



Cyberbullying — Damage in a Digital Age

A Common Sense Media White Paper

July 2010 / Common Sense Media

common sense
media



What cyberbullying is and why it matters

Cyberbullying can take many forms – from repeatedly sending hurtful text messages and pictures to posting cruel comments online to creating fake Facebook or MySpace pages to impersonate other kids – and it can have a devastating effect.

In some ways, cyberbullying is like traditional bullying. But there are many new and different aspects.

- Nasty comments and embarrassing photos can spread quickly and widely online and through mobile devices.
- Online anonymity makes it easier for kids to be mean and for other kids to add to the problem.
- Like the online world, cyberbullying is 24/7 – it may start from a home computer, but it expands into the school environment and everywhere in between.
- Because it's online and mobile, it's much harder for parents and teachers to detect.

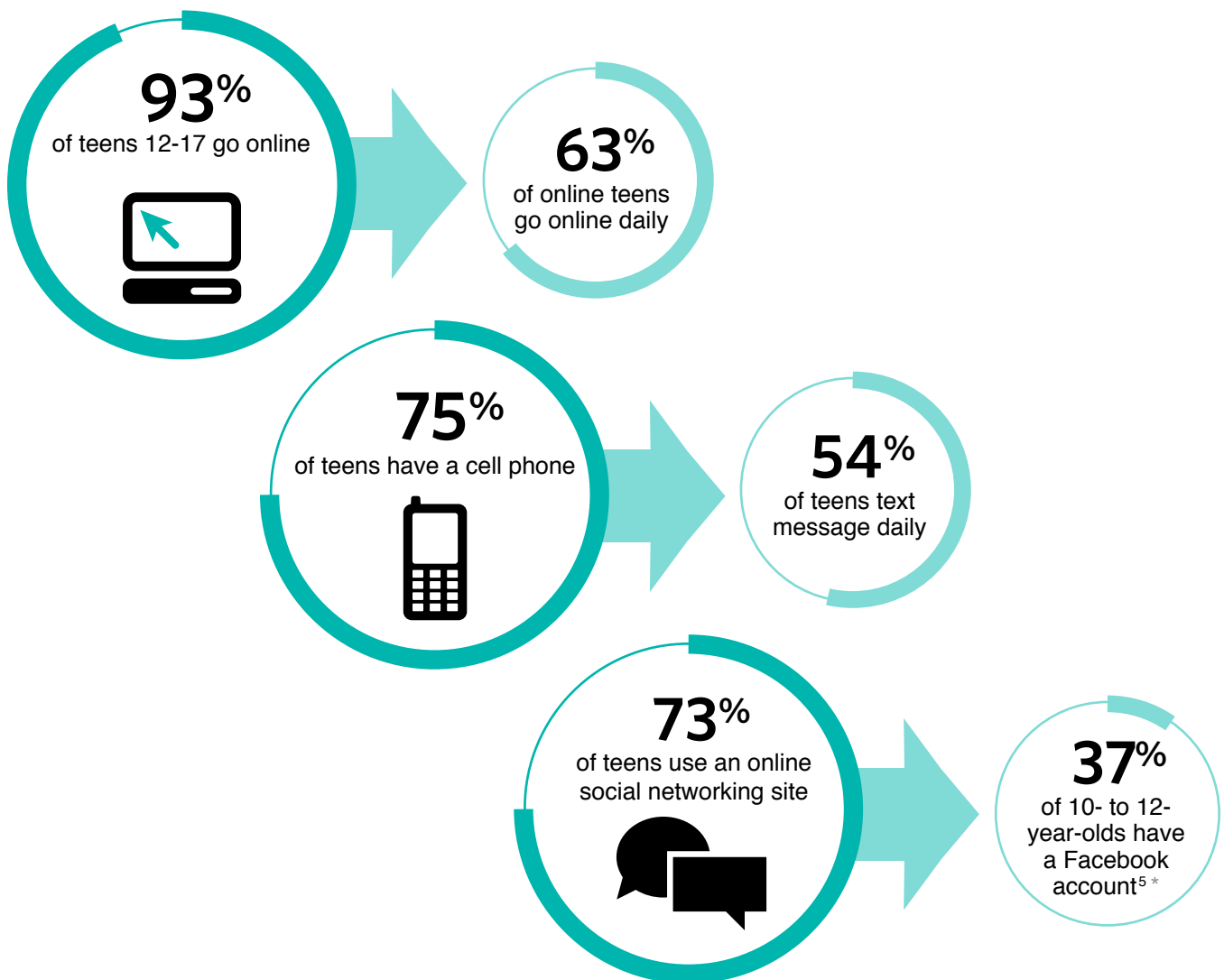
Cyberbullying is a relatively new term with a variety of definitions.

