, friends of mine were pulled by the hair, kicked, hit, and beaten. Then everyone laughed at them, and a video was filmed and spread online."

Continuously bullied youth are more likely to support others who are bullied and employ various strategies to help reduce bullying. For example, 31% have talked with a bullied friend, compared to 14% among all respondents. Similarly, 29% of the continuously bullied have given practical advice for dealing with bullying (compared to 15% overall).

"Because I've experienced bullying myself, I understand what it feels like. I try my best to intervene and tell the bully it's not okay and tell the bullied person to speak to a trusted adult."

"I don't really care when it happens to me — haters gonna hate. But when I see it happen to others, it's awful. How can people say such horrible things?"

Continuously bullied youth are more likely to report that the bullies are people they know. 22% say the bullies are familiar from school or hobbies, and 10% say they know them from the internet. Among all respondents, the figures are 9% and 4%. Open responses reveal how school bullying and cyberbullying are often linked.

"On the school bathroom wall, someone wrote: 'my name go kill yourself you f***ing whor*.' A picture of it was shared in the teachers' WhatsApp group, so everyone

knew. Only one assistant ever asked me about it — and still checks in sometimes."

"It doesn't feel safe walking outside, and I sometimes wonder if the things the bullies said about me are true."

"This fall, the class made a Snapchat group that included everyone — except me. I felt very excluded and insufficient."

Regarding effective anti-bullying strategies, continuously bullied youth largely agree with others. 44% believe quick intervention is effective, compared to 57% of others — suggesting that they may have experienced situations where quick action did not help. There is also a small difference in how effective they find telling a trusted adult: 14% of bullied youth see it as helpful, versus 19% of others. There are no major differences in how they view the ability of decision-makers and adults to impact online bullying.

A significant finding is that continuously bullied youth are more likely to be bullies themselves: 29% admit to bullying others online, compared to only 8% of the overall respondent group.

Continuously Bullied Youth Spend More Time on Their Phones Than Others

Compared to other respondents, continuously bullied youth spend more time on their phones. Among continuously bullied youth, 48 percent

(77 young people) spend more than 4 hours daily on their phone or on social media, compared to 41 percent of all respondents. 18 percent of continuously bullied youth use their phone for more than 7 hours a day, compared to 10 percent among all respondents. These bullied youth primarily use the same social media services as other young people. However, Discord, Telegram, and Reddit are somewhat more important to them than to others.

Time spent on gaming is also greater among continuously bullied youth compared to other respondents. Within the bullied group, there is a subgroup of gamer youth who do not take bullying very seriously, or dismiss it as a normal part of gaming culture.

"When people bully in games, it's rarely actual bullying — usually it's just chill, chaotic fun."

Somewhat surprisingly, continuously bullied youth do not recognize more well-being impacts from phone use than their peers. For instance, 22 percent of bullied youth feel that phone use has negative effects, compared to 20 percent of all respondents.

In open-ended responses, many continuously bullied young people describe that keeping in touch with friends enhances their well-being, while bullying deteriorates it. In a few responses, religion and neuropsychiatric symptoms are mentioned, suggesting that these youth may belong to especially vulnerable groups due to their background.

THE INSIGNIFICANT CONSEQUENCES OF CYBERBULLYING FOR THE BULLY

"Well, there weren't really any consequences. Just some conversations and a lot of regret."

Respondents believe that, for the most part, the people who bully online are young people the victims don't know in real life (see Table 11). This finding reinforces the broader observation from the survey that for many young people, cyberbullying consists of isolated and random experiences.
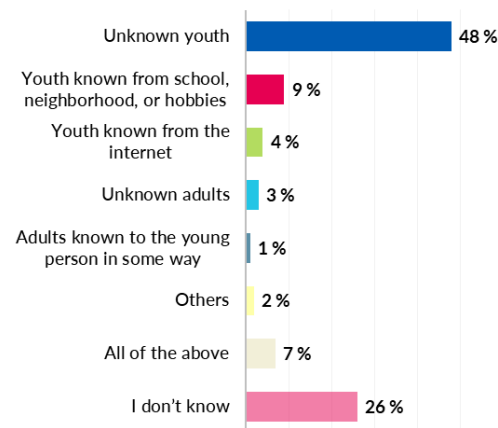

Table 11. If you think about the bullying young people your age face online, who do you think the bullies usually are? (N=5990)

Respondents who selected 'Others' in the options provided additional insights in the text fields. For example, they noted that in different online

environments, bullies might be random strangers in some contexts and acquaintances in others.

"In games it's strangers, but on social media it's some friends you've hurt badly."

Eight percent of youth report having bullied someone online themselves. Among non-binary youth, 16% report bullying, boys 11%, and girls 4%. Bullies are most frequently identified among 16-year-olds. Very interestingly, a significant portion (17%) of youth are unsure whether they have bullied others.

A large number of bullies feel that they haven't faced any consequences for their actions. 302 respondents who had bullied others answered a question about the consequences they personally experienced. Some report feeling bad afterward, while others say they even experienced pleasure from bullying. A few respondents noted that bullying back made the bullying they experienced stop.

"I wasn't bullied anymore when I bullied back."

There were a few mentions of warnings or bans from platform moderators. A handful of respondents said they ended up discussing the matter with adults and received punishments like being grounded. This survey suggests that bullies face very few consequences online – although many respondents experienced guilt and did not feel good about their actions.

