

What does "cancel culture" have to do with conflict resolution?

By Daniel E. Vargas Campos
Senior Manager, Education Programs

A year ago, our team was in the middle of developing new content to address **civics in digital life**, including a collaboration with our friends at KQED's Above the Noise to create civics-related videos like "**What Happens When Cancel Culture Goes to High School?**" To prepare, we got input from teens. When we surveyed them to learn what topics they would be interested in discussing in their classrooms, they ranked "cancel culture" high on the list.

While working on this video, we learned a lot about "cancel culture." We learned that the American public is deeply divided on how to even define the term. A **2021 report** from Pew Research Center found that some people think about it as an unfair judgment of someone's character that can end in censoring opinions we don't agree with, while others think of it as an avenue for holding someone accountable.

These disparate opinions, and our inability to have a civil conversation about them, divide us. They also keep us from fully listening to the perspective of teens and learning about the unique challenges they experience growing up in a digital world.

Here's what teens say: They're concerned about the role that social media plays in addressing interpersonal conflict. Specifically, they're concerned about the practice of "putting someone on blast," or shaming someone publicly in front of a digital audience as a means to resolve a conflict or force accountability. For teens, the issue of "cancel culture" was less a cultural one and more of an issue about the unique ways that digital platforms shape behavior and human connection.

That means that, developmentally, normal teen drama is dissected and amplified, and even the smallest misunderstanding can blow up into all-out feuds. Add the virality of platforms like TikTok and you end up with

a social environment where drama can be manufactured out of the ether and where **anyone can become the focused target of online rage.**

So, in light of "cancel culture," how can we help kids with conflict resolution?

As Aviva Powers, one of the teens in the KQED video, puts it, our goal should be to help students understand that social media can be a great tool to raise awareness about issues that are unacceptable, but it shouldn't become a weapon.

LINKS -

https://www.common sense.org/education/articles/civics-in-digital-life-lesson-plans-for-grades-8-12?j=9206798&sfmc_sub=171581702&l=2048712_HTML&u=209946261&mid=6409703&jb=14004&utm_source=edu_nl_2023.1.10&utm_medium=email&fbclid=IwAR3yuC_w_7qXHG-n1E_wN5TNtMccP5ea0PxLn30HwuU75TCqAl1BMNq2QrE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dl3zO6s8yTA>

https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/05/19/americans-and-cancel-culture-where-some-see-calls-for-accountability-others-see-censorship-punishment/?j=9206798&sfmc_sub=171581702&l=2048712_HTML&u=209946263&mid=6409703&jb=14004&utm_source=edu_nl_2023.1.10&utm_medium=email

https://www.vox.com/the-goods/22716772/west-elm-caleb-couch-guy-tiktok-cancel?j=9206798&sfmc_sub=171581702&l=2048712_HTML&u=209946264&mid=6409703&jb=14004