Why do people spread rumors?

Why do people spread rumors? Some of the reasons are of personal nature and some of the reasons have to do with the organizational climate. The most common reasons why people spread rumors are listed below.

• **Lack of real information** It's well known that when organizations withhold information from staff, rumors will fill in the void. Any tidbits of truth will be expanded and embellished to appear like the complete truth.
• **Boredom** When employees don’t have enough work to do, they will look for ways to spend time. One of those ways is to talk to others about others.

• **Wishful thinking** Did you hear that the union got everyone a raise this year? Did you hear management will be offering early retirement packages to all employees?

• **Fear surrounding bad news** This is the type of rumor that is likely to spread fast, especially when the organizational climate is bad. People wonder about layoffs, about policy changes, about organizational reassignments and so forth, and will tend to seek out any information about such bad news.

• **People’s speculations about impending changes** When a major change takes place, employees are likely to anticipate and speculate about the details of the change, and its effects.

• **Envy** Sometimes people use gossip to bring someone down. The target of gossip is someone who’s perceived to be doing well, someone that has something others want, be it power, beauty, reputation, or money. With a few exceptions, people that are down and out are not generally targets of gossip.

• **To bring oneself up** This is the other side of the coin of bringing others down. Sometimes there is not a specific target to bring down, but rather, our own sense of being ok is the one that needs to be bolstered. As an example, when you hear about someone in the office getting a divorce, you may not feel as bad about your own marital problems.

• **Viciousness** There are people that are just plain vicious and will start a gossip attack or malicious rumor without any particular reason and do it just for the pleasure of it.

• **Lack of Awareness** Some people are simply unaware that rumors are not the truth, and they will tend to repeat them. Don’t be trapped by this lack of awareness. Remember to check if a rumor is true before passing it on. This applies to email rumors as well.

• **To position themselves as someone in the know** Those who are in the rumor production business are perceived as more knowledgeable about what is going on. A person who’s given confidential information feels included. Conversely, however, those being talked about feel excluded.

As you review the list of reasons why people spread rumors, you will notice that some cause more damage than others. Someone who spreads rumors just to make conversation during a coffee break is bound to cause less damage than someone who’s doing it to bring another person down.
The next time you hear a rumor, remember this list of reasons why people spread rumors to help you decide how damaging the rumor is and the best way to deal with it.
Gossip and Rumors: Why it Hurts, Why it’s Wrong
Let's say you have a piece of wood, a nail, and a hammer. Pretend the wood is a person, and the nail is a nasty rumor about that person. If you hammer in the nail, you’re obviously hurting him or her. If you then pull out the nail...well, there's still a hole in the wood, and the damage has been done.

There are many reasons why that nail of a rumor can be so harmful:

**Words hurt as much as a punch** Sometimes more, because a punch may be painful, but at least it’s over pretty fast. Rumors are, quite simply, a form of bullying that's sometimes referred to as “relational aggression.” When a person or a group makes up a rumor about someone or decides to spread nasty gossip, it’s usually to hurt someone, break up a friendship, or make someone less popular. It’s the same thing as teasing, only it’s done behind someone’s back instead of to his or her face.

**Gossip and rumors can be a form of exclusion** When you spread a rumor about someone, you’re sending a signal that the person is outside of the group, and somehow less worthy of friendship than others. You’re making fun of that person or pointing out negative things about him or her. This can let others think that it’s okay to make the person feel inferior, and make him or her an outsider.

**Gossip and rumors can destroy trust** We need to be able to trust our friends, and gossiping and rumors can break this trust. If you tell a personal secret to a friend, and he turns around and blabs it to someone else, you might feel like you’ll get burned if you ever get close to him again.

**True or not, private is private** Let’s say your mother tells you that your friend Susannah’s parents told her that they’re getting a divorce. You don’t feel bad about passing it around because, after all, it’s a fact, right? Wrong! Perhaps Susannah isn’t ready for people to know about her parents splitting up. It can be very painful and humiliating when other people know things about us that we want to keep private. It can make us feel like we’ve been violated, like something that is supposed to be just ours is now out in the open for all to see...and to judge.

**Believing rumors can lead to bad choices** Letting a rumor influence your behavior is like letting someone else make a big decision for you. Let’s say you hear that the Principal plans to call a Snow Day tomorrow because a blizzard’s coming. Expecting a day off, you don’t do your homework. The next morning, the blizzard turns out to be nothing more than a drizzle, and school isn’t cancelled after all. Doh! You get zeroes on your assignments.

