



## LESSON PLAN

<b>Level:</b>	Grades 7 to 8
<b>About the Author:</b>	Emmanuelle Erny-Newton, Media Education Specialist, MediaSmarts
<b>Duration:</b>	One hour per activity

# Understanding Cyberbullying – Virtual vs. Physical Worlds

## Overview

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In this three-hour lesson, students explore the concept of cyberbullying and learn how the attributes associated with online communication may fuel inappropriate or bullying behaviour. Connections between other contributing factors to bullying – online and offline – are also reinforced as students develop an understanding of the role played by bystanders and the ways in which our own responses may fuel or stop this kind of behaviour. As a class, students will establish a class “code of (N)ethics” for online conduct.

## Learning Outcomes

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Students will demonstrate:

- understanding of how online communication differs from face-to-face conversation
- awareness of how the distinct attributes of online communication may contribute to inappropriate or bullying behaviour
- recognition of cyberbullying behaviour
- understanding of the crucial role played by bystanders, including themselves, in fuelling or stopping bullying behaviour – online and offline
- awareness of the impact of cyberbullying on targeted individuals
- knowledge of appropriate action to take when cyberbullying occurs
- awareness of rules for “good Netizenship”

## Preparation and Materials

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- Read the *Cyberbullying Backgrounder*
- Read the *A Word About (N)ethics* backgrounder
- Distribute to parents or caregivers (via email or hand delivery by students) the *Parents’ Guide to Cyberbullying* backgrounder
- Prepare a scenario for the “argument” between two student volunteers (see Activity Two)
- Prepare an overhead of *Conversation Thread*
- Prepare an overhead of *Students Speak Out Against Cyberbullying*
- Photocopy the *If I Am a Target of Cyberbullying...* handout



## Preamble

Generally, students perceive school as an environment that is separate and distinct from their home environment – a perception that can act as a barrier to the transfer and application of knowledge. In the case of cyberbullying, which often occurs in the home, this is a critical issue: what is the point of developing techniques at school if students do not apply them at home? In response to this problem, the activities in this lesson have been designed to bridge both environments by encouraging students to picture themselves in their home and personal virtual spaces.

## Procedure

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### Activity One: Perceptual Benchmarks

This first activity introduces the concept of cyberbullying by encouraging students to consider the differences between direct, face-to-face communication and communication using technology. It also encourages them to consider how these distinctions might contribute to bullying behaviour.

Before beginning this class, write the following quote on the board:

*When people use technology, there is a lack of tangible feedback about the consequences of actions on others.*

Nancy Willard, 2000

### Class Discussion

Explain that you are going to be looking at cyberbullying. Ask students whether they can tell you what cyberbullying is. Record the main points on the board.

Ask students the following questions:

- Does anyone here use the Internet to communicate with people?
- How do you usually do this? (*Examples may include using chat rooms, instant messaging, and social networking sites such as Facebook.*)
- When you are communicating online, do you “chat” only with people you know offline? (*If students have friends they chat with whom they know only on the Internet, ask them to write their names on a sheet of paper.*)
- Do you ever try to picture these friends in your mind?
- Have you ever been surprised at how they have reacted to comments that you’ve made during an online conversation? (*Instruct students to write their responses next to their virtual friends’ names on the sheet of paper.*)
- What caused this miscommunication? (*Have students record their responses to this question as well.*)
- Has this ever happened while you have been chatting online with friends who you know from school?

Review the quote by Nancy Willard with students. Ask them:

- What is she saying in this quote?
- What kind of “tangible feedback” do you get in a face-to-face conversation that you don’t get when you’re talking to someone online?



- Have you ever accidentally said something online that offended someone? Have you made a comment meaning to be funny, and had it backfire?

Explain that if we had to put a general label on the challenge outlined in Nancy Willard’s quote, it would be “You Can’t See Them.” Not being able to see the person you are talking to is one aspect of using technology to communicate.

A second quote draws attention to another issue. Write this sentence on the board:

*On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog.*

(If you wish to make an overhead, a copy of the cartoon from which this quote is taken can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Internet\\_dog.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Internet_dog.jpg).)

Ask students:

