



CANADA'S CENTRE
FOR DIGITAL AND
MEDIA LITERACY

First Do No Harm: How to be an active witness to cyberbullying

Did you know? Two-thirds of Canadian students have helped someone who was being picked on online.

When you see or hear bad things happening online, *you* have a lot of power to make things better – or worse. Sometimes it's hard to know the right thing to do, so ask yourself these questions:

Do I know the whole story? Sometimes what you're seeing may not be as clear as it looks. What looks like cyberbullying may actually be someone fighting back against a bully, and what looks like just a joke might really hurt someone's feelings. That doesn't mean you shouldn't do anything, but it does mean you need to think about what's the *best* way to help.

Am I helping, or just helping my friends? We all want to help our friends, and we count on our friends to help us. But before you take your friend's side, ask yourself if you'd do the same thing if he or she *wasn't* your friend. If you're *not* going to help someone, ask yourself if you'd do the same thing if he or she *was* your friend.

Am I making excuses for what's happening? Sometimes we come up with reasons *not* to do something that we know is right. A lot of the time those reasons are based on the *values* of the group we're in. Ask yourself if you're doing any of these:

- Minimizing it ("It's just a joke.")
- Denying it ("That wouldn't hurt my feelings, so she can't really be hurt.")
- Blaming the target ("He deserved it.")
- Avoiding it ("Nobody else is doing anything about it.")

Will this make things better or worse? There are a lot of things you can do to help someone who's being bullied, but some things work better than others at different times – and some of them can sometimes make the situation worse. Half of Canadian kids have chosen not to do anything about cyberbullying because they thought it would make things worse for the person being bullied, and two-thirds have chosen not to do anything because they thought it might make **them** a target.

When you're supporting someone who's being cyberbullied, your actions don't have to be big or loud – and sometimes they shouldn't be. Especially if you don't know the person very well, be aware of how he or she responds to attention and social situations... They may not be comfortable with certain ways of showing encouragement." Justin W. Pathchin and Sameer Hinduja, Words Wound



Here's a list of things you can do that kids who have been targets of bullying say *usually* make things better, and **won't** make you a target:

- Comfort me in private
- Tell an adult I trust what's happening
- Talk to me about how to handle what's happening
- Post something nice about me
- Report what's happening to the service provider
- Stop communicating with the person who's doing it
- Document what's happening (make a copy or take a screenshot) to support me later

Think carefully before you do one of these things that kids say *sometimes* make things better, but **may** make you a target:

- Try to mediate between me and the person who's doing it
- Confront the person who's doing it in private
- Confront the person who's doing it in person

Make sure you're *not* doing one of these things that kids say usually make things **worse**:

- Tagging people in a post or liking it
- Sharing what's happening with other people (forwarding, upvoting, etc.)
- Laughing at what's happening
- Doing nothing

Am I making it easier for others to stand up? Three-quarters of Canadian kids say that they would be more likely to do something about cyberbullying if they thought others would respect them for doing it. Make sure to recognize and support other kids who are taking a stand to help others.

