LESSON PLAN

Level: Grades 7-8
About the Author: MediaSmarts

Cyberbullying and Civic Participation

This lesson is part of USE, UNDERSTAND & CREATE: A Digital Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools: http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework.

Overview

This lesson allows students to explore the concepts of rules, values and ethics and learn how they influence our decision-making. Students are then invited to consider how they can contribute to create positive online cultures.

Learning Outcomes

Students will demonstrate the ability to:

- understand the role of rules, values and ethics in helping us do the right thing
- suggest rules for preventing cyberbullying

Preparation and Materials

- Read the *Cyberbullying Backgrounder*
- Prior to class, distribute to parents or guardians the *Parents' Guide to Cyberbullying*
- Photocopy any school rules relevant to Internet use (for using the computer room, against bullying, etc.)
- Photocopy the student handouts:
  - *First, Do No Harm: How to Be an Active Witness*
  - *Changing the World*
- Prepare to project the slideshow *Rules, Values and Ethics*

Activity One: What Good Are Rules?

Guessing Game

Divide the class into two groups, A and B, and arrange each so that your instructions to each group cannot be overheard by the other group.

For Group A, tell them that they are playing a guessing game where Group B will choose an animal and Group A must guess what the animal is by asking questions. Group B can answer the questions with only "yes" or "no".

Tell Group B that you are playing a spelling game where Group A will be asking them a number of questions. If the last word of the question ends with a vowel, Group B must answer "yes"; if it ends with a consonant, they are to answer "no". Any answers but "yes" or "no" will disqualify Group B.

Tell both groups that the game will end after five minutes.

(Be prepared for some noise and confusion! Obviously, Group A will not be able to guess correctly because Group B's answers will not follow the same rules as their questions.)

Class Discussion

Once the game is over, let the two groups compare their experiences and discover that they were not playing by the same rules. Guide the discussion by asking the following questions:

- What were the rules of the game? (*Each group will provide the rules they were given.)*
- What happened? *(Each group thought they were playing by the same rules, but they weren't. Therefore, the game did not go as it should have.)*
- Why are rules important in a game? *(Rules make sure that everyone is playing in the same way.)*
- Can you think of different kinds of rules? (Answers might include school rules, household rules, rules of the road and laws.)
- What rules have you learned, at home and at school, about how to behave when you're online?

Write the examples of online rules provided by the students on the board. Then ask: Are rules the only way we decide what's right and wrong?

Project the slideshow *Rules, Values and Ethics* and go through it with the class.

Changing Rules and Laws

Ask the class the following questions:

- At home and at school, is it possible to discuss rules if you don't agree with them?
- Is it possible to modify them?

Once students have answered with regard to household and school rules, ask them:

- Can national laws be discussed and modified? How? (*You don't have to go into a lot of detail on this point; just explain that most laws can be changed by Parliament or a provincial or territorial legislature. You can also mention that laws that are found to be against the* Charter of Rights *– which is supposed to embody the most basic* values *of our legal system – can be struck down by the Supreme Court.*)
- Do you think it is a good idea to be able to change laws? Why or why not? *(The world changes and laws need to be able to adapt to change.)*
- Have things changed at school between your parents' generation and yours? *(Schools now have computers, the Internet and cell phones.)*

- In general, rules are created by imagining or seeing how things could go badly in a particular situation. Do you think that the rules you're looking at are good at predicting all the problems that might arise out of the use of computers and cell phones? *(Introduce here the idea of cyberbullying as a kind of bullying that takes place in an online environment.)*

Changing Values

Now ask:

- Is it possible for the *values* of a group to change? What are some examples of this happening? (*You can draw on the slideshow for examples of how values relating to visible minorities have changed. You can also talk about changes in:*
  - *views of women's participation in society*
  - *views relating to popular music*
  - *views relating to media (novels and comics were once seen as dangerous to kids; now we encourage kids to read instead of spending time in front of screens).*
- How do values change? (*Values change because people speak out about something they feel is right or wrong: remind students of the point in the slideshow that it can take as little as ten percent of a group to change its values, if that ten percent is committed to their position. Values can also change more gradually with time, as we become used to things – when a generation of book and comic readers didn't turn into juvenile delinquents, for instance.)*
- How is it similar to and different from how laws change? (*Values and laws change mostly because our ideas of right and wrong change. But because laws and rules are written down, we know exactly when they change. Changes in values are less clear and more gradual.*)
- What is the connection between how values change and rules or laws change? (*For instance, people used to believe that women shouldn't be involved in politics and the law didn't allow them to vote: when people's values changed, the law eventually changed too.*)

Rules and Values Online

Ask students to think about this situation: You play an online war game where a certain amount of "trash talk" (making fun of other players when they're killed, for instance) is normal. You invite your friend Jenny to play with you but when she does, a lot of the other players make particular fun of her because she's a girl or else assume she won't be any good at the game. After a short time Jenny tells you she's not having fun and decides to quit playing. What should you do?