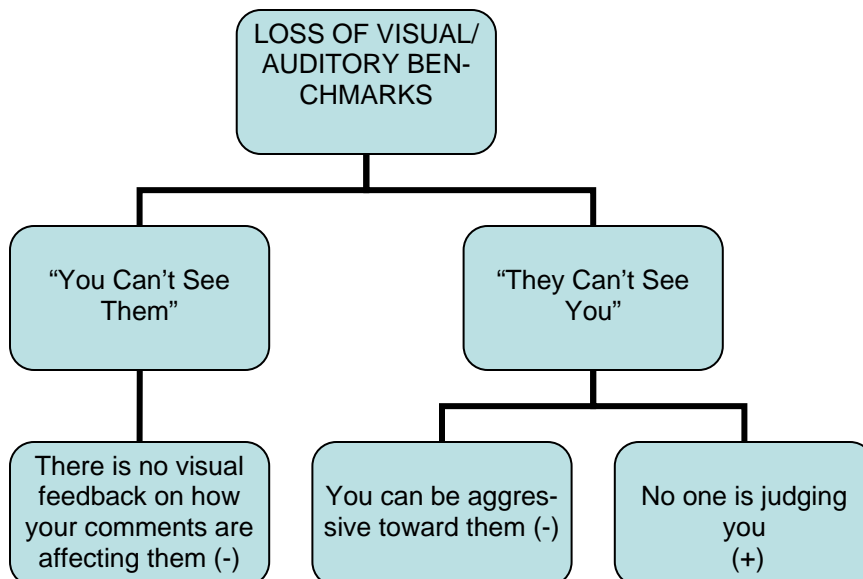
- What is the meaning of this quote?
- How would we label this aspect of using technology to communicate? (*They Can’t See You.*)
- Are there times when not being seen by the person you’re talking to might be a good thing?

### Group Exercise

Divide the class into small groups and ask students to do the following:

- Think about these two aspects of communicating using technology like the Internet: “You Can’t See Them” and “They Can’t See You.” List all of your ideas about positive and negative things that relate to each of these. Provide, where possible, concrete examples from your own online experiences.
- Indicate whether each point on your list is positive (+) or negative (-).

Once students have discussed and recorded their responses, ask a member of the group to share the group’s responses with the class. As students do this, record their thoughts and examples on the board, grouping them in a similar manner to that shown in the diagram below.



Have students consider the more negative implications. Ask them what can be done to avoid the negative side of online communication.

Encourage students to find concrete and positive ways to address the lack of visual and auditory benchmarks by developing a series of guidelines or rules. (For example, relating to “They Can’t See You”, students might suggest *avoiding being aggressive or threatening toward others – i.e., do not send anonymous messages; before sending an angry message, sleep on it.*)

For “You Can’t See Them,” encourage students to apply empathy in their online interactions and to anticipate the impact of what they say or do on the person they are communicating with. Would they like to receive a similar message or be treated in the same way?

Record the rules students have developed. This will form the basis for a class code of (N)ethics which they can build upon as they go through various activities in this lesson.

### “Think Before You Click” Self-Test

To teach students to quickly decide whether something they are about to do online is a good or a bad idea, ask each student to:

- Think of two people:
  - someone famous he or she admires for his or her courage, and
  - an adult in her or his life who is trusted and respected.
- Record these two names in a specific place in their agenda. Explain that as of today, these two people will be their “virtual conscience.” Every time they intend to do something online which they’re not sure is right, they will ask themselves: “What would these people think about this?”

### Activity Two: Bystanders Taking Action

As we saw in the first activity, everyone makes mistakes, and anyone can sometimes behave in an inappropriate manner online by impulsively saying things that are rude or hurtful – this is called **flaming**. But flaming is different from cyberbullying, which is based on power relationships and involves someone using the Internet or a cell phone to intimidate and harass others on purpose.

### Role-Playing

For this activity, ask for two student volunteers, one to play the role of a perpetrator and the other to act as the perpetrator’s target. The rest of the class will assume the role of bystanders who are at their home computer instant messaging their friends.

Have the student volunteers act out the following scenario (or something like it):

- **Perpetrator:** “What’s up with the T-shirt? Did you find it at the dump?”
- **Target:** “No! I happen to like this T-shirt. It’s sick!”



The target sits at the front of the class reading a book, while the “bully” goes home (to his or her desk), turns on an imaginary computer and writes a message on a piece of paper which is then passed to a member of the class who is sitting nearby. The message says “(Name of target) is so lame! Pass it on!” *(Arrange to have the first receiver of the message in on the scenario, so that she or he can set the scene by silently reading the message and then smirking while passing it on to another student. If a student chooses not to pass the message on, have the student who passed it to him/her give it to someone else. Repeat this process until the message has been passed to all the students.)*

### Class Discussion

Once the message has gone around the class, ask students the following questions:

- How many people were involved in this incident? *(The point to be made is that this incident was not just between two people: the whole class was involved. This exercise is intended to dramatically introduce the idea of bystanders’ responsibility.)*
- How did bystanders react? *(Reactions might include laughing, obeying the perpetrator by passing on the message, and making comments.)*
- How else could bystanders have reacted?
- Did anyone refuse to pass on the message? Did anyone consider not passing it on? Why might classmates pass it on even if they don’t think it’s a nice thing to do?
- What effects can cyberbullying have on people who are targeted? *(All bullying has negative consequences. Answers might include increased anxiety, embarrassment, not wanting to go to school, not wanting to use the computer, stress, sadness, withdrawal, and inability to concentrate or enjoy activities.)*
- Which do you think is more hurtful: someone saying something mean about a person, or someone forwarding a cruel message to people online? *(Both are extremely hurtful, but once something has been sent online, there is no taking it back. Unlike a verbal message, a written message is permanent and can reach many more people, making it more powerful.)*

Explain that whether bystanders receive mean-spirited instant messages about someone on their home computer or watch a yelling match in a schoolyard, they have a lot of power when it comes to encouraging or stopping bullying behaviour.