Here’s another example: the gossip grapevine has it that the new girl in school is snobby, so you avoid her. Years later, you and the girl become friends, and you learn that she’s not a snob at all! You missed spending a lot of time with a cool person because you judged her based on a rumor.

Once you understand the damage they can do, how do you go about Breaking The Chain of rumors and gossip?
Gossip and Rumors: Breaking the Chain

Face it: people gossip. They always have, and they always will. You can’t change that, but you can change what happens when a rumor comes your way.

**Decide whether it’s hurtful or harmless** When you hear something about someone you know and have the urge to pass it on, don’t think about whether it’s true or not. Instead, ask yourself these questions:
- Why do I want to pass this on?
- Would I want people to know this kind of information about me?
- How will this person feel if he or she knew this rumor was being spread?
- Will this rumor reduce this person’s status or make him or her excluded from the group?

Your answers will help you figure out the right thing to do.

**Make the rumor stop with you** If you decide that the rumor is hurtful in some way, make a stand. Decide that you don’t want to take part in spreading it. Others may continue to circulate the gossip, but you’ve made a personal choice to stay out of it. Chances are that the rumor will die out much more quickly than if you had joined the buzz.

**Don’t be an audience** When someone comes to you with a rumor, try not to be an audience. This person may want to hurt somebody, or may be after attention or power. It can be hard to resist hearing some juicy dish, especially if you’re bored, but make an effort to say, “I’m not interested in hearing mean gossip, thanks.”

Just like with physical bullying, there are no “innocent bystanders” with hurtful rumors. Hearing and reacting to the rumor, and letting it continue, makes you almost as responsible for its damage as the person who started it. Instead, don’t provide another pair of ears for the rumor-starter. If he isn’t getting the reaction or attention he’s seeking, he’ll be less likely to do it in the future.

**Be a peacemaker** If one of your friends wants to hurt someone else by spreading lies or rumors, speak up. Let your friend know that this isn’t the right thing to do. If you need to, find another friend who feels the same way and talk to the others together. If rumors are getting out of control and someone is being made a real victim, get a counselor or teacher involved.

**Respect others’ privacy** If you don’t want other people talking about the personal things in your life, don’t do it to others. When you hear personal information about a classmate or friend, try to keep it to yourself, and don’t worry about whether it’s true or not. If you respect people’s privacy, they’ll be more likely to do the same for you.

**Get the facts** Most of the time, you should try to ignore gossip and rumors. But if you hear a rumor about something important, and it doesn’t sound too crazy or far-fetched, ask a teacher, guardian, or
parent what they think. If it’s a modern legend that you find interesting, you can try searching on the Web to see if it’s been proven fake or not. But remember not to believe everything you read, even on the Web!
http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/friends/rumors/article6.html
Dealing with Bullying

**Bullying Is a Big Problem**

Every day thousands of teens wake up afraid to go to school. Bullying is a problem that affects millions of students, and it has everyone worried, not just the kids on its receiving end. Yet because parents, teachers, and other adults don't always see it, they may not understand how extreme bullying can get.

Bullying is when a person is picked on over and over again by an individual or group with more power, either in terms of physical strength or social standing.

Two of the main reasons people are bullied are because of appearance and social status. Bullies pick on the people they think don't fit in, maybe because of how they look, how they act (for example, kids who are shy and withdrawn), their race or religion, or because the bullies think their target may be gay or lesbian.

Some bullies attack their targets physically, which can mean anything from shoving or tripping to punching or hitting, or even sexual assault. Others use psychological control or verbal insults to put themselves in charge. For example, people in popular groups or cliques often bully people they categorize as different by excluding them or gossiping about them (psychological bullying). They may also taunt or tease their targets (verbal bullying).

Verbal bullying can also involve sending cruel instant or email messages or even posting insults about a person on a website — practices that are known as cyberbullying.

**How Does Bullying Make People Feel?**

One of the most painful aspects of bullying is that it is relentless. Most people can take one episode of teasing or name calling or being shunned at the mall. However, when it goes on and on, bullying can put a person in a state of constant fear.