Let the students discuss the scenario for a few minutes without making any comments of your own. Distribute the handout *First, Do No Harm: How to Be an Active Witness* (based on work by the Youth Voice Project, the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center and Embrace Civility) and go through it with the students, then give them five minutes or so to write down what they think is the right thing to do in this situation and answer the four questions in the handout.

Now have students share their responses. How did the four questions change their thinking? What did they think of after reading the handout that they hadn't thought of before?

Changing the World

Ask students to write down the spaces they spend time in online. These might be games, social networks, virtual worlds, discussion forums – anywhere they interact with other people. Even a space that isn't built around interaction is a community if it allows for interaction: for example, YouTube users interact through comments on videos. Top sites among Canadian students in grades 7-11 that have interactive features include:

- YouTube
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Wikipedia
- Tumblr
- Reddit
- Instagram
- Pinterest
- Minecraft
- Wattpad
- Weheartit
- Wanelo
- Deviantart
- Ask.fm

Now have them reflect on and write down what kinds of things are seen as *positive* in these spaces (the things that will get people to say nice things to you or about you; "Friend" you; help you; "like", vote up or share your posts) and what kinds of things are seen as *negative* (the things that will make people be critical to or about you; unfriend or block you; down vote your posts or report them to the site). (They should be able to list at least three positive and negative things.) These are those spaces' *values*.

Now ask: What are these spaces' values when it comes to witnessing behaviour like cyberbullying, racism or sexism? What have they seen other people do in these cases? What do they feel like *they* should do? Is there sometimes a difference between what seems to be the *accepted* thing to do and what they think is the *right* thing to do? Ask a few students to share examples and then have all the students go back to their list of values from the last step and add any new ones that they have thought of.

Action Plan

Distribute the handout *Changing the World* and go through it with students. Have each of them pick one value of their offline spaces that they think is harmful or disagree with and, drawing on the handout, create an action plan for changing it. This action plan can be either in paragraph or point form (you can choose or let the students choose) and should include at least three specific things they can do to help change that value.

Extension: Have students conduct a survey of cyberbullying rates at their school using the handout *Online Meanness Survey* and then create posters or skits to publicize the results. Make sure that they emphasize the positive over the negative findings – for instance, if the survey finds that 25 percent of students have been mean to someone online that means that 75 percent haven't been.

First, Do No Harm: How To Be An Active Witness

***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:

1. 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 the *best* way to help is.

2. 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.

3. 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.")

4. 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 work better than others at different times – and some of them can sometimes make things worse.

> *"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:

- spend time with me
- talk to me and encourage me
- help me get out of the situation
- give me advice
- distract the bully
- help me tell an adult I trust
- tell an adult I trust for me

Think carefully before you do one of these things that kids say *sometimes* make things better:

- politely tell the bully to stop what she or he is doing
- firmly tell the bully to stop what he or she is doing

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

- making fun of me
- blaming me
- ignoring what's going on

Changing the World

Did you know? **8 out of 10 Canadian students in grades 7-8 say it's important to speak out against racism and sexism online.**

You have the power to change the world! When you're online, your voice counts as much as anyone else's. Read on to see the ways that you can make the world a better place – online and offline.

Review school and site rules. It's important to know the **rules and laws** of the spaces you're in. Make sure that you're familiar with your school's rules about Internet use and the policies of your online spaces (games, social networks, etc.) and what to do when someone breaks those rules.

Respond to online meanness. Don't support meanness by joining in, voting up negative comments, or sharing or forwarding nasty or embarrassing photos or messages. **Record** meanness when you see it and **speak out** or **report it**. Scientists have found that **just one person** speaking out in a group can change their behaviour.