For example:

- The Centers for Disease Control calls it “any type of harassment or bullying (teasing, telling lies, making fun of someone, making rude or mean comments, spreading rumors, or making threatening or aggressive comments) that occurs through email, a chat room, instant messaging, a website (including blogs), or text messaging.”¹
- The National Crime Prevention Council says it's when “the Internet, cell phones, or other devices are used to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person.”²
- Leading researchers describe it more simply as an “overt, intentional act of aggression towards another person online.”³

Bullying has always been a blow to kids' self-confidence, but the public humiliation of cyberbullying may be even more damaging. Hurtful information posted online is extremely difficult to remove, and many more people can see it and spread it.

TEENS' ONLINE FOOTPRINT⁴



*Facebook's Terms of Service restrict use to individuals 13 and older

Cyberbullying occurs where kids live today. They spend more time online, texting, watching TV and movies, and playing video games than they do in school or with their parents, so harmful comments or actions online may have even greater impact.

Unlike kids, most adults don't live online, so cyberbullying usually occurs in places and formats that parents and teachers don't immediately see. Sometimes adults learn about cyberbullying only when they see the depression and anxiety — or worse — that results.

Cyberbullying victim talks about ordeal that led her to harm herself

By Kerry Lester | Daily Herald Staff



Tuesday, July 13, 2010

Life

Most kids have had negative online experiences: report

By QMI AGENCY

[Home](#) [News & Opinion](#) [Local Coverage](#)

Cyberbullying: One victim's story

By Lauren Daley / New Bedford Standard-Times

Sunday, April 11, 2010 - Added 3 months ago

Mean Girls: Cyberbullying Blamed for Teen Suicides

Massachusetts Girl, 15, Was Reportedly Bullied Online Before Taking Her life

6

Cyberbullying Is a Major Issue That Is Not Going Away

Cyberbullying is so bad that it drives some kids to suicide

Toledo Blade, July 1, 2010

With cyberbullying, there's no safe place, study finds

CNN Health: The Chart, July 5, 2010

Cyberbullying: Torment just one click away

The News-Star (Monroe, LA), April 15, 2010

When cyberbullying kills: Suicide's mom warns of social-networking dangers

Philadelphia Daily News, April 24, 2009

Who Cyberbullies?

Early research is showing the complexity of cyberbullying. For example, surveys about the frequency of cyberbullying often show different responses depending on the description or type of cyberbullying:

- In a recent McAfee/Harris Interactive survey, 29% of 10- to 17-year-olds said they've been cyberbullied, and 52% said they know someone who has experienced cyberbullying.⁷
- According to recent studies by the Pew Internet & American Life Project,
 - > 26% of teens said they've been harassed via cell phone, either by voice or text.⁸
 - > 15% of teens said they've had private material (IM, text, email) forwarded without permission.⁹

By Gender

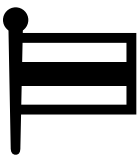


- Both boys and girls cyberbully, but early research indicates that girls are more likely than boys to be perpetrators – and victims – of cyberbullying.¹⁰ (Boys are generally more likely than girls to be engaged in traditional forms of bullying.)¹¹
- There are also gender differences in types of cyberbullying – girls are more likely than boys to spread rumors, while boys are more likely to post hurtful pictures or videos.¹²



By Age

- Most cyberbullying occurs among mid-teens (ages 14-17).¹³
- Perpetrators of cyberbullying (like traditional bullying) are generally the same age as their victims.¹⁴



By Race

There is limited information about how cyberbullying varies by race or ethnicity,¹⁵ but the Pew Internet & American Life Project found no major differences in socio-economic status, race/ethnicity, or parent education in the likelihood of being harassed online.¹⁶



Aggressors and Victims

- In one study, 47% of the victims said the perpetrator was another student at school.¹⁷
- Another study found that 43% of the victims were cyberbullied by known peers, and 57% by people they met online and did not know in person.¹⁸