Guys and girls who are bullied may find their schoolwork and health suffering. Amber began having stomach pains and diarrhea and was diagnosed with a digestive condition called irritable bowel syndrome as a result of the stress that came from being bullied throughout ninth grade. Mafooz spent his afternoons hungry and unable to concentrate in class because he was too afraid to go to the school cafeteria at lunchtime.
Studies show that people who are abused by their peers are at risk for mental health problems, such as low self-esteem, stress, depression, or anxiety. They may also think about suicide more. Bullies are at risk for problems, too. Bullying is violence, and it often leads to more violent behavior as the bully grows up. It's estimated that 1 out of 4 elementary-school bullies will have a criminal record by the time they are 30. Some teen bullies end up being rejected by their peers and lose friendships as they grow older. Bullies may also fail in school and not have the career or relationship success that other people enjoy.

Who Bullies?
Both guys and girls can be bullies. Bullies may be outgoing and aggressive. Or a bully can appear reserved on the surface, but may try to manipulate people in subtle, deceptive ways, like anonymously starting a damaging rumor just to see what happens. Many bullies share some common characteristics. They like to dominate others and are generally focused on themselves. They often have poor social skills and poor social judgment. Sometimes they have no feelings of empathy or caring toward other people. Although most bullies think they're hot stuff and have the right to push people around, others are actually insecure. They put other people down to make themselves feel more interesting or powerful. And some bullies act the way they do because they've been hurt by bullies in the past — maybe even a bullying figure in their own family, like a parent or other adult. Some bullies actually have personality disorders that don't allow them to understand normal social emotions like guilt, empathy, compassion, or remorse. These people need help from a mental health professional like a psychiatrist or psychologist.

What Can You Do?
For younger kids, the best way to solve a bullying problem is to tell a trusted adult. For teens, though, the tell-an-adult approach depends on the bullying situation. One situation in which it is vital to report bullying is if it threatens to lead to physical danger and harm. Numerous high-school students have died when stalking, threats, and attacks went unreported and the silence gave the bully license to become more and more violent.
Sometimes the victim of repeated bullying cannot control the need for revenge and the situation becomes dangerous for everyone.

Adults in positions of authority — parents, teachers, or coaches — can often find ways to resolve dangerous bullying problems without the bully ever learning how they found out about it. If you're in a bullying situation that you think may escalate into physical violence, try to avoid being alone (and if you have a friend in this situation, spend as much time together as you can). Try to remain part of a group by walking home at the same time as other people or by sticking close to friends or classmates during the times that the bullying takes place.

**Bullying Survival Tips**

Here are some things you can do to combat psychological and verbal bullying. They're also good tips to share with a friend as a way to show your support:

- **Ignore the bully and walk away.** It's definitely not a coward's response — sometimes it can be harder than losing your temper. Bullies thrive on the reaction they get, and if you walk away or ignore hurtful emails or instant messages, you're telling the bully that you just don't care. Sooner or later the bully will probably get bored with trying to bother you. Walk tall and hold your head high. Using this type of body language sends a message that you're not vulnerable.

- **Hold the anger.** Who doesn't want to get really upset with a bully? But that's exactly the response he or she is trying to get. Bullies want to know they have control over your emotions. If you're in a situation where you have to deal with a bully and you can't walk away with poise, use humor — it can throw the bully off guard. Work out your anger in another way, such as through exercise or writing it down (make sure you tear up any letters or notes you write in anger).

- **Don't get physical.** However you choose to deal with a bully, don't use physical force (like kicking, hitting, or pushing). Not only are you showing your anger, you can never be sure what the bully will do in response. You are more likely to be hurt and get in to trouble if you use violence against a bully. You can stand up for yourself in other ways, such as gaining control of the situation by walking away or by being assertive in your actions. Some adults believe that bullying is a part of growing up (even that it is character building) and that hitting back is the only way to tackle the problem. But that's not the case. Aggressive responses tend to lead to more violence and more bullying for the victims.
Practice confidence. Practice ways to respond to the bully verbally or through your behavior. Practice feeling good about yourself (even if you have to fake it at first).

Take charge of your life. You can't control other people's actions, but you can stay true to yourself. Think about ways to feel your best — and your strongest — so that other kids may give up the teasing. Exercise is one way to feel strong and powerful. (It's a great mood lifter, too!) Learn a martial art or take a class like yoga. Another way to gain confidence is to hone your skills in something like chess, art, music, computers, or writing. Joining a class, club, or gym is a great way to make new friends and feel great about yourself. The confidence you gain will help you ignore the mean kids.

Talk about it. It may help to talk to a guidance counselor, teacher, or friend — anyone who can give you the support you need. Talking can be a good outlet for the fears and frustrations that can build when you're being bullied.