"Nothing bad, because no one cares."

"There aren't many consequences, and it's assumed to be funny."

"I laughed a lot and got a couple bans."

"The people I bullied started threatening me with physical violence."

"I was blocked from the service and had to talk to my teacher and principal."

"My conscience hit me once the emotions settled down."

"The person I bullied blocked me. And I felt horrible because my friends pressured me into bullying."

WHY DOES CYBERBULLYING HAPPEN?

"Being anonymous brings a sense of safety, and people can be thoughtless and cruel for their own entertainment. For example, constantly seeing certain opinions can change your own views, so if you end up on the wrong side of the internet, you can get stuck there — and basic empathy and understanding that others are people too begins to fade."

Cyberbullies were asked in an open-ended question why they bully others online. 341 young people responded. Those who have bullied online reported doing it mainly for fun or entertainment, or to fight boredom. More than half of the comments concerned gaming environments, where respondents said they bullied because a teammate failed or because they themselves failed due to

someone else's mistake. Some stated they began bullying because they were bullied first. Discriminatory language is particularly noticeable in gaming contexts — and it is also present in responses to this survey.

"Because the person was disabled, gay, trans, dark-skinned, or just plain stupid, dumb, etc."

"Sometimes in games when a brat starts yelling, it pisses me off, so I shut him down like this."

"It's part of the culture in team shooter games."

"Because they insulted me and talked behind my back, so I wanted revenge."

"I didn't understand when I was younger that a joke might not be just a joke to someone else."

In their open responses, bullies primarily mentioned insulting others and making mean comments. Other types of bullying were rarely described in detail.

The survey also included an open-ended question about why young people think cyberbullying happens. 2,341 young people answered. The responses ranged from completely inappropriate to quite analytical views of the causes of cyberbullying.

Anonymity clearly emerges as the most central enabler of bullying in young people's responses. Acting behind a nickname means there are often no real consequences, according to the youth. Respondents acknowledge that the digital environment enables immediate and thoughtless reactions. The internet offers a protective mask, allowing individuals — even when using their real names — to say things they would never express face-to-face.

"No one knows who you are, and you can do whatever you want — no one will find you."

"Because young people think that when you're anonymous, you can comment and say anything without consequences."

"It's easy and anonymous, and the bully might not even realize they're bullying — they think they're just sharing their opinion without a filter."

"You can't really see the impact on the person if you're bullying someone you don't know."

"Things don't feel real there, so it's easy to say stuff."

Another significant reason for cyberbullying, as identified by youth, is the bully's own distress. Many recognize that bullying is often a symptom of internal pain. The idea that "bullies are unloading their own problems" appears in numerous answers. Some mention that the bully has been a victim themselves and is either seeking revenge or passing on their own pain. A few responses also include criticism of society.

"If someone isn't doing well at home, they might take their anger out on someone else."

"People let out their bad moods, for example when they lose in a game."

"Because some think it's funny — or they have personal problems they're trying to cover up by bullying others for their weaknesses."

"People feel bad because Finland is such a functional 'welfare state.'"

Some young people believe that certain people are simply unempathetic by nature — they want to bully or be jerks to others. Respondents also identify how the bully's own insecurity, jealousy, or narrow-mindedness can manifest as aggression online. Many responses repeat the idea that bullies act out because they're bored and have nothing better to do.

"People just enjoy provoking others. What I hate the most is when people judge appearances — and it usually comes from boys, but also girls. Maybe they're just jealous."

"Because some people are really jerks and find it funny to make others feel bad."

"Because some people are jealous or don't accept that others are different."

"It also happens because on social media you see people with completely different lives — people you wouldn't normally hang out with. It's easy to bully them because you can't relate to how they live."

"People argue much more now because they think it's fun. Young people like it when someone gets bullied. I think youth are more bored now, so arguing is somehow more entertaining."

Some young people reflect on the definition of bullying, emphasizing how

subjective it can be. Many mention that a bully may perceive their actions as joking, while the victim experiences it as bullying.

"Everyone has their own opinion about what it is. If you tell someone in a game they're bad, is that bullying? Does bullying depend on how the other person feels, or on the action itself? And how do you know where the line is between joking and bullying?"

"Someone might feel bullied if they get killed repeatedly in a game — even though that's the point of the game."

"People are insecure, prejudiced, and think it's funny — they don't realize the effect it has on others."

Some answers reveal peer pressure or a desire to be accepted through bullying.

"Because you want to be accepted, or you're bored, or something like that."

"To act tough in front of friends."

MEASURES TO INTERVENE IN CYBERBULLYING

In situations where young people witness bullying targeting others, the most common response was to offer advice on what to do (see Table 7). The next most common action was talking to the bullied person or sending them encouraging messages. Notably, only 9 percent of respondents chose to do

nothing, compared to 21 percent in the 2021 survey. Those who selected "I did something else" gave responses such as:

"I didn't do anything because I was afraid I'd be bullied too."

"Usually if a friend is being bullied, we start throwing the same crap back with the friend."

"I let it go because I found out about it later than others and someone else had already reported it to an adult."

By gender, non-binary individuals and girls intervened in bullying significantly more often than boys. Among intervention methods, the following were more prevalent among older

respondents: sending encouraging messages, spending time with the bullied person, giving advice, reporting to platform moderators, defending the bullied person, and blocking the bully.

