



# True Shield

Verbal Self-Defense Training  
For  
Young Women & Teens

By Susan Harrow

## Scenario 5. When someone is cyber-bullying you (or trying to destroy your reputation online)

### What's happening:

A bully is making cruel statements about you on the Internet, or posting embarrassing photos of you without your permission.

### What's REALLY happening:



Lots of things.

Online bullies are just like “offline” bullies. The bully might come from an abusive household — repeating patterns of abuse that he or she has suffered at home.

Most of the time, bullies are deeply insecure people who feel powerless over their own lives. They need to hurt others in order to feel strong.

But they can’t strip away your power ... without your consent. You can always defend yourself and fight back.

## **What to SAY:**

Online bullying (or “cyber-bullying”) is extremely tricky to navigate, but the important thing to remember is that you have lots of options.

When it comes to “what to say,” you can ...

Say absolutely nothing. You can ignore the whole situation, log off the social network, and refuse to engage. Bullies want to get a reaction out of you. If you don’t react, the game is over.

Or, you can ...

Say exactly what you feel. (“Stop.” “What you’ve said is mean-spirited and untrue.” “What you’ve just posted is completely offensive.” “Remove the photo immediately.”)

Whatever you choose to say (or not say), the key is to remain calm and unemotional.

You don't want to show the bully how upset you really are. That will only encourage them to keep teasing or threatening you.

So, if you need to cry, scream, vent or punch a pillow, do it. Get all the emotions out, as much as you possibly can. Talk to a friend or trusted adviser and spill your heart out. And then, once you're feeling steadier, you can decide what to do next.

## What to DO:

You've got options.

If someone **posts a photo** of you on the Internet that you want taken down, you can begin by taking a "non-aggressive" or "neutral" approach and say:

"I saw the photo that you posted of me at [place / scenario]. That photo was taken at a private gathering, and I'd like it to remain private. I'd appreciate it if you'd remove it. Thank you."

If they **refuse to remove the photo**, you can say:

"Actually, this isn't up for discussion. It is unethical to post a photo of someone online without his or her permission. Please remove the photo, or I will contact the security team at [name of social media network] and they will remove it for you."



If the photo contains **nude images**, you turn up the heat and say:

Posting nude images of a minor online is a felony. I'm sure you don't want child pornography charges on your record. Remove the images immediately. This is the last time I am going to ask, before turning this over to the police."

If the bully has posted something on the Internet about you that is **ugly and untrue**, you can write to them and say:

"What you've said about me is ugly and untrue.

Publishing false statements that could damage someone's reputation is called 'libel,' and it is considered a crime.

I'm going to give you 24 hours to delete the statements you've made, online.

If you do not delete them, I will report you to our school administration, the security department of [name of social media network], and if necessary, the police. Cyber-bullying is serious and you need to stop, immediately."

If the bully has posted something on the Internet about you that is **ugly but also true**, you can write to them and say:

"What you've said about me is hurtful.

If you have an issue with me, I invite you to speak with me privately, offline. There's no reason to have a public conversation about it.

Ugly language in a public space makes both of us look bad, and I'm sure neither of us want that."

## What (else) to DO:

The best way to deal with cyber-bullying is to prevent it from happening in the first place.



You can do this by refusing to socialize with classmates who are mean-spirited, gossipy and prone to vicious verbal attacks. You can avoid parties, hang-outs and situations where people are snapping photos left and right, without your knowledge. You can refrain from liking mean comments.

You can be careful not to get intoxicated at parties, so that somebody could potentially record an embarrassing video of you.

You can refuse to “friend” certain people on Facebook and other social media platforms, or remove social media from your life, entirely. (There are always other ways to stay connected with friends.)

Above all, surround yourself with people who are positive, kind and encouraging. Steer clear of online spaces where people are constantly spewing ugliness.

You don't need to be part of that nonsense.

## **TRUE STORY:**

When Savannah Dietrich was sexually abused at a party, her friends shockingly rallied around the guy who did it. It's happening all over, and it needs to end now. [Find out what you can do if this happens to you or a friend.](#)



## Teens & Twenties Talk:

Cyber Bullying comes in subtle and not so subtle forms. Alicia\* who has responded to over 2043 questions on ask.fm, chooses to treat her comments lightly. Not with insults, but with a phrase like, “LOL think what you want, but that’s your opinion.”

I don’t want to start something bigger. I’ve gotten a lot of comments about my forehead, because it’s large. In fact, over 50 comments on ask.fm alone. So I did a rant. “Stop commenting on my forehead. I’ve lived with it for fourteen years. It will make my self-esteem go down because it’s something I can’t change.” The comments stopped after that.

**My note:** Sometimes addressing the issue head-on in a direct, non-confrontational way, works. Alicia made a direct request. Told people how their comments affected her and why it was pointless to continue. Well done.

## Teens & Twenties Talk:

Rachel\* and I were both going for the same guy. When we were around each other we wouldn’t talk. Multiple times she would tweet/post Facebook updates about me. I ran into her when a bunch of us were all hanging out and she ignored me. I asked her, “What is the problem you have me specifically?” And, “Did I do something wrong for you to be ignoring me?”

Don’t come with an attitude or your defenses up. When you go to approach them do it respectfully.

“I saw you posted about me.”

Not one drop of  
my self-worth  
depends on your  
acceptance of me.

Be really personable about it even if you don't like them or aren't their biggest fan. If you go out with defenses blazing nothing will get solved that way and will probably cause more drama. It's vital to come at them really respectfully and calmly.

But you want to squash the drama. When the drama goes on it affects a lot of people.

To squash it say, “Hey did I do something wrong? Can we fix it? Is there something that I did to you? Did I cross you the wrong way? It’s more your attitude that important rather than the exact words. ~ Kelsey Poelker, 22 years old.

## Teens & Twenties Talk:

When someone posted the phrase, “Tiffany\* is an anorexic and wannabe,” her friend Blaize\* wrote: “No. Stop.”

“If someone is talking about my friend I don’t want to bring up any more, so I didn’t write anything else.” End of story. The conversation stopped.

**My note:** It can sometimes be easier for you to stand up for your friends than it is for them to stand up for themselves. Especially when an attack touches a sensitive issue or an unresolved insecurity. The more you do it, the easier it becomes.

## Teens & Twenties Talk:

Alessandra\* said, “Someone wrote: ‘Fake whore’ about me. I know I’m not fake. And I know I’m a virgin. So I know that statement is not true. So I used the libel phrase you recommended above and it stopped.”