Find your (true) friends. If you've been bullied with rumors or gossip, all of the above tips (especially ignoring and not reacting) can apply. But take it one step further to help ease feelings of hurt and isolation. Find one or two true friends and confide how the gossip has hurt your feelings. Set the record straight by telling your friends quietly and confidently what's true and not true about you. Hearing a friend say, "I know the rumor's not true. I didn't pay attention to it," can help you realize that most of the time people see gossip for what it is — petty, rude, and immature.

What If You're the Bully?
All of us have to deal with a lot of difficult situations and emotions. For some people, when they're feeling stressed, angry, or frustrated, picking on someone else can be a quick escape — it takes the attention away from them and their problems. Some bullies learn from firsthand experience. Perhaps name-calling, putdowns, or physical force are the norms in their families. Whatever the reason, though, it's no excuse for being the bully.

If you find it hard to resist the temptation to bully, you might want to talk with someone you look up to. Try to think about how others feel when you tease or hurt them. If you have trouble figuring this out (many people who bully do), you might ask someone else to help you think of the other person's side.

Bullying behavior backfires and makes everyone feel miserable — even the bullies. People might feel intimidated by bullies, but they don't respect them. If you would rather that people see your strength
and character — even look up to you as a leader — find a way to use your power for something positive rather than to put others down.

Do you really want people to think of you as unkind, abusive, and mean? It's never too late to change, although changing a pattern of bullying might seem difficult at first. Ask an adult you respect for some mentoring or coaching on how you could change.

**Steps to Stop Bullying in Schools**

If the environment at your school supports bullying, working to change it can help. For example, there may be areas where bullies harass people, such as in stairwells or courtyards that are unobserved by staff. Because a lot of bullying takes part in the presence of peers (the bully wants to be recognized and feel powerful, after all), enlisting the help of friends or a group is a good way to change the culture and stand up to bullies.

You can try to talk to the bully. If you don't feel comfortable in a face-to-face discussion, leave a note in the bully's locker. Try to point out that his or her behavior is serious and harmful. This can work well in group situations, such as if you notice that a member of your group has started to pick on or shun another member.

Most people hesitate to speak out because it can be hard. It takes confidence to stand up to a bully — especially if he or she is one of the established group leaders. But chances are the other students witnessing the bullying behavior feel as uncomfortable as you do. They may just not be speaking up. Perhaps they feel that they're not popular enough to take a stand or worry that they're vulnerable and the bully will turn on them. Staying quiet (even though they don't like the bully's behavior) is a way to distance themselves from the person who is the target.

When a group of people keeps quiet like this, the bully's reach is extending beyond just one person. He or she is managing to intimidate lots of people. But when one person speaks out against a bully, the reverse happens. It gives others license to add their support and take a stand, too.

Another way to combat bullying is to join your school's anti-violence program or, if your school doesn't have one, to start one of your own. [http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/problems/bullies.html](http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/problems/bullies.html)
School Bullying and Teen Bullying Statistics

**What is school bullying?** Bullying includes a wide variety of behaviors, but all involve a person or a group repeatedly trying to harm someone who is weaker or more vulnerable. It can involve direct attacks (such as hitting, threatening or intimidating, maliciously teasing and taunting, name-calling, making sexual remarks, and stealing or damaging belongings) or more subtle, indirect attacks (such as spreading rumors or encouraging others to reject or exclude someone).

**How common is teen bullying?** Almost 30 percent of teens in the United States (or over 5.7 million) are estimated to be involved in school bullying as either a bully, a target of teen bullying, or both. In a recent national survey of students in grades 6 to 10, 13 percent reported bullying others, 11 percent reported being the target of school bullies, and another 6 percent said they bullied others and were bullied themselves. Limited available data suggest that teen bullying is much more common among younger teens than older teens. As teens grow older, they are less likely to bully others and to be the targets of bullies. School bullying occurs more frequently among boys than girls. Teenage boys are much more likely to bully others and to be the targets of bullies. While both boys and girls say others bully them by making fun of the way they look or talk, boys are more likely to report being hit, slapped, or pushed. Teenage girls are more often the targets of rumors and sexual comments. While teenage boys target both boys and girls, teenage girls most often bully other girls, using more subtle and indirect forms of aggression than boys. For example, instead of physically harming others, they are more likely to spread gossip or encourage others to reject or exclude another girl.