Another complication is that perpetrators are often also victims, whether online or offline.¹⁹

- One recent survey found that 11% of kids ages 10 to 17 admitted to engaging in some form of cyberbullying.²⁰

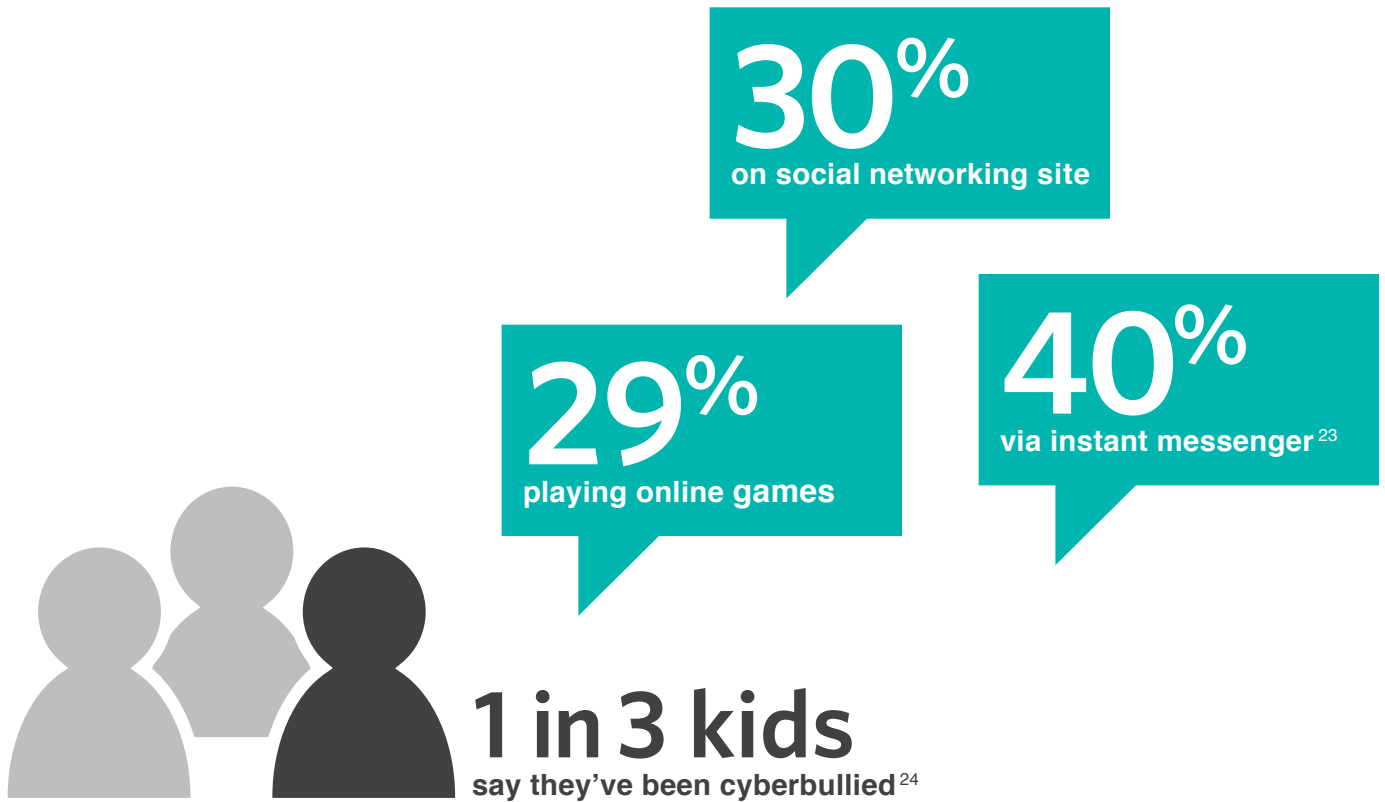
As with traditional bullying, it can be very hard to determine *why* kids cyberbully – sometimes it's a response to a break-up or the end of a friendship, sometimes it can be based on hate or bias, and some cases of online bullying begin as a response to offline bullying. Some kids may even see cyberbullying as entertainment – a game in which you get to hurt other people.²¹



The impact of cyberbullying

Bullying in any form can result in long-term damage, including low self-esteem, depression, anger, school failure, and, in some tragic cases, even violence or suicide. Cyberbullying may be even more dangerous than traditional bullying because:

- It's easy to start – a few clicks is all it takes, and the anonymity of the Internet removes many of the traditional restraints.
- It's hard to stop – words and pictures sent online can go around the world in no time and are often impossible to remove.
- It's very visible to kids but almost *invisible* to adults, since they aren't online as much and aren't in the same online spaces. Also, kids may hesitate to tell adults what happens online and on their cell phones because they are traumatized, fear retribution, or worry that their online activities or cell phone use will be restricted.²²



Several early studies about the impact of cyberbullying on kids show troubling results:

- Young people who were harassed online were significantly more likely to use alcohol or other drugs, receive school detention or suspension, skip school, or experience emotional distress than those who were not harassed.²⁵
- Young people who receive rude or nasty comments via text message are significantly more likely to report feeling unsafe at school.²⁶
- Targets of cyberbullying were eight times more likely than all other youths to report recently carrying a weapon to school.²⁷

Almost as troubling as the impact of cyberbullying is the limited understanding of how we prevent it. One in four kids (25%) report that they wouldn't know what to do if they were bullied or harassed online.²⁸

What We Can Do to Protect Our Kids



What Parents Can Do

- Set the rules. Explain to your kids that if they wouldn't say something to someone's face, they shouldn't text it, IM it, or post it.
- Ask if they know someone who has been cyberbullied. Sometimes they will talk about others' experiences before they'll discuss their own.
- Establish consequences for bullying. Make sure kids know that if they aren't responsible, you'll take away their phone and computer privileges.
- Visit www.commonsense.org/cyberbullying-tips for more parent tips.



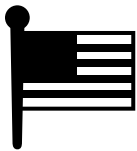
What Educators Can Do

- Teach digital literacy and citizenship in K-12 schools so that all kids learn how to be responsible, respectful, and safe digital citizens.
- Establish clear rules about bullying and harassment in all forms. School is by far the most common place that youths report being cyberbullied.²⁹
- Provide professional development for all teachers and staff in how to recognize and respond to bullying.
- Implement Common Sense Media's free middle school curriculum. Visit www.commonsense.org/educators for more information.



What Companies Can Do

- Provide easy-to-use online resources for kids who have been cyberbullied, including better opportunities to flag and report bullies.
- Fund and facilitate local digital literacy and citizenship programs in your community.
- Support public awareness messages about the potential for cyberbullying and the impact it can have on kids.



What Government Can Do

- Make digital literacy and citizenship an essential part of every school's basic curriculum and support it through programs like the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.
- Fund professional development for educators about digital literacy and citizenship.
- Create a new Digital Literacy Corps as outlined in the National Broadband Plan.
- Support additional research to build a deeper understanding of how and why kids cyberbully.

