

SAFE SCHOOLS
CYBERBULLYING
RESOURCE

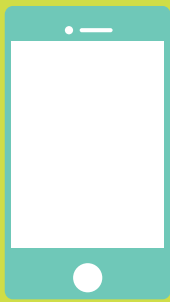
A decorative graphic consisting of a pattern of teal-colored triangles of various shades, arranged in a grid-like fashion that curves upwards from the bottom left towards the top right, creating a sense of movement and depth.

DEFINITION

Cyberbullying

According to the Ministry of Education:

Bullying is typically a form of repeated and aggressive behaviour directed at an individual or individuals that is intended to cause (or should be known to cause) fear and distress and/or harm to another person's body, feelings, self-esteem, or reputation.



Youth and Technology

Most children and youth are very adept at learning new technology and easily use electronic communication to share ideas, complete projects, follow the news, build friendships and form large social networks. It is important to remember that using and learning new technologies is an integral part of their development. Many youth turn to social media to form and experiment with their own digital identities. Many online sites and social media help them discover new interests and seek answers and support for issues they may face. However, when this powerful tool is misused, it can create fear, humiliation and isolation.

Characteristics of Cyberbullying:

- Constant, any time of day
- Hard to escape
- Anonymous
- Instantaneous
- Mass exposure
- Permanence in cyber space

Examples of Cyberbullying:

- **Cyber-stalking** – repeatedly sending threatening or intimidating emails or texts
- **Denigration** - posting derogatory information or embarrassing photos, spreading lies or hurtful rumours
- **Flaming** - using vulgar language to harass or verbally attack someone online
- **Impersonation** - stealing passwords, and altering someone's personal information to degrade or negatively misrepresent them
- **Outing** - sharing someone's private or secret information online and without permission
- **Sexual Solicitation** or exploitation of someone using social media

Cyberbullying and Mental Health

The impact of cyberbullying can be detrimental to psychological health and wellbeing. As perpetrators of bullying have turned to technology to exert their power, victims of cyberbullying have suffered tremendous and persistent abuse. Victims may experience feeling:

- unsafe at school and at home
- helpless
- excluded
- isolated
- lonely
- withdrawn
- low self-esteem

Victims of cyberbullying may also see negative effects on academic achievement and in some cases may fail in school because of their suffering. Furthermore, such constant negative feelings may even lead to more serious mental health concerns including:

- anxiety
- depression
- psychosomatic symptoms (ie. headaches, abdominal pain)
- reliance on drugs or alcohol to cope
- suicidal ideation

Cyberbullies are also at risk for social and emotional concerns. They too may face depression and suicidal ideation and feel that they lack social support. Bullies may engage in other maladaptive behaviours such as illegal conduct, and they may also resort to drugs and alcohol to cope with their own struggles.

Cyberbullying and the Law

Cyberbullying is not a joke. It causes physical and emotional suffering that can last for a long time. Headaches, stomach aches, depression, loneliness and isolation are a few of the ways it hurts people. In some cases, the relentless torture and suffering associated with cyberbullying has led kids to taking their own lives.

There are now both civil laws and criminal laws in Canada that address various forms of cyberbullying.

Here are examples of how cyberbullying behaviour could lead to serious consequences under our Civil Laws:

- **Distribution of Intimate Images:** When someone takes, and/or shares an intimate photo of another person. If the person photographed is under the legal age, those who share the photo can be charged with distribution of child pornography. This can lead to serious legal repercussions, as well as school suspension and expulsion.
- **Defamation:** When someone damages another person's reputation by publicizing hurtful or slanderous lies about him/her. A person can be sued for defamation or for libel.
- **Creating an unsafe environment:** Students can now be suspended or expelled if their online comments are making other students feel unsafe at school or or cause them to feel too afraid to come.

Here are some examples of how cyberbullying behavior could lead to serious consequences under Canada's Criminal Laws and are considered crimes.

- **Harassment:** When a person repeatedly frightens another person and makes them feel unsafe. This threatening behaviour is very serious and can result in up to 10 years in prison.
- **Defamatory Libel:** When a person makes statements that seriously damage another person's reputation, most often against a person in authority. This behaviour can result in five years in prison.

Immediate strategies for preventing cyberbullying:



1. Familiarize yourself with different sites and apps and what they are used for.

2. Show your students you are “in the loop” by using social media yourself and by understanding its benefits.

3. Look for opportunities to explain the potential social consequences of having a personal profile and encourage students to reflect on themselves.

4. Recommend to parents the privacy setting guides available with most apps, and then reinforce their importance to your students.

5. Talk with your class about passwords and their importance. Encourage them to create different passwords for different sites and never share their passwords with friends.

6. Emphasize the use of a password to lock all devices. It protects them if their devices get into the wrong hands.

7. If a student receives a mean, hurtful message they should not respond or retaliate, but they should ask for help from an adult to save and record the content before deleting it.

8. Encourage parents to help their child block the person from their child’s account to prevent further contact.

Teaching Positive Digital Citizenship:

Help children understand the importance of their online identities. Explain that the internet is a space to be creative and to portray yourself positively. Have them consider their online identities by asking:

What does your profile picture say about you?

Does the way you display yourself on social media apps show that you have interests or hobbies?

Is the way you depict yourself online an accurate depiction of you? How does your "online you" differ from your "real life you"?

What might someone learn from your online you that they might not notice when meeting you? (For example: A youth might use social media to show their musical talents, post music videos, or promote their band. Their online persona is obviously musical which might not be visible in real life.)

Are you happy with the way you appear online?

Do you have friends online that you don't have in real life? (This is not always dangerous. Perhaps they contribute to a blog/forum with other international users.)

Model upstanding behavior. Demonstrate your knowledge of social media, and model online behaviour that is positive and productive. Show your students/children the ways in which you use social technologies to benefit you. For example: Contributing to forums or blogs, Commenting on online publications.

Have your children/students show you how to use social media apps you are unfamiliar with. They might be eager to teach you something they know so much about.

**For more information on
Cyberbullying and other safe
school issues, visit:**

**www.CanadianSafeSchools.com
[@CndnSafeSchools](https://twitter.com/CndnSafeSchools)**

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