Display the *Students Speak Out Against Cyberbullying* overhead, and share the following two real-life examples with students:

- In September 2007, at a high school in Cambridge, Nova Scotia, a new Grade 9 student was bullied because he wore a pink polo shirt on the first day of school. When two Grade 12 students heard what had happened, they decided to do something about it. They went to a discount store, bought 50 pink T-shirts, and emailed their classmates requesting them to wear one of the T-shirts in support of the Grade 9 student.
- Word got around, and instead of just fifty students, hundreds showed up the next day wearing pink clothes. When the bullied student arrived at school, he was surrounded by a sea of pink. According to students, there “hasn’t been a peep” from the bullies since then, and the two Grade 12 students who decided to take a stand – David Shepherd and Travis Price – have been getting calls and emails from around the world and have inspired “pink days” at other schools.



- A few years ago in Manitoba, when a student posted an online poll asking other students to vote on the “ugliest kid” at their school, students stopped the poll from going forward. They responded instead with a slew of messages condemning the poll as “hurtful and mean,” and asking how the student who set it up would feel if *his* name appeared on it.

Ask students whether they have any other positive stories to share. After discussion, have them add rules for bystanders to the class code of (N)ethics.

### Activity Three: Am I an Active or a Passive Target?

During this activity, students assume the roles of targets to learn the impact of cyberbullying first-hand. The purpose of the activity is to help them develop psychological resistance strategies, by distinguishing between two possible responses to cyberbullying.

### Class Discussion

Point out to students that you have been referring to victims of bullying as “targets,” not “victims.” Ask them why you might have made this distinction. (*The term target is used because the word “victim” implies powerlessness and passivity, whereas the term “target” does not imply anything about that person’s ability to respond. Individuals who are targeted by bullies can, with support, take action.*)

Tell students that a **passive** response (where the victim deletes or ignores an aggressive message) is an attempt – usually unsuccessful – to avoid cyberbullying by hoping it will just “go away.” An **active** response, on the other hand, tackles the situation in a way that may be more successful in leading toward a more socially acceptable and definitive resolution.

Instruct students to form small groups. Allocate each group as either “anonymous” or “non-anonymous.”

Once the groups have been struck and allocated, have students return to their seats to work independently on the first part of the exercise.

When students are seated, take them through the following visualization exercise:

*Picture yourselves going home after school. Think of the streets, the sidewalks, the trees that you pass. Picture yourself coming through the front door, grabbing a snack and sitting down at your computer. When you log on to your favourite chat room, this conversation thread, which is about you, is on your screen (display the Conversation Thread overhead).*

Tell students in the “anonymous” groups that they don’t know who sent the message. Tell students in the “non-anonymous” groups that the message is signed by another student at their school.

Distribute the handout *If I Am a Target of Cyberbullying...* and instruct students to circle the emoticon that would most closely illustrate their frame of mind.

Ask the following questions:

- What would you do then? (*Answers might include turn off the computer, delete the message, talk to a family member or someone else who is at home, or phone a friend to talk about it.*)



- The next day at school, what would you do? How would you feel?

In small groups, have students write all their ideas and reactions in the first two columns of the handout – even if they don't appear to be the "best" way to respond.

### Pooling of views

Ask for a student volunteer to record group responses on the board.

(The main difference between the "anonymous" and "non-anonymous" groups will most likely be the target's counterattack where the perpetrator is known.)

Ask students the following:

- Did you react differently based on whether or not the message was anonymous? Why might we respond differently? (*Point out that although the message appears to be "anonymous", it is possible for Internet service providers to find out who sent it by using the IP address of the source computer if necessary.*)
- If you ignore cyberbullying, do you think it might just go away? Why or why not?

Ask students to share their responses to the cyberbullying scenario. For each response recorded on the board, ask students to decide whether this is consistent with an active or passive target, filling in the last column of the table in the handout.

Present the following information to the class:

- **Key point:** Anyone can, at any given time, become a target – you are not responsible for this; you can't please everyone. But this situation must never be tolerated: you must react to bullying in a *proactive way* – one that will lead to a resolution. In other words, to resolve the cyberbullying situation, you need to address it, but not get involved in further exchanges with the bully because that may escalate the situation.