Sources

1. Hertz MF, David-Ferdon C. Electronic Media and Youth Violence: A CDC Issue Brief for Educators and Caregivers. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control; 2008. http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/YVP/electronic_aggression.htm
2. <http://www.ncpc.org/newsroom/current-campaigns/cyberbullying>
3. Ybarra M. & Mitchell KJ. (2004b). Youth Engaging in Online Harassment: Associations With Caregiver-Child Relationships, Internet Use, and Personal Characteristics. *Journal of Adolescence*, 27, 319-336.
4. Lenhart A. Cyberbullying 2010: What the Research Tells Us [presentation]. Washington, DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project, May 6, 2010. <http://pewinternet.org/Presentations/2010/May/Cyberbullying-2010.aspx>
5. McAfee/Harris Interactive. Youth Online Behavior. June 21, 2010. http://safekids.com/mcafee_harris.pdf
6. Sources: Cyberbullying victim talks about ordeal that led her to harm herself - Chicago Daily Herald, May 3, 2010. Cyberbullying: One victim's story - Boston Herald, April 11, 2010. Mean Girls: Cyberbullying Blamed for Teen Suicides - Good Morning America, ABCNews.com, Jan. 28, 2010. Most kids have had negative online experiences: report - Toronto Sun, June 15, 2010.
7. McAfee/Harris Interactive (2010)
8. Lenhart A, Ling R, Campbell S, Purcell K. Teens and Mobile Phones. Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project, April 20, 2010. <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Teens-and-Mobile-Phones.aspx>
9. Lenhart A. Cyberbullying. Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 27, 2007. <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2007/Cyberbullying.aspx>
10. Some studies have not found any differences, while others have found that girls perpetrate electronic aggression more frequently than do boys. See Williams KR, Guerra NG. Prevalence and predictors of internet bullying. *J Adolesc Health* 2007;41 (6 Suppl 1):S14-S21. Kowalski RM, Limber SP. Electronic bullying among middle school students. *J Adolesc Health* 2007;41 (6 Suppl 1):S22-S30. Hinduja S and Patchin J. Bullying, Cyberbullying, and Suicide. Forthcoming in Archives of Suicide Research - <http://www.cyberbullying.us/research.php>. Lenhart, A (2007).
11. Cyberbullying: Bullying in the Digital Age. <http://www.cyberbullyhelp.com/whatis.html>
12. Hinduja S and Patchin J. Bullying, Cyberbullying, and Suicide.
13. Lenhart A (2007). Hinduja S and Patchin J. Cyberbullying: an exploratory analysis of factors related to offending and victimization. *J Deviant Behavior* 2008;29: 129-156.
14. Wolak J, Mitchell KJ and Finkelhor D. Does Online Harassment Constitute Bullying? An Exploration of Online Harassment by Known Peers and Online-Only Contacts. *J Adolescent Health*. 2007 Dec; 41 S51-S58
15. Hertz MF, David-Ferdon C (2008).
16. Lenhart A (2007).
17. Kowalski RM, Limber SP (2007).
18. Wolak J, et al (2007)
19. Willard N. Cyberbullying & Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Electronic Aggression. Eugene, OR: Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use, 2006.
20. McAfee/Harris Interactive (2010).
21. Willard N. Educator's Guide to Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats. Eugene, OR: Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use, April 2007. <http://new.csriu.org/cyberbully/docs/cbcteducator.pdf>
22. Willard N (2007).
23. <http://www.cyberbully411.org/myths-and-facts>
24. McAfee/Harris Interactive (2010)
25. Ybarra M, Diener-West M, Leaf PJ. Examining the overlap in internet harassment and school bullying: implications for school intervention. *J Adolesc Health* 2007;41(6 Suppl 1):S42-S50.
26. Ybarra M, et al (2007).
27. Ybarra M, et al (2007).
28. McAfee/Harris Interactive (2010).
29. Ybarra M, Mitchell KJ, Espelage D. A comparison of bullying online and offline: Findings from a national survey. Presented to AERA Annual Meeting, April 16, 2009. [presentation] <http://is4k.com/presentations/a-comparison-of-bullying-online-and-offline-findings-from-a-national-survey/>



Digital Citizenship in a Connected Culture

is Common Sense Media's pioneering school-based curriculum designed to provide students with the essentials of positive behavior in a digital world. Based on the digital ethics research of Dr. Howard Gardner at the Harvard School of Education, Common Sense Media uses engaging content — from print and video materials to interactive components and role-play case studies — on topics like privacy, self-expression, and cyberbullying to inspire kids to be responsible digital citizens.

To access the curriculum, visit www.commonsense.org/educators.

Who We Are

Common Sense Media is dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in a world of media and technology.

More than 1.3 million people visit the Common Sense website every month for age-appropriate media reviews and parenting advice. Tens of millions more access our advice and information through our distribution partnerships with leading companies like Comcast, DIRECTV, Time Warner Cable, Cox Communications, Facebook, Yahoo!, Google, Apple, Disney, Netflix, Best Buy, and more.

COMMON SENSE MEDIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Rich Barton	Chairman and CEO, Zillow.com	William S. Price, III (Chair)	President, Classic Wines, LLC
Marcy Carsey	Founding Partner, Carsey-Werner Productions	Jesse Rogers	Managing Director, Golden Gate Capital
Chelsea Clinton	Columbia University	Susan F. Sachs	Partner, Establishment Capital Partners
James Coulter	Founding Partner, TPG	James P. Steyer	Founder and CEO, Common Sense Media
Geoffrey Cowan	University Professor, The Annenberg School for Communication at USC	Gene Sykes	Managing Director, Goldman, Sachs & Co.
April McClain-Delaney	President, Delaney Family Fund	Todor Tashev	Director, Omidyar Network
John H.N. Fisher	Managing Director, Draper Fisher Jurvetson	Deborah Taylor Tate	Former FCC Commissioner
Lycia Carmody Fried	Community Volunteer	Michael Tollin	Founding Partner, Tollin Productions
Thomas J. Holland	Partner, Bain & Company, Inc.	Eugene Washington, MD	Dean, UCLA Medical School
Gary E. Knell	President and CEO, Sesame Workshop	Lawrence Wilkinson (Vice Chair)	Co-Founder, Oxygen Media and Global Business Network
Robert L. Miller	President and CEO, Miller Publishing Group		