In the 2021 survey, the question was phrased differently and had fewer answer options. Back then, the most common action was to support or defend the bullied person.

In 2021, 21% of youth reported talking to a trusted adult about bullying. Now, only 4% report doing so.

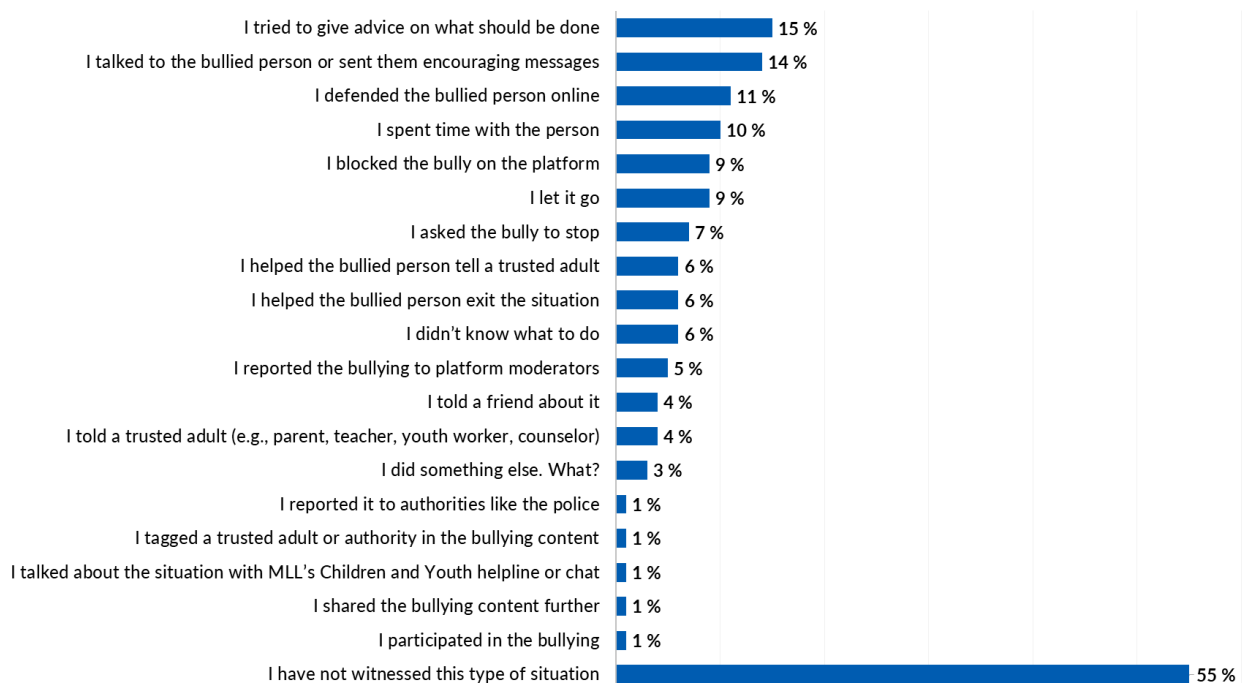|	
I tried to give advice on what should be done	15 %
I talked to the bullied person or sent them encouraging messages	14 %
I defended the bullied person online	11 %
I spent time with the person	10 %
I blocked the bully on the platform	9 %
I let it go	9 %
I asked the bully to stop	7 %
I helped the bullied person tell a trusted adult	6 %
I helped the bullied person exit the situation	6 %
I didn't know what to do	6 %
I reported the bullying to platform moderators	5 %
I told a friend about it	4 %
I told a trusted adult (e.g., parent, teacher, youth worker, counselor)	4 %
I did something else. What?	3 %
I reported it to authorities like the police	1 %
I tagged a trusted adult or authority in the bullying content	1 %
I talked about the situation with MLL's Children and Youth helpline or chat	1 %
I shared the bullying content further	1 %
I participated in the bullying	1 %
I have not witnessed this type of situation	55 %

Table 7. Think back to a situation where a young person you know was bullied or mistreated on social media, in games, or online. Did you do any of the following? (Select all that apply). (N=5990)

8.1 Ways to Resolve Cyberbullying Situations

"[The bully] usually only stops when the police or some other powerful adult gets involved. PS: Teachers don't do crap about bullying."

"Most cyberbullies try to hide their identity, so it's not easy to track them. It's also hard for young people to talk about bullying, so it should be addressed early — preferably right when they bring it up."