Don't encourage drama. When we see people fighting or arguing on TV or in movies, it can be exciting to watch. But when it happens in real life – online or offline – real people get hurt. Don't get involved in online drama and try to help people work things out instead of making a fight go on longer.

> *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."* (Attributed to Margaret Mead)

Don't let the noisiest voices take over. Sometimes the voices you think are speaking for the values of a group are really just the loudest ones. Find out how you can block and mute people who are repeatedly mean online.

Help kindness go viral. Send, share and spread positive things about friends and classmates. Students in schools across the United States and Canada have started campaigns and events like *Nice It Forward* and *Pink Shirt Day* to show that being mean isn't part of their school's values. You can do something like that at your school (or in your online spaces) or just post and share kind comments and compliments on your own!

Spread the good news. Help make sure that your friends, classmates and online contacts know that most kids **aren't** bullying. For instance, did you know:

- 8 in 10 Grade 7 students have **never** been mean to anyone online
- 9 in 10 Grade 7-8 students have **never** threatened to hurt someone online
- Only **1 in 20** Grade 7-8 students has **ever** shared an embarrassing photo of someone

Be a mentor. If someone is new to a game, to a social network, to your school or to the Internet, reaching out to them can make a world of difference. Show them around, and show them someone cares.

Action Plan: Think about the values of your online spaces and pick one that you think is harmful or that you disagree with. Come up with an action plan that includes at least three specific steps that you can take to help change that value.

Online Meanness Survey

1. Has anyone ever said or done something mean or cruel to you online that made you feel bad?

   _____Yes _____No

   If you answered Yes, how often was it a serious problem for you?

   _____ Often
   _____ Sometimes
   _____ Rarely
   _____ Never

2. Have you ever said or done something mean or cruel to someone online?

   _____ Yes _____ No

   If you answered Yes, what did you do? (*Check all that apply*)

   _____ Called someone a name
   _____ Threatened to physically hurt someone
   _____ Spread rumours
   _____ Posted or shared an embarrassing photo or video of someone else
   _____ Harassed someone sexually (said or did something sexual when the person did not want you to)
   _____ Made fun of someone's race, religion or ethnicity
   _____ Made fun of someone's sexual orientation
   _____ Harassed someone in an online game
   _____ Other

If you answered Yes, why did you do it? (*Check all that apply*)

_____ I was just joking around

_____ The person said something mean and cruel about me first

_____ The person said something mean and cruel about my friend first

_____ I wanted to get even with the person for another reason

_____ My friends were doing it

_____ I was bored

_____ I was angry

_____ I did not like the person

_____ Other

_____ I don't know

3. When someone has said something mean or cruel online to someone else, have you ever done anything to help the person who is being picked on?

_____ Yes _____ No

4. Has anyone ever threatened you online (for example, said things like "I'm going to get you" or "You're going to get it")?

_____ At least once a day

_____ At least once a week

_____ At least once a month

_____ At least once a year

_____ Less than once a year

_____ Never

If you answered At least once a day, At least once a week or At least once a month, did you think it was a serious problem for you?

_____ Often

_____ Sometimes

_____ Rarely

_____ Never

Cyberbullying Backgrounder

What is Cyberbullying?

For most youth, the Internet is all about socializing and while most of these social interactions are positive, increasing numbers of kids are using the technology to intimidate and harass others – a phenomenon known as cyberbullying.

The term "cyberbullying" can be a bit of a misnomer. Unlike the traditional definition of bullying, which involves a difference in power or strength between the perpetrator and the target, a lot of the activities that adults would label as cyberbullying happen between people of roughly the same status. It's also sometimes difficult to distinguish clearly between the target and perpetrator in a cyberbullying scenario. Finally, much of the abusive behaviour that takes place within offline relationships may also take place in online spaces or be abetted by digital technology.

How Common is It?

A significant minority of students have experienced both meanness and threats online: just over a third say that someone has said something mean or cruel to them, and just under a third say that someone has threatened them online by saying something like "I'm going to get you" or "You're going to get it." Roughly a quarter of students say that they have engaged in online meanness.[1]

Roles

Those who are involved in cyberbullying are generally categorized as perpetrators, targets and witnesses. But meanness is fairly often reciprocal, with a significant overlap between students who have engaged in online meanness and those who have experienced it.[2] Additionally, it's not at all unusual for both parties in a cyberbullying scenario to see themselves as being the victims.