BOARD OF ADVISORS

Aileen Adams	Chair, The Women's Foundation of California
Larry Baer	Chief Operating Officer, San Francisco Giants
Richard Beattie	Chairman, Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP
Angela Glover Blackwell	Founder and CEO, PolicyLink
Geoffrey Canada	Founder and President, Harlem Children's Zone
Ramon Cortines	Superintendent, Los Angeles Unified School District
Yogen Dalal	Managing Director, The Mayfield Fund
Steve Denning	Founding Partner, General Atlantic Partners
Susan Ford Dorsey	President, Sand Hill Foundation
Millard Drexler	Chairman and CEO, J. Crew
Ezekiel Emanuel, MD, PhD	Chair, Department of Clinical Bioethics, The National Institutes of Health
Robert Fisher	Director, GAP Inc.
Arjun Gupta	Founder & Managing Partner of TeleSoft Partners
F. Warren Hellman	Founding Partner, Hellman & Friedman
James Herbert II	President and CEO, First Republic Bank
David Hornik	Partner, August Capital
Omar Khan	President, Insight Strategy & Logic (ISL), Web Site Design
David Lawrence Jr.	President, The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation
Nion McEvoy	Chairman and CEO, Chronicle Books
Nell Minow	Founder, The Corporate Library and Movie Mom
Newton Minow	Counsel, Sidley, Austin and Brown; Former FCC Chairman
James Montoya	Senior Vice President, The College Board
Becky Morgan	President, Morgan Family Foundation
Nancy Peretsman	Managing Director, Allen & Company Inc.
Philip Pizzo, MD	Dean, Stanford University School of Medicine
George Roberts	Founding Partner, Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co.
Carrie Schwab Pomerantz	President, Charles Schwab Foundation
Alan Schwartz	CEO, Guggenheim Partners

Marshall Smith	Senior Adviser, Department of Education
Thomas Steyer	Founding Partner, Farallon Capital
Robert S. Townsend	Partner, Morrison & Foerster LLP
Laura Walker	President, WNYC Radio
Alice Waters	Founder, Chez Panisse and Chez Panisse Foundation
Robert Wehling	Founder, Family Friendly Programming Forum; Former CMO, Procter & Gamble
Tim Zagat	Co-Founder and Co-Chair, Zagat Survey

BOARD OF POLICY ADVISORS

Angela Glover Blackwell	Founder and CEO, PolicyLink
Dr. Milton Chen	Executive Director, The George Lucas Educational Foundation
Michael Cohen	CEO, The Michael Cohen Group
Dr. Jeffrey Cole	Director, Center For The Digital Future
Ramon Cortines	Superintendent, Los Angeles Unified School District
Ezekiel Emanuel, MD, PhD	Chair, Department of Clinical Bioethics, The National Institutes of Health
Ellen Galinsky	Co-Founder and President, Families and Work Institute
Andrew Greenberg	President, Greenberg Qualitative Research, Inc.
Denis Hayes	President, The Bullitt Foundation
Dr. Donald Kennedy	President Emeritus, Stanford University; Editor-in-Chief, <i>Science Magazine</i>
David Lawrence Jr.	President, The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation
Wendy Lazarus	Co-Founder and Co-Director, The Children's Partnership
Christopher Lehane	Political Communications Expert
Laurie Lipper	Co-Founder and Co-Director, The Children's Partnership
Philip Pizzo, MD	Dean, Stanford University School of Medicine
Dr. Alvin Poussaint	Prof. of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School; Dir. of Media, Judge Baker Children's Center
Thomas Robinson, MD	Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Medicine, Stanford University
Theodore Shaw	Professor, Columbia University
Marshall Smith	Senior Adviser, Department of Education

Common Sense Media is dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in a world of media and technology.

Go to www.commonsense.org for thousands of reviews and expert advice.

Common Sense Media

650 Townsend Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

 415.863.0600

 **www.commonsense.org**

www.facebook.com/commonsensemedia

www.twitter.com/commonsensenews