According to young people, the most effective way to resolve cyberbullying is intervening as quickly as possible, and 56% agree with this (see Table 12). Blocking the bully and other moderation actions are also seen as effective measures.
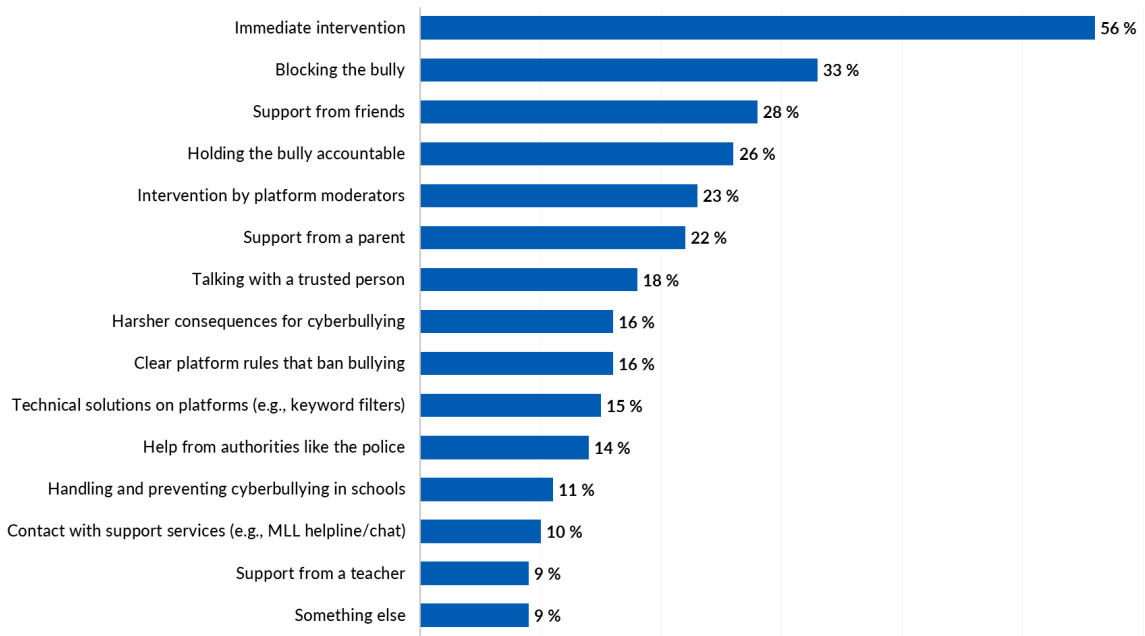
Measure	Percent
Immediate intervention	56 %
Blocking the bully	33 %
Support from friends	28 %
Holding the bully accountable	26 %
Intervention by platform moderators	23 %
Support from a parent	22 %
Talking with a trusted person	18 %
Harsher consequences for cyberbullying	16 %
Clear platform rules that ban bullying	16 %
Technical solutions on platforms (e.g., keyword filters)	15 %
Help from authorities like the police	14 %
Handling and preventing cyberbullying in schools	11 %
Contact with support services (e.g., MLL helpline/chat)	10 %
Support from a teacher	9 %
Something else	9 %

Table 12. What do you think works or would work best for resolving cyberbullying situations? (Multiple choices allowed, N=5990)

By age, there are no significant differences in the effectiveness of social support measures (friends, parents, trusted adults). However, technical solutions (moderation, filtering, blocking) are seen as increasingly effective with age. For example, 30% of 13-year-olds trust the ban on the bully, 33% of 14-year-olds, 35% of 15-year-olds, 41% of 16-year-olds, 52% of 17-year-olds, and 53% of 18-year-olds. Holding the bully accountable and implementing harsher penalties for bullies are also seen as increasingly effective measures with the respondent's age.

Girls find all measures more effective than boys. Non-binary youth usually fall

between the two — aligning more with girls in some cases, and boys in others. The most pronounced gender differences are seen in social support measures. For example, 36% of girls consider peer support effective, whereas only 19% of boys do. For moderation and technical tools, the gender gap is smaller, and non-binary youth actually see some tools as more effective than both boys and girls. For example, 28% of non-binary youth view moderator intervention as effective, compared to 24% of girls and 23% of boys. Girls (20%) and non-binary youth (19%) are also more in favor of stricter punishments for bullies than boys (12%).

Even though 9% selected "Other," most free-text responses reiterated options already provided. Some responses suggested retaliatory bullying. Others proposed that the victim should just turn off their phone or delete their social media to avoid being bullied. Many respondents feel that cyberbullying is difficult to eradicate and that it has become a normalized part of the internet.

"There should be a new rule that, for example, on TikTok you can only make an account using your real name and face... I swear 90% of bullying would stop immediately."

"Cyberbullying can't really be stopped. It's just something that will always exist."

"Just turn off your phone or other smart device."

"I think you just stay away from those people — if you're being bullied, you can just end it yourself or forget about it and stay out of their way."

HOW CAN CYBERBULLYING BE PREVENTED?

9.1 Young People's Own Responsibility in Cyberbullying

Respondents were asked to assess which groups could reduce cyberbullying. From the perspective of young people, they believe they have the greatest impact in reducing cyberbullying (see Table 13). The roles of parents, social media platforms, and professionals are also seen as important. The efforts of decision-makers and organizations are not seen as equally impactful as those of other groups.

The 2021 survey also reflected this sense of personal responsibility. At that time, 54% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement: "Intervening in bullying, offensive treatment, and harassment is only adults' responsibility." Today, 57% of youth continue to hold this view.
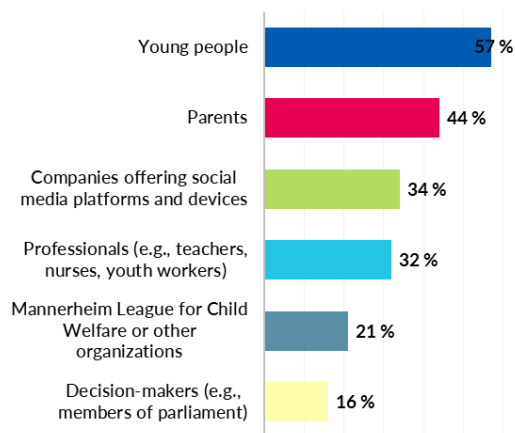
Group	Percentage
Young people	57 %
Parents	44 %
Companies offering social media platforms and devices	34 %
Professionals (e.g., teachers, nurses, youth workers)	32 %
Mannerheim League for Child Welfare or other organizations	21 %
Decision-makers (e.g., members of parliament)	16 %

Table 13. Which of the following groups do you think can help reduce cyberbullying?
(N = 4065)

It is noteworthy that nearly 2,000 young people did not answer this question. They may perceive all the listed groups as having limited ability to influence cyberbullying, or they may have been fatigued near the end of the survey.