One of the challenges in dealing with cyberbullying is that the term itself often has little meaning to youth. What adults may consider cyberbullying youth will describe as getting into fights, "starting something" or simply "drama."[3] This includes many of the activities considered forms of cyberbullying, such as spreading rumours or excluding peers from their social circles. Boys similarly refer to what they do – most often online impersonation or posting embarrassing videos – as "punking" or "pranking" rather than bullying.[4]

There is little doubt that cyberbullying can be traumatic: one third of students who were bullied online reported symptoms of depression, a figure which rose to nearly one half for those who experienced both online and offline bullying.[5] Unfortunately, youth typically underestimate how harmful online bullying can be. Researchers at the University of British Columbia found that while young people believe most of the negative behaviour that happens online is meant as a joke, "students need to be educated that this 'just joking' behaviour has serious implications."[6] MediaSmarts' *Young Canadians in a Wired World* (*YCWW*) research found that the most common reason given for online meanness

1 Steeves, Valerie. (2014) *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Cyberbullying: Dealing with Online Meanness, Cruelty and Threats*. Ottawa: MediaSmarts.

2 Ibid.

3 Marwick, Dr. Alice, and Dr. danah boyd. *The Drama! Teen Conflict, Gossip, and Bullying in Networked Publics*.

4 Ibid.

5 Kessel Schneider, Shari, Lydia O'Donnell, Ann Stueve, and Robert W. S. Coulter "Cyberbullying, School Bullying, and Psychological Distress: A Regional Census of High School Students," *American Journal of Public Health* (January 2012) 102:1, 171-177.

is "I was just joking around," followed by "the person said something mean and cruel about me first" and "the person said something mean about my friend first".[7]

One reason cyberbullying may be more harmful than offline bullying is the potential presence of countless, invisible witnesses and/or collaborators to the cyberbullying, which creates a situation where targets are left unsure of who knows, and who to fear. Technology also extends the reach these young people have, enabling them to harass their targets anywhere and at any time. While these situations should be reported, it can be difficult for young people to step forward: how do you report an attack that leaves no physical scars? Will the consequences of telling an adult that you are being cyberbullied be worse than the bullying itself? Adults want to help, but many feel ill-equipped to handle bullying in a digital world.

Research has shown that **witnesses** to bullying can be just as important as targets or perpetrators in affecting how an incident plays out.[8] Witnesses may also suffer negative effects that are as bad as or worse than those suffered by the target.[9] MediaSmarts' *YCWW* research on cyberbullying has revealed both good and bad news on this front. The good news is that many youth who witness bullying do something about it: 65 percent of the 5,436 Canadian students in grades 4 to 11 that were surveyed said that they had done something to help someone who was experiencing online meanness.[10]

There's no question that it's possible for witnesses to do a great deal of harm, whether it's by directly joining in the bullying, encouraging the perpetrator or even re-victimizing the target by sharing a bullying post or video. It's also well-established that when witnesses to bullying stand up and defend the target it can make a tremendous and positive difference – but not in every situation. There may be just as many cases where intervening can do greater harm to the target, the witness or both, and witnesses may have a number of valid reasons for not wanting to intervene:

- Fear of being a target. Saying that anyone who witnesses bullying should confront the perpetrator is not unlike suggesting that everyone who sees a mugging should try to stop it. Standing up to defend a target – especially if you turn out to be the only person who stands up – can easily lead to becoming a target yourself without necessarily having a positive effect on the situation.
- Fear of losing social status. Even if intervening or reporting doesn't lead to the witness becoming a target, it can still have long-term effects on a young person's social status, either by being associated with the target (youth who are marginalized for reasons such as poverty,[11] disability,[12] being a member of a visible minority group[13] and having a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender status[14] are substantially more likely to be targets) or by being labeled a "snitch" – both of which may easily be preludes to being a target of bullying.

6 Bellett, Gerry. "Cyberbullying needs its own treatment strategies." *The Vancouver Sun*, April 13, 2012.

7 Steeves, Valerie. (2014). *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Cyberbullying: Dealing With Online Meanness, Cruelty and Threats.* Ottawa: MediaSmarts.

8 Hawkins, D., Pepler, D. & Craig, W. (2001). Naturalistic observations of peer interventions in bullying. *Social Development, 10,* 512-527.