Generally, a four-step **STOP** process is recommended to actively deal with and stop bullying. Review the following with students:

- **STOP**—immediately leave the online environment or activity where bullying is going on.
- **BLOCK** emails or instant messages received from bullies. NEVER RESPOND.
- **RECORD** all harassing messages and send them to your Internet provider (*Yahoo, Hotmail, etc.*). Most providers have policies about users harassing people on their server.
- **TALK** to a trusted adult about the cyberbullying; alert the police when bullying involves physical threats.

### Closure

Ask students:

- Who are the people you could talk to about cyberbullying?
- Would the same process work for physical bullying?







Review with students the class code of (N)ethics they have developed during the course of this lesson. See if there is anything they would like to add.

### **Extension Activity**

If there are younger students at your school or at a school nearby, have groups of students develop presentations for younger grades on ethical online behaviour and how to deal with cyberbullying.



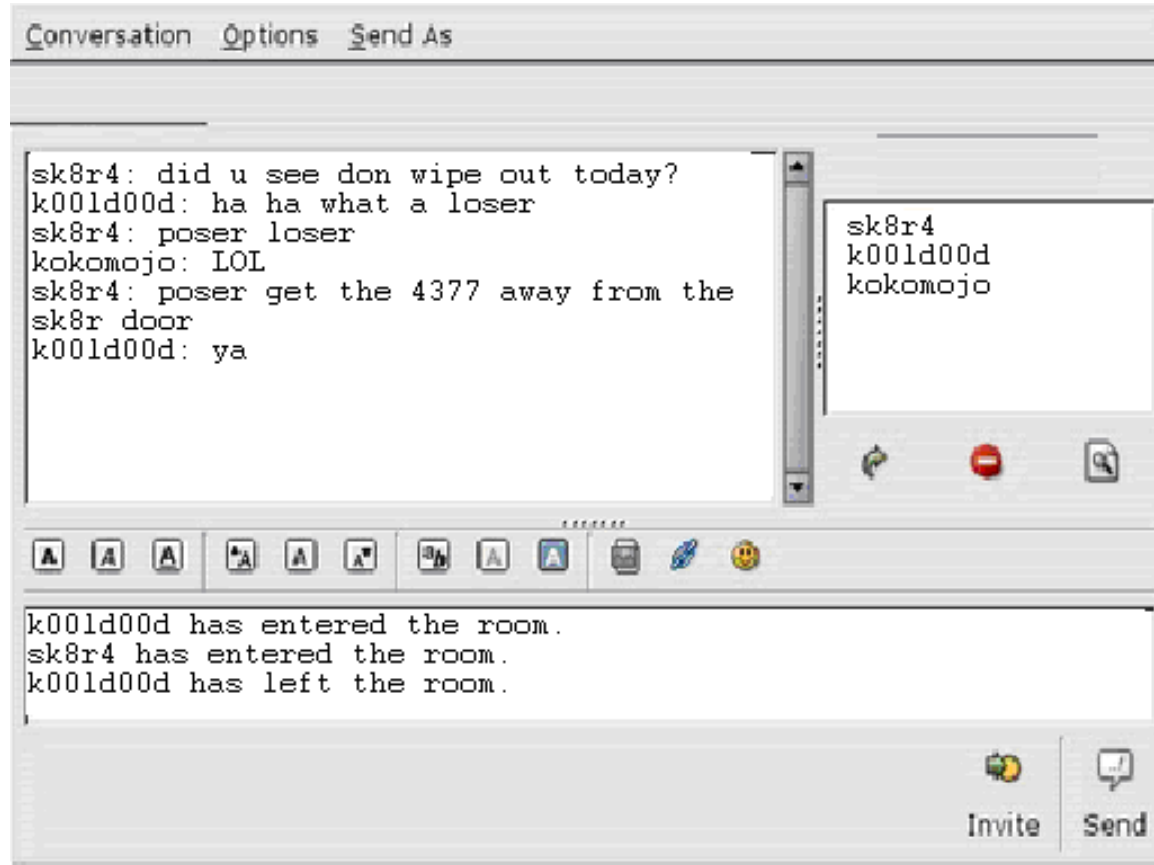
## Students Speak Out Against Cyberbullying

Author	Comment
<p>The protical children of the corn Veteran Posts: 110 (6/18/01 5:49:38 pm)</p>	<p> Who is ugliest kid in massey??</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Josh McCroary</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Jarrod Evanyshyn</p> <p><input type="button" value="Vote"/> Show results</p>
<p>devilonyourshoulder   Veteran Posts: 101 (6/18/01 6:03:47 pm)</p>	<p>Re: Who is ugliest kid in massey??</p> <p>who are you to say things like that about people??? its so hurtful and mean! how would you feel if people went around saying how ugly you were and that you were a loser? you wouldn't feel too great thats for sure.</p>
<p>Salty Balls <input type="checkbox"/> Mad Poster Posts: 334 (6/18/01 6:16:31 pm)</p> 	<p>Re: Who is ugliest kid in massey??</p> <p>Just because you call yourself ugly, doesn't make this right. Besides, there's no reason to hold such a low opinion in yourself, no matter how much you believe it, not everything is about appearance. Remeber when you were dealing with some tough problems, all these people tried to help you, and you seemed pretty thankful of that, but to put people down now, when you know what its like to feel hurt. It doesn't make any sense. I hope you come to your senses, I really do, you seem like a good person who just hit some hard times, I hope it gets better for ya real soon.</p>











## Conversation Thread

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## If I Am a Target of Cyberbullying ...