Girls and non-binary respondents are more confident than boys in the ability of all listed groups to reduce cyberbullying. The biggest difference appears in the perceived effectiveness of professionals: 37% of girls, 27% of non-binary youth, and 26% of boys believe professionals can make a difference.

Younger respondents tend to be more skeptical of all actors' abilities. The most significant age difference concerns social media companies: among 13-year-olds, only 27% trust these companies' ability to reduce cyberbullying, whereas 50% of 17–18-year-olds do.

Respondents were also asked to justify their selections about which groups can reduce cyberbullying. In their open responses, young people urged their peers to take responsibility and foster a positive atmosphere online. They emphasized that this is particularly important because adults, such as parents and platform moderators, may not see or effectively intervene in online bullying. At best, adults can only help de-escalate and respond after the fact. Prevention and quick intervention are primarily the responsibility of young people themselves.

"Young people themselves have the most influence over what content is on social media because they're the ones using it the most."

"Young people could tell those who are bullying to stop, because I think it's more effective to hear it from another young person than from an adult."

"They could try to have the courage to speak up instead of just watching and staying silent."

"Only the people involved can work it out. If you bring in parents, things just get worse and the bullying increases."

"Bullying will never completely stop, so we just have to try to protect others from bullies."

Young people also suggested concrete actions that other young people could take to prevent bullying:

- Think about what you say and how it might make others feel

- Stay quiet if you don't have anything kind to say

- Promote a positive discussion culture online by being kind to others

- Tell an adult if you see bullying

- Include everyone

- Encourage others to stop bullying

- Respect others even if they are different from you

- Intervene in bullying yourself

- Defend the bullied

- Take responsibility for your actions and recognize if your bad mood is turning into bullying

- Use online platforms carefully and safely

- Understand the consequences of bullying

9.2 The Role of Adults in Anti-Bullying Work

From parents, young people hope — as expressed in open responses — for quick intervention in bullying, support for the bullied child, and also discipline for their own child if they are the bully. Parents are expected to teach their children more about the consequences of bullying and to set clear boundaries for behavior. Young people also wish that parents would not permit children to install social media at too young an age and would use technical tools to control internet use before problems arise.

"They could show more interest in how young people use their phones."

"Give the child a phone later and teach them properly."

Young people request stricter rules, tighter age restrictions, and effective technical filtering tools, such as word filters, on social media platforms that function properly in Finnish. They wish for active removal of bullies from platforms and more effective moderation. Strong user identification is also mentioned as a solution to the problems created by online anonymity.

"Ensure that platform rules ban bullying, and that the algorithm hides such videos and doesn't promote them. Cyberbullying relies on visibility."

"Develop programs for chats that automatically censor swear words."

"Moderators and automatic bullying prevention in the service."

Young people particularly want professionals, such as teachers, to engage in active discussions about bullying and its consequences and to intervene when the bully and victim are acquainted. Clearer information about punishments is also hoped for. Many

young people want professionals to guide others in showing respect and understanding diversity.

Professionals are also urged to use social media themselves, so they understand what kind of world young people live in. Young people stress the importance of professionals being interested in their online lives and inquiring about their well-being. They offer practical suggestions, such as establishing bully-free zones in schools and youth centers, and creating anonymous reporting.

"Talk in school about how bullying is really a serious thing and help wake young people up to how bad it feels for the one being bullied."

"There should be trustworthy adults you can freely talk to and trust that they will help."

"Professionals could maybe try joining these apps like Snap and TikTok."

From the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare (MLL) and other organizations, young people wish for support, help, and advice for the bullied. They wish for MLL to be more visible in spaces frequented by young people and to engage parents in discussions about cyberbullying. Some also suggest that the organization could more effectively file child welfare reports, monitor platform activity, and contact bullies to help stop bullying. Young people feel that MLL should continue conducting similar surveys and actively promote their services.

"Contact the bullies, for example, and visit schools to talk about bullying and its consequences."

"Spread the message about stopping bullying — for example, through advertising."

"These surveys are good for everyone. I myself was reminded about bullying by this."

"They should advertise their work more, because I never even remember that these things exist."

From decision-makers, young people hope for laws and regulations and harsher penalties to get bullying under control. It's possible that young people don't fully understand existing legislation and the tools already available to address bullying. On the other hand, a real challenge is that Finnish laws alone cannot change the permissive global online culture.

Young people seek prompt assistance from decision-makers for both bullies and victims, for example, through better mental health services. Some even suggest banning certain platforms or forcing them to enforce age limits and intervene effectively. They also wish decision-makers would talk publicly about how bullying has affected them and advocate concretely for bullied youth. They believe it's the responsibility of decision-makers to keep the issue in the public eye and address it seriously.

"Pass a law that immediately removes all hate comments."

"Create or enforce laws that increase consequences for bullying or force companies to take action to reduce bullying on online platforms."