**How does school bullying affect teens who are the targets of bullies?** Teen bullying can lead teenagers to feel tense, anxious, and afraid. It can affect their concentration in school, and can lead them to avoid school in some cases. If teen bullying continues for some time, it can begin to affect teens’ self-esteem and feelings of self-worth. It also can increase their social isolation, leading them to become withdrawn and depressed, anxious and insecure. In extreme cases, bullying can be devastating for teens, with long-term consequences. Some teens feel compelled to take drastic measures, such as carrying weapons for protection or seeking violent revenge. Others, in desperation, even consider suicide. Researchers have found that years later, long after the bullying has stopped, adults who were bullied as teens have higher levels of depression and poorer self-esteem than other adults.

**What are the long-term consequences of teen bullying behavior?** Teen bullying is often a warning sign that children and teens are heading for trouble and are at risk for serious violence. Teens (particularly boys) who bully are more likely to engage in other antisocial/delinquent behavior (e.g., vandalism, shoplifting, truancy, and drug use) into adulthood. They are four times more likely than nonbullies to be convicted of crimes by age 24, with 60 percent of bullies having at least one criminal conviction.
You can change a life.

Last week I did an article on friends, and this week I would like to do the same. This is a true story of a young freshman that changed the life of a young man named Kyle.

One day, when I was a freshman in high school, I saw a kid from my class was walking home from school. His name was Kyle. It looked like he was carrying all of his books. I thought to myself, "Why would anyone bring home all his books on a Friday? He must really be a nerd." I had quite a weekend planned (parties and a football game with my friends tomorrow afternoon), so I shrugged my shoulders and went on. As I was walking, I saw a bunch of kids running toward him. They ran at him, knocking all his books out of his arms and tripping him so he landed in the dirt. His glasses went flying, and I saw them land in the grass about ten feet from him. He looked up and I saw this terrible sadness in his eyes. My heart went out to him. So, I jogged over to him and as he crawled around looking for his glasses, and I saw a tear in his eye. As I handed him his glasses, I said, "Those guys are jerks. They really should get lives." He looked at me and said, "Hey thanks!" There was a big smile on his face. It was one of those smiles that showed real gratitude. I helped him pick up his books, and asked him where he lived. As it turned out, he lived near me, so I asked him why I had never seen him before. He said he had gone to private school before now. I would have never hung out with a private school kid before. We talked all the way home, and I carried some of his books. He turned out to be a pretty cool kid. I asked him if he wanted to play a little football with my friends. He said yes. We hung out all weekend and the more I got to know Kyle, the more I liked him, and my friends thought the same of him. Monday morning came, and there was Kyle with the huge stack of books again. I stopped him and said, "Boy, you are gonna really build some serious muscles with this pile of books everyday!" He just laughed and handed me half the books. Over the next four years, Kyle and I became best friends. When we were seniors, we began to think about college. Kyle decided on Georgetown, and I was going to Duke. I knew that we would always be friends, that the miles would never be a problem. He was going to be a doctor, and I was going for business on a football scholarship. Kyle was valedictorian of our class. I teased him all the time about being a nerd. He had to prepare a speech for graduation. I was so glad it wasn't me having to get up there and speak. Graduation day, I saw Kyle. He looked great. He was one of those guys that really found himself during high school. He filled out and actually looked good in glasses. He had more dates than I had and all the girls loved him. Boy, sometimes I was jealous. Today was one of those days. I could see that he was nervous about his speech. So, I smacked him on the back and said, "Hey, big guy, you'll be great!" He looked at me with one of those looks (the really grateful one) and smiled. "Thanks," he said. As he started his speech, he cleared his throat, and began. "Graduation is a time to thank those who helped you make it through those tough years. Your parents, your teachers, your siblings, maybe a coach...but mostly your friends. I am here to tell all of you that being a friend to someone is the best gift you can give them. I am going to tell you a story." I just looked at my friend with disbelief as he told the story of the first day we met. He had planned to kill himself over the weekend. He talked of how he had cleaned out his locker so his Mom wouldn't have to do it later and was carrying his stuff home. He looked hard at me and gave me a little smile. "Thankfully, I was saved. My friend saved me from doing the unspeakable." I heard the gasp go through the crowd as this handsome, popular boy told us all about his weakest moment. I saw his Mom and dad looking at me and smiling that same grateful smile. Not until that moment did I realize its depth. Never underestimate the power of your actions. With one small gesture you can change a person's life.