These emoticons closely illustrate my state of mind:

							
Annoyed	Angry	Not sure	Crying	Sad	Surprised	Happy	Don't care!

I will turn off the computer: **YES / NO**

I will delete the message: **YES / NO**

Who will I talk to?	What will I say? <i>(What tone will you use? Add emoticon)</i>	Active or passive target?



## A Word About (N)ethics

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In the course of the activities in this lesson, students will develop rules of online conduct. These rules can be grouped under a term such as “(N)ethics” or “Golden Rules.” They share the goal of avoiding, dealing with and speaking out against cyberbullying.

Here is a relatively complete list that can be adapted to suit the students’ age level:

1. Respect the private lives of other people online; don’t spread rumours, don’t share information about or photos of someone without getting his or her permission.
2. Respect other people’s virtual space: don’t go into someone else’s files or computer.
3. In the online world, just like the offline world, never try to exclude other people.
4. Don’t try to turn people against one another; making someone else be a bully is no different from being a bully yourself.
5. Follow the same values in the virtual world as in the physical world: never write to anyone something you wouldn’t be willing to say face-to-face. If you feel an urge to write something angry, sleep on it.
6. If you witness cyberbullying:
7. Refuse to do it if someone asks you to pass on an insulting or embarrassing message, photo or video.
8. Take action against the perpetrator: react when your friends get involved in cyberbullying, and speak up every time you witness online harassment. Most young people are more sensitive to criticism from their peers than from their parents.

If you are a target of cyberbullying:

9. **Stop:** immediately leave the online environment or activity where the bullying is happening (chat room, newsgroup, game, IM, etc.)
10. **Block** all emails or instant messages from the perpetrator, and never reply.
11. **Record** all harassing messages and forward them to your Internet Service Provider. Most ISPs have policies against harassing messages
12. **Talk:** tell a trusted adult, such as a parent or teacher.



## Cyberbullying Backgrounder

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### What is Bullying?

Bullying is a specific relationship characterized by recurrent abuse of power by a person (or group) over another person. Bullying is expressed differently depending on the age of the abuser.<sup>1</sup>

### What is Cyberbullying?

As its name implies, cyberbullying is bullying through an electronic medium such as a computer or cell phone.

### Roles

For the purposes of this document, those who are involved in cyberbullying are categorized as perpetrators, targets and bystanders.

**Perpetrators:** Although cyberbullying might appear to be simply another means used by “traditional” bullies to reach their target, the virtual attributes of the Internet have fostered a new type of bully: someone who capitalizes on online anonymity to initiate bullying behaviour.

Believing themselves to be anonymous, some young people feel free to commit acts online that they would never carry out in person. In addition, the frequency with which adolescents share online passwords provides perpetrators, when caught, with the ready excuse that someone else may have assumed their identity to send bullying messages.

In addition to anonymity, the absence of visual and auditory feedback online can also fuel hurtful behaviour. According to Nancy Willard, from the Responsible Netizen Institute, this type of technology can affect students’ ethical behaviour because they are not fully aware of the impact of their actions on others. This lack of feedback reduces feelings of empathy or remorse. “When people use technology, there is a lack of tangible feedback about the consequences of actions on others”.<sup>2</sup>

As such, students may write things online that they would never say in person because they feel removed from their own actions and from the person at the receiving end. As a student who participated in focus testing for MediaSmarts’ *Young Canadians in a Wired World* research commented:

*[With] the Internet, you can really get away with a lot more because I don't think a lot of people would have enough confidence to walk up to someone and be like, "I hate you, you're ugly." But over the Internet you don't really see their face or they don't see yours and you don't have to look in their eyes and see they're hurt.*

**Targets:** In this lesson series the term “target” is used instead of “victim.” The term “victim” implies powerlessness and passivity, whereas “target” is considered to be more neutral.

Although there is no physical violence, cyberbullying may be more frightening to targets because there are, potentially, an unlimited number of witnesses. When perpetrators are anonymous, targets don’t know which peers to watch out for or respond to—leading to feelings of helplessness. With no one to point to, targets may be less likely to file complaints.

The targets’ situation is compounded by the reality that the home, which traditionally offers respite to bullying, is no longer safe, with cyberbullying continuing on the home computer.