9.3 Young People's Wishes For Adults

"Usually, if a young person is being bullied and tells an adult, and if the bully is someone familiar or from the same school, the adult suggests talking face-to-face — which almost never helps. Because if it's discussed face-to-face, the bully might later get even angrier at the victim for 'getting them into trouble.' That's obviously not fair or true to say, but it can cause even more anxiety and fear for the victim. So the adult should intervene differently — and more quickly."

"I wish adults would understand online bullying the same way they understand other bullying. It can leave a big scar in the victim's life — like if you crumple up a piece of paper and try to straighten it out, it's hard."

Respondents were asked an open-ended question: what do you wish adults understood about cyberbullying? A total of 1,330 young people responded — although at least a third of the answers were variations of "idk".

In the responses, young people frequently emphasize the diversity and complexity of bullying: they want adults to understand that cyberbullying is a complex phenomenon, rarely linear or easy to identify. Many responses highlight the ambiguous boundaries and context-dependent nature of bullying.

For example, they hope adults realize that bullying occurring in games differs from other forms of cyberbullying.

"Bullying or insulting in games usually comes from irritation caused by the game."

"Bullying can be very subtle. Some adults don't even understand youth slang, which can include offensive terms."

"Adults must understand that they don't always grasp the whole situation — and that it may not be as simple or straightforward from a young person's point of view."

9.4 Cyberbullying Must Be Taken Seriously

Young people have two differing views on the seriousness of cyberbullying. Some want adults to understand that cyberbullying must be taken seriously, due to its potential long-lasting psychological effects. Others perceive it more as part of social interaction or joking, which adults should not overreact to.

"It's important for adults to understand that bullying online can be just as serious as physical bullying. It can affect mental health and self-esteem in the long run."

"It's not often as serious as they think."

According to many youth, adults should see cyberbullying as part of a broader social network. Bullying isn't an isolated event — it transcends boundaries between different environments. Digital platforms represent just one arena.

Some responses also indicate that online bullying by strangers is not perceived as serious as bullying from acquaintances.

"They should understand that nothing is black and white. Gossip in real life and online can mix, and the internet becomes just a tool for bullying."

"Even strangers can bully, so it's not always that serious. But if the bully is someone familiar, then it's regular bullying and should be handled like that."

Some responses highlight the need for more effective adult intervention in cases of cyberbullying. Youth emphasize the importance of listening, adopting non-blaming attitudes, and providing quick, sensitive responses.

"A child may feel ashamed to talk about these things, so just being there and listening helps."

"It happens every day. It would be good if adults regularly asked how social media is affecting the youth, so it becomes routine — and the youth wouldn't be afraid to talk about what's happening."

"Even if you tell the bully to stop, they won't listen. If it continues, the police should be contacted immediately to fix the situation and teach the bully how to behave."

"Telling someone to just ignore it or blaming the victim for being on social media doesn't help or solve anything."

A concerning theme in some responses is the normalization of bullying — that it's seen as a natural part of online culture and interaction. Young people say they also learn this behavior from adults.

"Not everything is bullying, and sometimes it's just normal that someone speaks harshly."

"It happens a lot, and no one can stop it except other young people. Probably everyone has been bullied on social media at some point."

"I feel like adults also bully — and young people copy that behavior. Adults should reflect on their own behavior too. That would help."

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Conclusions

Cyberbullying Is Increasing Alarmingly

Young people now experience cyberbullying targeted at themselves more than before. Online bullying directed at youth most commonly manifests as indirect meanness, insinuations, and deliberately not replying to messages. All four forms of cyberbullying inquired about in the survey are now experienced more commonly than in the 2021 survey. The most significant increase is in the experience of being excluded from a group, and threats have also become more common. Non-binary youth have encountered cyberbullying more often than girls and boys. Boys are slightly

overrepresented among those who experience persistent bullying.

Bullying Is a Daily Reality Among Youth

The study shows that young people now witness all forms of cyberbullying more frequently on a daily basis than in the 2021 survey. This means that an increasing number of youth observe bullying around them, with one in five young people encountering mean comments online daily. As they age, young people are also increasingly exposed to bullying content and graphic depictions of bullying violence. The highest prevalence of bullying content is seen on TikTok. A particularly concerning finding is that some young people have difficulty distinguishing between what constitutes bullying and what can be interpreted, for example, as humor or banter.

Anonymous Bullying Thrives Without Consequences

Nearly half of respondents feel that online bullies are typically unknown young people. According to youth, anonymity is a significant reason why bullying happens online: things don't feel real, expression escalates, and there are no consequences. Anonymous online conversations create an atmosphere of fear, frustration, anxiety, and hopelessness, enabling hatred and the spread of misinformation. Although anonymous bullying is emphasized in the responses, it's important to remember

that online and school bullying are interconnected: 9% of respondents believe that bullies are usually familiar peers from school, neighborhood, or hobbies.

Victims No Longer Bother Asking for Help — Bystander Numbers Are Growing

In situations where a young person is bullied, the most common response is to let it go. This is especially true for those who experience persistent bullying, despite having access to more intervention strategies than others. More young people also choose not to intervene when they witness bullying happening to others — increasing the number of bystanders. Girls and non-binary youth are more likely to intervene than boys. A hardening attitude climate may increase bullying, make it worse and more brutal, and desensitize youth. In the worst case, it leads to cynicism. The bullied young person may also end up becoming a bully themselves.

