

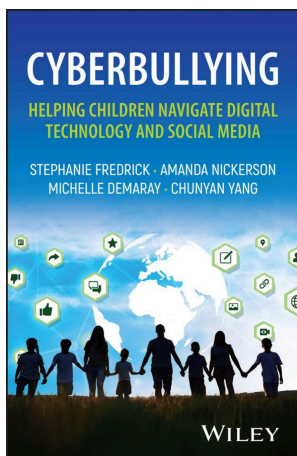


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BY DANIELLE LEGARE

Prepare, not scare: UB faculty publish book on helping children navigate digital media

In an increasingly connected world, cyberbullying remains one of the most pressing issues facing children and teens. A new book coauthored by University at Buffalo Graduate School of Education faculty Stephanie Fredrick and Amanda Nickerson aims to provide adults with the tools they need to tackle this complex challenge and help young people foster healthy digital habits along the way.



"Cyberbullying: Helping Children Navigate Digital Technology and Social Media," published by Wiley in April 2025, offers research-based guidance for parents, educators and mental health professionals concerned about online aggression, social media usage and the overall well-being of young people growing up in a technology-saturated environment.

Nickerson, SUNY Distinguished Professor and director of the Alberti Center for Bullying Abuse Prevention, said the goal was to offer "a really good mix of what the research tells us, but written in a way that's hopefully accessible and usable for adults in the lives of children."

Fredrick, associate professor in the Department of Counseling, School and Educational Psychology and associate director of the Alberti Center, agreed.

"There's just been a lot of negative attention given to digital media use, especially social media. We tried to balance that perspective and highlight some of the positive aspects,"

she said. "We also tried to be relatable, because when parents, educators or others are constantly hearing that social media, video games and technology are all bad for kids—that's just not the real world. We all use digital media in our lives, and kids and teenagers have to use it."

"I think we tried to provide a balanced perspective and offer evidence-based resources to help adults help kids navigate those things," Fredrick added.

The idea for the book grew out of a symposium the coauthors presented during the 2023 American Psychological Association (APA) convention. Their session, focused on cyberbullying prevention, was selected for the conference's prestigious feature stage.

Their insights caught the attention of Wiley editors, who approached Fredrick and Nickerson—as well as their coauthors Michelle Demaray, professor of school



Coauthors from left to right: Stephanie Fredrick, Amanda Nickerson, Michelle Demaray and Chunyan Yang.



From left to right: Amanda Nickerson, Stephanie Fredrick, Chunyan Yang and Michelle Demaray present at the American Psychological Association conference.

psychology at Northern Illinois University, and [Chunyan Yang](#), associate professor of counseling, higher education and special education at the University of Maryland—about turning their work into a book.

"They wanted it to be readable and digestible for people outside of academia, and they needed it out quickly because the topic is so timely and important," said Fredrick.

The team wrote the book in eight months.

The final product blends academic rigor with practical insights, shaped not only by the authors' research but also by their extensive work in the field. Their work at the Alberti Center has enabled them to engage thousands of educators, mental health professionals and families through trainings, workshops and outreach programs.

"We hear the same questions over and over: How is digital media use impacting child development and mental health? At what age should my kid get a cellphone? What should I do if my child is involved in cyberbullying? We used those recurring discussions and questions and made sure we addressed them in the book," said Fredrick.

From her perspective, one of the most important takeaways from the book is the value of early, ongoing communication.

"It's really all about knowing your child, your student or your client, and knowing them well and recognizing when they're acting differently or showing changes in behavior," Fredrick said. "Are they irritable around devices? Are they withdrawing? It comes back to having open conversations, starting them early and having them often, so you can notice when something shifts."

The book covers a range of topics, including peer relationships, emotional development and legal and international considerations. It also includes chapters on the family's role, the school's role and strategies for fostering collaboration between the two on cyberbullying prevention.

Fredrick said the content is meant to support prevention at all ages. "There's a chapter on digital media use in the early years—infancy and toddlerhood—and I wrote that chapter," said Fredrick.

"Honestly, it helped me as a parent of a six-year-old and a three-year-old because I was able to look at the research and figure out what I was doing both right and wrong. I think that made it really applied and relatable."

Looking ahead, Fredrick and Nickerson are continuing their work on digital safety and youth well-being.

"It's about prepare, not scare," said Nickerson. "There's so much out there on the topics we study that it can make someone want to throw up their hands and just protect their child from everything. But that's not particularly helpful or healthy for the parent or the child."

"We hope this book says: 'Here it is. Here are some things we know,'" she said. "There's still a lot we don't know, but decades of research on child development and working with kids have shown that there are key things we can all do when these problems arise or, better yet, before they do."