**Bystanders:** This important group forms the social consensus for bullying behaviour  $\frac{3}{4}$  online and offline. In a study of 2,095 students conducted by the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto in March, 2008, 28% reported having witnessed cyberbullying. Of this percentage:

- 9% became involved in the bullying behaviour
- 32% watched but didn't participate
- 14% voiced their objection to the person doing the bullying
- 21% tried to stop the bully
- 11% left the online environment
- 7% tried to befriend the bully, and
- 7% reported the bully to someone who could help.<sup>3</sup>

In general, the longer the bullying persists, the more likely it is that the number of witnesses who are willing to join in will increase.<sup>4</sup>

### Online Methods of Cyberbullying

There are several ways that young people bully others online. They may send emails or instant messages containing insults or threats directly to a person. They may also spread hateful comments about a person to others through email, instant messaging or postings on websites and online diaries (blogs). Or they may steal passwords to email or instant messaging accounts belonging to other youth and send out threatening emails or instant messages under an assumed identity. It's not unknown for technically savvy kids to build password-protected websites to target specific students or teachers.

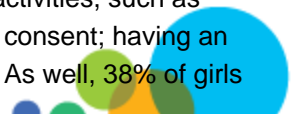
Increasing numbers of children and youth are being bullied through text messaging with cell phones. The use of cell phones is challenging the ability of adults to monitor and guide children because, unlike a computer placed in a public area of a home, school or library, mobiles are personal, private, connected—and always accessible. Kids tend to keep their phones turned on at all times, meaning that bullies can harass victims at school or even in their own bedrooms.

Built-in digital cameras in cell phones add a new dimension to the problem. In one case students used a camera-enabled cell phone to take a photo of an overweight classmate in the shower after gym. The picture was distributed throughout the school email list within minutes.

Schools are struggling to address the issue of cyberbullying among students, especially when it occurs outside of school. When real-world bullying occurs in a schoolyard or classroom, teachers are often able to intervene, but online bullying takes place off the radar screen of adults, making it difficult to detect in schools and impossible to monitor off school property.

### The Extent of the Problem

The Pew Report *Cyberbullying and Online Teens* (2007) reports that “about one third (32%) of all teenagers who use the Internet say they have been targets of a range of annoying and potentially menacing online activities, such as receiving threatening messages; having their private emails or text messages forwarded without consent; having an embarrassing picture posted without permission; or having rumours about them spread online.”<sup>5</sup> As well, 38% of girls



reported having been bullied online, compared to 26% of boys. The group reporting the highest rate of cyberbullying was girls 15 to 17 years of age, at 41%.<sup>6</sup>

In Canada, in its 2007 poll on the state of the teaching profession, Ontario's College of Teachers found 84 % of respondents reporting having been targets of cyberbullying by their students (a figure that rises to 93% for French-language teachers).

### Cyberbullying and the Law

Young people should be aware that some forms of online bullying are considered criminal acts. Under the Criminal Code of Canada, it is a crime to communicate repeatedly with someone if your communication causes them to fear for their own safety or the safety of others. It's also a crime to publish a "defamatory libel"—writing something that is designed to insult a person or is likely to injure a person's reputation by exposing him or her to hatred, contempt or ridicule.

A cyberbully may also be violating the Canadian Human Rights Act if he or she spreads hate or discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or disability.

### The Role of the School

Most bullying relationships are struck at school and, therefore, cyberbullying has a direct negative impact on the atmosphere at school or in the classroom. In her 2004 *Educator's Guide to Cyber Bullying*, Nancy Willard recommends schools develop a comprehensive approach to address cyberbullying that includes:

- engaging in participatory planning that involves current school-based programs (such as safe schools initiatives) and non-school participants – police, parents and community groups and social agencies
- conducting a needs assessment
- ensuring that an effective anti-bullying program is in place
- reviewing existing policies and procedures (update their bullying policy to include harassment perpetrated with mobile and Internet technology, and computer Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) to specifically prohibit using the Internet for bullying)
- conducting professional development
- providing parent education (organize parent education nights and workshops)
- providing student education (integrate anti-bullying and cyberbullying education into existing curriculum, so it is not another 'add on')
- evaluating the program to determine its effectiveness