Boys' Online Environment Is Harsh, Brutal, and Cynical

Boys experience less bullying than their peers, but they also tend to engage in more bullying and gaming. Many boys seem to grow up in an online culture where harsh attitudes, trolling, propaganda, misogyny, violence, and intentional boundary-pushing are normalized. The line between bullying and joking is often blurred. Bullying in

gaming environments stands out from other forms of online bullying, and many boys consider it harmless, even if it causes real distress. The anonymous online environment and competitive context, which includes trash-talking opponents, create a fertile ground for bullying and shift the tone of online discourse negatively.

Youth Responsibility and Empathy Are Not Always Sufficient

Young people feel that they themselves bear significant responsibility for reducing cyberbullying. From parents, they wish for presence, a caring attitude, and problem-solving skills. Youth also hope for understanding without blame, and quick, sensitive reactions from adults. It's important for adults to understand that bullying can be very subtle and therefore easily go unnoticed. A young person may, for example, quietly fall into isolation when no one responds to their messages or they're gradually excluded from online communities. In these situations, young people's empathy and emotional skills are tested: how to support a friend facing such treatment, and how to effectively intervene?

Being Bullied Casts a Dark Shadow Over Too Many Lives

The study suggests that the most serious consequences of cyberbullying accumulate among a small group of youth who are continuously bullied.

Bullying leads to anxiety, self-esteem issues, and social isolation. Survey responses indicate that young people who have been bullied are more likely than others to intervene when they see bullying and to provide emotional support to other victims. A continuously bullied youth is often also a bully themselves: a child may end up with a conflicted "triple role": as victim, bully, and supporter of other bullied youth.

Young People Are Exposed to Disturbing Violent Content With Unpredictable Consequences

The proportion of young people who have seen violent bullying content grows linearly with age: only 18% of 13-year-olds have seen such material, compared to 43% of 18-year-olds. The study shows that continuously bullied youth are exposed to such content even more than average. Exposure to violent content tends to increase anxiety, fear, and general distress among youth, especially if viewed frequently or alone at home, with no one to talk to. The fear is that the normalization of graphic violence in social feeds will desensitize and numb, or, at worst, even encourage some youth.

RECOMMENDED MEASURES

Social Media and Gaming Platforms

Social media and gaming platforms must adopt more effective practices to reduce the spread of bullying and violent videos. For example, AI could be utilized more effectively to detect this kind of content and expose users' evasion tactics aimed at manipulating algorithms. The effectiveness of these practices must be transparently demonstrated with data to community members and parents. Aggressive algorithms must not promote or amplify bullying. Anonymity must be preserved in online services, but not at the expense of young people's safety and well-being. Platforms must strengthen genuine cooperation with expert organizations to prevent and reduce bullying.

Decision-Makers

Influencing Attitudes and Norms

The role of decision-makers in anti-bullying work is crucial, as they can influence both legislation and societal attitudes and norms. Clarifying legislation and enforcing it effectively is important, but legal regulation alone is not enough to change a culture, both online and offline, that tolerates bullying. Decision-makers must actively work to strengthen the anti-bullying climate, for example by engaging in open and bold public discussions and by promoting responsible online behavior.

Advocacy

Advocacy must also target social media platforms and technology companies to ensure stricter moderation, age limit enforcement, and removal of harmful content. Decision-makers can also strengthen the role of anti-bullying efforts in schools and youth work. It is also essential to increase the resources of mental health and support services, so that both bullied youth and bullies receive timely help.

Young People

Supporting Youth and Providing Meaningful Free-Time Activities

According to youth, the root causes of cyberbullying often lie in the bully's own distress, family-related challenges, or a general lack of well-being. Therefore, anti-bullying measures must include broader support for well-being of youth. Early intervention services in schools, youth work, and social and healthcare services are crucial for addressing challenges before they escalate. Low-threshold services help families by supporting parenting and overall well-being. MLL's support services for youth and parents are free and confidential.

One of the concerning findings of the survey was that a significant motivation for bullying is boredom. This can be addressed by providing meaningful, community-building activities for youth — in schools, during free time, face-to-face and online. This finding challenges all actors to consider how to prevent

harmful behavioral patterns through their own efforts.

Youth's Key Role in Combating Cyberbullying

Youth creativity, skills, cleverness, and cultural literacy should be utilized by organizations and schools when designing anti-bullying measures and campaigns. It is crucial to listen to young people's experiences and insights regarding the root causes of bullying. Their perspective is different from that of adults. Bullying is part of youth social norms and roles, many of which adults are not even aware of. Youth should be included in developing anti-bullying strategies not only in schools, but also on social media and gaming platforms, as well as in the design and testing of anti-bullying technologies.

The Importance of Peer Support

The increasing number of bystanders must also be engaged in anti-bullying efforts. According to the survey, young people's attitudes and behavior are especially influential in preventing cyberbullying. The perception that the group does not accept bullying significantly reduces its occurrence. Youth should be provided with opportunities to discuss online behavior and to share experiences about the causes and consequences of cyberbullying with their peers. The value of peer support for a bullied person's well-being cannot be overstated. One

example of a peer-support model is MLL's peer student program, which includes peer strategies for addressing cyberbullying.

