

What Gaming Platforms Can Do To Prevent Cyberbullying

Many people don't realize the size of the gaming industry – it's so big it [dwarfs](#) the movie industry (\$152 billion versus \$41 billion). As multiplayer gaming has increased in popularity – whether through consoles or PCs – there have been some profound changes to the world of gaming. Some of these are positive: gaming is more interactive and immersive, people feel part of a community, and caring and concern have even extended offline.

Unfortunately, there have been some dangerous negative effects too. The conversations on gaming platforms can run from mildly offensive to full-blown abusive. You have likely read the numerous stories of cyberbullying and online toxicity on gaming platforms.

In this post, we'll explore the extent of cyberbullying and online toxicity on gaming platforms, and look at practical ways to prevent this from occurring.

Cyberbullying and Online Toxicity: The Dark Side of Gaming

The anonymous nature of gaming – where users generally have an avatar and nickname, and *that's it* – creates an environment ripe for cyberbullying and online toxicity. The [statistics](#) speak for themselves:

- In the U.S. 97% of boys and 83% of girls play video games, according to the Pew Research Center
- 34% of children in the U.S. have experienced cyberbullying at least once
- The most common types of online harassment among gamers are trolling (64%), hate speech (57%), and personal threats (47%)
- Teens attribute the increasing cases of bullying in gaming to anonymity (86%), ignorance of real-life repercussions (76%), and no fear of punishment (73%)
- From those bullied in the last year, 37% developed social anxiety while 36% fell into depression

Perhaps most disturbing is [this article](#), which leads with: “Over 70% of gamers say they've been harassed, with Overwatch and Fortnite players among the worst offenders -and nearly HALF admit they've participated in the abuse of others”.

It's important to note that the vast majority of gamers are great people. Unfortunately, it's a few bad apples that spoil it for everyone else. The effect that these cyberbullies and other criminals can have, however, is significant.

Take [the case](#) of Sarah (not her real name). Her son was playing the popular Roblox game, and she had set up parental controls to ensure he was protected.

After a while, however, Sarah noticed a change in her son. He was more withdrawn and did not want to participate in family activities. After investigating further, Sarah found out that her son had been coerced into sending explicit images over a 3rd-party app.

Recent Events

An [expose](#) in The New York Times delved further into this phenomenon. Kate's story stands out: her son was playing "innocent" games such as Minecraft – only for her to discover her son's account on Discord, a platform for gamers to chat on while playing. It was full of explicit imagery, and when confronted, her son broke down with relief.

Says the Times, "Sexual predators and other bad actors have found an easy access point into the lives of young people: They are meeting them online through multiplayer video games and chat apps, making virtual connections right in their victims' homes".

Some perpetrators are caught. Recent arrests include a California man who perpetrated his abuse through online game Clash of Clans, or a Seattle man who was sentenced to 15 years in prison for abuse through Minecraft and League of Legends, and an Illinois man who threatened and abused minors on Xbox Live.

Preventing Cyberbullying and Online Toxicity: Tips

There are some practical steps that can be taken to combat cyberbullying and online toxicity. Some of these included:

- Talking to kids about the threats that are out there, and how to respond to them
- Being aware of the gaming and chat platforms being used
- Staying on top of the latest trends and threats
- Where possible use filters to prevent abuse

While these tactics are effective to some degree, the results will vary for one thing, and a large number of kids and adults will still be left exposed to cyberbullying and online toxicity. Clearly, a long-term solution is needed, one that is instigated and implemented by the gaming platforms.

Preventing Cyberbullying and Online Toxicity: A Long-Term Solution

The long-term solution is a concerted effort by gaming platforms to combat cyberbullying and online toxicity currently taking place on their platforms. There is a lot more that needs to be

done in this respect. As The New York Times notes, “The tech industry had made only tepid efforts to combat an explosion of child sexual abuse imagery on the internet. The Times has also found that the troubled response extends to the online gaming and chat worlds, where popular and successful companies have created spaces that allow adults and children to interact, despite efforts to create some safeguards”.

Calls have already been made to the gaming industry. The Huffington Post ran an [article](#) entitled “Four Ways Online Games can Prevent Cyberbullying” and discussed filtering, moderators, parent access and dialogue. Unfortunately, many of these solutions are not possible at scale or in real-time.

The status quo needs to change, and that’s why our team here at X is so motivated and passionate about what we do. Using advanced technology, we are providing apps, social platforms, and games with the answer that they so desperately seek.