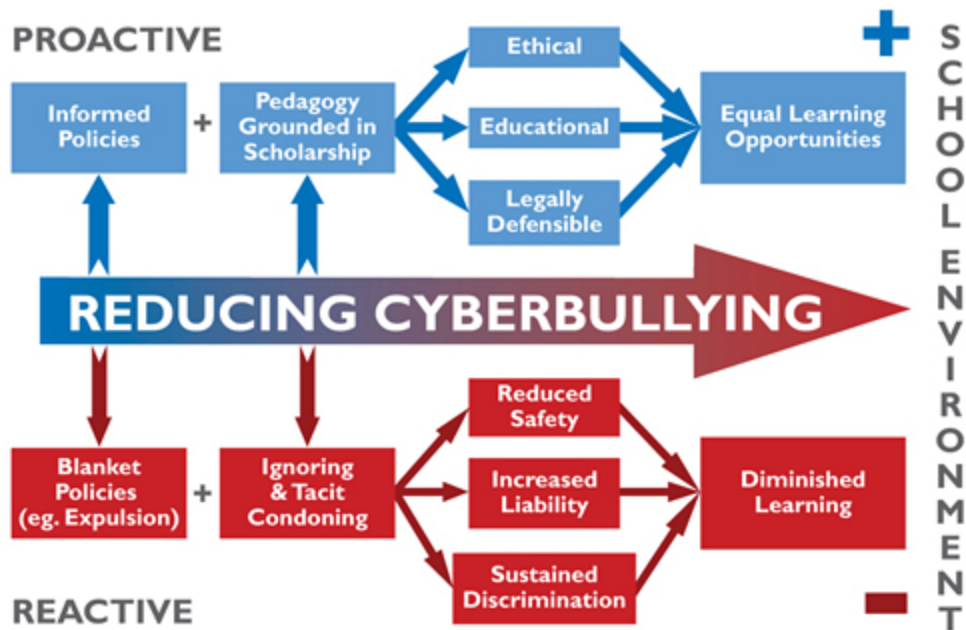
Dr. Shaheen Shariff at McGill University emphasizes that schools have a responsibility "to adapt to a rapidly evolving technological society, address emerging challenges, and guide children to become civic-minded individuals".<sup>7</sup>

According to Shariff, schools must support a preventive approach to cyberbullying in order to promote equal opportunity learning. A reactive approach (where, for example, cyberbullies are suspended) weakens learning.<sup>8</sup>



As this table illustrates, schools must take a proactive approach in order to strike a balance between freedom of expression and providing a safe learning environment where students feel safe and protected from all kinds of bullying.

### Cyberbullying School Response: Proactive and Reactive



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In the classroom, teachers can create an environment of inclusiveness in which every student is valued. Teachers should:

- examine their own attitudes and demonstrate a respectful attitude towards all students and other staff
- intervene whenever a child is being bullied – this includes speaking out if they see other teachers exhibiting aggressive or demeaning behaviour towards a student
- seek out shy, marginalized students and encourage their involvement in the classroom by promoting any special talents they have
- encourage healthy relationships by integrating strategies for discouraging bullying into classroom activities

Developing a sense of *control*—a belief in one’s ability to take charge of the controllable aspects of a situation and influence a more positive outcome—can make a difference in helping young people build resiliency toward and take control of bullying situations.<sup>9</sup> Adults can help young people deal with bullying, wherever it is encountered, by encouraging them, as a community, to develop and agree to uphold codes of conduct. Adults can also provide young people with support and tools to actively address bullying behaviour.

The Canadian Federation of Teachers has developed a *CyberTips* guide for teachers that can be viewed or downloaded at: [http://www.ctf-fce.ca/publications/pd\\_newsletter/PD2008\\_Volume7-2English\\_Article9.pdf](http://www.ctf-fce.ca/publications/pd_newsletter/PD2008_Volume7-2English_Article9.pdf).



## Helping Students Take Action

Just as students need to understand that online bullying may be a criminal act, it is also important for them to understand their own responsibilities as “Netizens” in building and contributing to positive online communities. Teachers and parents have an essential role to play in helping young people develop their own moral compasses to guide their online behaviour. The following rules can be used as a starting point to help students develop a code for ethical conduct online, to encourage positive online interactions, and to help them respond proactively if they find themselves targeted by a cyberbully.

1. Protect your privacy, and respect the privacy of others: don't give out your personal information and avoid spreading rumours or posting any information or photo on the Web without first obtaining permission from the person who provided it.
2. Respect people's virtual space: don't go digging through someone's files or computer.
3. Stay true to yourself: do not send anonymous personal messages.
4. Stay true to your values in cyberspace: never write something that you wouldn't say to someone's face. Before you decide to send someone an aggressive message, sleep on it.
5. Don't behave like a troll (someone who posts controversial messages in an online discussion with the intention of baiting other users and pitting them against each other).<sup>10</sup>

If you witness bullying online:

6. Stand up to the perpetrator: speak out every time that friends cyberbully someone and every time you witness aggressive behaviour against a person online. Criticism from friends usually carries more weight than when it comes from parents.
7. Don't be a doormat! If someone asks you to spread an offending message, photo or video about someone, refuse to do it!

If you are the target of cyberbullying, use the four-step STOP process:

8. **STOP**—immediately leave the online environment or activity where bullying is going on (chat room, forum, game, instant messenger, etc.).
9. **BLOCK** emails or instant messages received from the perpetrator. NEVER RESPOND.
10. **RECORD** all harassing messages and send them to your Internet provider (Yahoo, Hotmail, etc.). Most providers have policies about users harassing people on their server.
11. **TALK** about it to a trusted adult; alert the police when bullying involves physical threats.