Professionals Working with Children and Youth

The Importance of Emotional Skills in Bullying Situations

Emotional and social skills can be taught and learned. Recognizing, interpreting, and understanding others' emotions is especially challenging online. In digital environments, emotions are not conveyed the same way as in face-to-face conversation. The psychological effects on the victim often remain invisible, making emotional education even more crucial.

Bullying in gaming environments clearly stands out from other forms of cyberbullying, as also reflected in this survey. Because games are highly interactive and fast-paced, prevention requires strategies tailored to the specifics of gaming culture. Strengthening emotional and interaction skills is key to reducing bullying in gaming environments. Gaming, to a great extent, is fundamentally a social activity that requires cooperation, fair play, and emotional awareness.

Improving Online Interaction Skills

Bullying is strongly connected to the language and communication culture of online communities. The characteristics

of online interaction must be recognized and used to build a positive communication culture. It is important to strengthen youth's awareness of their own impact on community well-being.

- What actions help build inclusive communities?

- How can everyone be included?

- Are you the one who encourages others?

- Do you boost your own status by putting others down?

- Do you ignore others' messages?

The School's Role in Cyberbullying Situations

Among continuously bullied youth, the survey indicates that bullies are often familiar classmates. Young people feel that teachers and school professionals do not always intervene in online bullying. Barriers to intervention include everyday busyness, limited digital skills, uncertainty about how to respond, or the belief that online bullying is not the school's responsibility if it happens outside school hours.

But cyberbullying affects student well-being, the school climate, and learning, so intervention is an essential part of school operations. Sometimes, bullying that starts at school continues online, and can even extend into the home. Home-school collaboration must be strengthened, and clear communication provided to students and guardians

about how to respond to online bullying cases.

Support and Resources for Professionals

Social media and gaming platforms are constantly evolving and so is bullying. Educators need continuous access to up-to-date knowledge, skills, and training to intervene and prevent bullying. There must be current information about bullying phenomena, intervention models, and non-blaming discussion strategies that respect youth culture.

In addition to moderation and technical anti-bullying tools, support services for children, youth, and parents provide psychological help online provided by professionals. Online police and digital youth workers have been developing intervention models for years — these should be expanded and further developed. Adults' own behavior also plays a key role: responsible participation in social media and fostering a respectful discussion culture sets an example for young people.

Parents and Families

Parental Responsibility

Parents must not remain bystanders in their children's digital lives. In addition to setting screen time limits, it's essential to discuss topics like online interactions, humor boundaries, equality, and how to be a good friend in games and online. Ideally, parents actively participate in their children's media use, and

discussions about online experiences are part of everyday parenting. An adult's own example is key in supporting a child's media literacy.

Alarmingly, only 4% of youth report cyberbullying to a trusted adult. Youth wish their parents would show care, make time, be present, and have the ability to intervene and resolve bullying situations. If a child reports being bullied online, it is crucial that the matter is addressed immediately and that the young person's message is taken seriously.

Gender-Sensitive Media Education

Girls, boys, and non-binary youth use different social media and gaming platforms, and their experiences in digital spaces vary widely. It is important to increase understanding that gendered experiences and needs in digital environments are not uniform — they are shaped by different expectations, norms, and interactions.

Strengthening this understanding is key to promoting equality and safety online. Parents and other adult figures can help children recognize and understand different digital experiences and develop interaction skills that foster empathy and respect.

Strengthening Boys' Empathy

According to the survey, boys' online culture appears harsh and cynical, and supporting them in becoming

empathetic and responsible may be key to improving online communities. Families and educators must create space for discussion and provide boys, in particular, with tools to understand how their behavior affects both themselves and others. Fostering compassion among boys is especially important in situations where they increasingly encounter unwanted content and experiences in the digital world.

The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare

Mannerheim League for Child Welfare is an open civic organization that promotes the well-being of children, young people, and families with children. MLL's goal is a child-friendly Finland.

MLL understands the everyday lives of children, youth, and families and offers peer support, diverse volunteer opportunities, and possibilities for participation and influence in various life situations.

The largest child welfare organization in Finland consists of:

- *71,107 members*
- *532 local associations*
- *9 district organizations*
- *1 central organization*

Each year:

- *The MLL's Children and Youth Helpline and Chat responds to nearly 20,000 calls, chat conversations, and online letters.*
- *The Parent Phone, Parent Web letter service, and chat handle nearly 2,500 contacts.*
- *In primary, lower secondary, and unified comprehensive schools, over 11,000 MLL peer students operate; online, young people are supported by digital peer students, the so-called verkk@rit.*
- *Nearly 90,000 children and young people participate annually in media education lessons and workshops.*
- *Over 12,000 adults attend media education evenings for parents and trainings for professionals each year.*
- *In local and online support groups, the "Selviydytään kiusaamisesta" initiative supports children and young people who have experienced bullying.*
- *At the start of each school year, MLL runs the "A Good Start to the School Path" campaign, which reaches about 50,000 parents of first graders.*

Learn more about MLL's media education work (in Finnish):

- *mll.fi/sinisen-valon-sukupolvi*
- *mll.fi/nettikiusaaminen*
- *nuortennetti.fi/netti-ja-media/nettikiusaaminen*
- *mll.fi/mediakasvatus*

Nuoret ja nettikiusaaminen 2025 -report
in Finnish (PDF) on MLL's website

More information on cyberbullying on MLL's website (in Finnish):
mll.fi/nettikiusaaminen