1 J. Jaanen and S. Graham, eds., *Peer Harassment in School: The Plight of the Vulnerable and Victimized*. London: Guilford Press, 2001.

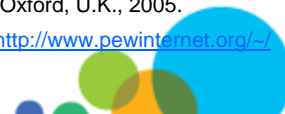
2 N. Willard, “Fostering Responsible Online Behaviour (Part 1).” For The Cybercitizen Awareness Program: *Guidance Channel Ezine*, June 2007. [www.guidancechannel.com/default.aspx?index=480](http://www.guidancechannel.com/default.aspx?index=480).

3 F. Mishna, “Cyber Bullying Report.” Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, March 2008.

4 S. Shariff and R. Gouin, “Cyberdilemmas: Gendered Hierarchies, Free Expression and Cyber-safety in Schools.” Presented at *Safety and Security in a Networked World: Balancing Cyber-Rights and Responsibilities*, Oxford Internet Institute Conference, Oxford, U.K., 2005.

5 A. Lenhart, “Data Memo: Cyberbullying and Online Teens.” Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 27, 2007. <http://www.pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2007/PIP%20Cyberbullying%20Memo.pdf.pdf>.

6 Ibid.



- 7 S. Shariff and R. Gouin (2005).
- 8 S. Shariff and L. Johnny, "Cyber-libel and cyber-bullying: Can Schools Protect Student Reputations and Free-expression in Virtual Environments?" *Education & Law Journal*, 16 (2007), pp. 307-42.
- 9 J. Pearson and D. Kordich Hall, "Reaching IN ... Reaching Out Resiliency Guidebook.." Child & Family Partnership, 2006, p. 5. <http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/documents/Guidebook%20-%20Guide2.pdf>.
- 10 When a troll attack occurs on a discussion list, the moderator will generally take action (from issuing a warning to suspending the troll's subscription).



## Parents' Guide to Cyberbullying

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### What is Bullying?

Bullying is a specific relationship characterized by recurrent abuse of power by a person (or group) over another person. Bullying is expressed differently depending on the age of the abuser.

### What is Cyberbullying?

As its name implies, cyberbullying is bullying through an electronic medium, such as a computer or cell phone.

The Internet's reach and perceived anonymity means that children who might not otherwise initiate bullying may initiate this sort of behaviour, and an unlimited number of young people may become bystanders who perpetuate the victimization as they read and forward harassing messages and/or images.

It is extremely important that young people learn how to respond to cyberbullying. Adults can help.

### How Do I Know Whether or Not my Child is a Target of Cyberbullying?

Signs that your child is being bullied online include fear of using the computer or going to school, anxiety and psychological distress, and withdrawal from friends and usual activities.

### What Should I do If my Child is Targeted?

- Report the cyberbullying to your local police. The abuser is probably breaking other laws, too.
- You can also call the tip line at the Canadian Crime Stoppers Association: 1-800-222-TIPS (8477)
- Meet with school officials if your child is being bullied by a peer at school.
- File a complaint:
  - For bullying using email or instant messaging (IM), contact the Internet Service Provider (ISP) of the perpetrator at <contact@ispname> or <abuse@ispname>. Forward offending emails or IM message logs to the ISP with your complaint.
  - For bullying material posted on a website, use the Contact Us section of the site and ask to have the material removed.
  - For bullying through a cell phone, have your service provider trace the call and contact the perpetrator's service provider.

### How Can I Prevent Cyberbullying?

As a large portion of cyberbullying occurs in the home, you must get better informed about your children's online activities. Get involved and talk to your child about behaving ethically online.

Establish rules regarding appropriate Internet use. MediaSmarts' research shows that these rules have a very positive impact on your children's online behaviour. You can consult MediaSmarts' resources on developing household Internet rules at [http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/tipsheet/TipSheet\\_FamilyOnlineRules.pdf](http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/tipsheet/TipSheet_FamilyOnlineRules.pdf).



Urge your children to come to you as soon as they feel uncomfortable or threatened online.

### **What Should I Avoid Doing if my Child is a Target of Cyberbullying?**

It can be difficult for a young person to come forward when being bullied; even to mum or dad. To foster a climate of trust, do not overreact. Do not forbid your child to use the Internet in the hope of eliminating the source of the problem: for your child, this is the equivalent of social death and will leave her or him feeling even more victimized (not to mention the fact that an extreme reaction such as this will probably cause your child to avoid confiding in you again when feeling threatened).

### **How Can I Learn More?**

As much as possible, show an interest in your child's online life: where does he or she go online? What does he or she do? What is it about these online experiences that are so absorbing? If you're in the habit of sharing your own online experiences with your child, she or he will be more likely to talk to you when having a negative experience.

If you want to better understand your child's online experience, visit MediaSmarts' BeWebAware site at: <http://www.bewebaware.ca>.