9 Rivers et al. Observing bullying at school: The mental health implications of witness status. *School Psychology Quarterly*, *24 (4)*: 211.

10 Steeves, Valerie. (2014). *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Cyberbullying: Dealing with Online Meanness, Cruelty and Threats*. MediaSmarts: Ottawa.

- Fear of escalating the situation. Both targets of and witnesses to bullying often fear that standing up to a perpetrator or reporting bullying to a parent or teacher is more likely to make things worse rather than better. Many of the youth who participated in 2012 focus groups for MediaSmarts' *YCWW* study[15] said that they were reluctant to report bullying to teachers because they felt the situation was likely to get out of control, especially in cases where teachers were bound by "zero tolerance" policies to respond to cyberbullying complaints in a particular way. This reluctance was echoed in the *YCWW* national survey, which found that while teachers rate highly as a source of information about cyberbullying, youth are extremely reluctant to turn to them for help.[16]

A good starting principle for witnesses would be "first, do no harm." As well as not participating in the bullying, young people should be encouraged to think ethically about their responsibilities as witnesses. Instead of automatically following any single rule, young people who witness cyberbullying should think carefully about the possible consequences of the different ways they may react. Instead of telling youth to report and intervene each time they witness cyberbullying, we can teach them to see themselves as active participants in the situation and consider different approaches for different situations, such as:

- *documenting* the bullying and, if it seems that it will do more good than harm, reporting it;
- *comforting* the target and offering help privately (including help in reporting the bullying to authorities: targets of bullying are often reluctant to report it to adults[17]);
- *mediating* between the target and perpetrator; or
- *confronting* the perpetrator, either privately or in public. If the perpetrator is a friend, youth can show that they don't approve of their behaviour by not joining in or reinforcing it.[18]

Methods of Cyberbullying

There are several ways that young people bully others online. Seventy-eight percent of those students who have done something mean or cruel online say they have called someone a name (18% of the total sample). Self-reporting of other problematic behaviours is much lower. Around six percent of all students report that they have harassed someone in an online game, five percent have spread rumours and four percent have posted an embarrassing photo/video of someone. Three percent say that they have made fun of someone's race, religion or ethnicity and two percent report

11 Cross, E.J., R. Piggin, J. Vonkaenal-Platt and T. Douglas. (2012). *Virtual Violence II: Progress and Challenges in the Fight against Cyberbullying*. London: Beatbullying.

12 Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., Ólafsson, K., with members of the EU Kids Online Network (2011) 'EU Kids Online Final Report'.

13 Cross, E.J., R. Piggin, J. Vonkaenal-Platt and T. Douglas. (2012). *Virtual Violence II: Progress and Challenges in the Fight against Cyberbullying*. London: Beatbullying.

14 Hinduja, S., and Patchin, J. (2011) 'Cyberbullying Research Summary Factsheet: Bullying, Cyberbullying and Sexual Orientation'.

15 Steeves, Valerie. (2012). *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Talking to Youth and Parents About Life Online*. Ottawa: MediaSmarts.

16 Ibid.

17 Dinham, Peter. "Kids Reluctant to Speak Up About Bullying, Bad Experiences." iTWire, June 2, 2014.

18 Patchin, Justin W. "Empower Bystanders to Improve School Climate." Online: <http://cyberbullying.us/empower-bystanders-to-improve-school-climate/>. Posted July 18, 2014.

making fun of someone's sexual orientation. One percent report that they have harassed someone sexually (e.g. said or did something sexual when the person did not want them to).[19]

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 for 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 someone'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. A thorough explanation of federal and provincial laws relating to cyberbullying can be found at http://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/digital-issues/cyberbulling/cyberbullying-law.

The Role of the School

Almost two thirds of students say their school has a rule relating to cyberbullying; of these, three quarters say the rules are "often" or "sometimes" helpful. This does not, however, seem to translate into actual effects on students' behaviour: unlike with household rules, there is almost no correlation between the presence of school rules and whether or not a student has engaged in or experienced either meanness or threats online. Perhaps because of this, students who have personally experienced online threats or meanness are much less likely to feel that school rules are helpful.[20]

Schools have started to become more proactive about confronting bullying, but too often these efforts fall into stereotypes, emphasize unrealistic worst-case scenarios and are presented as one-time-only interventions. Youth participants in MediaSmarts' *YCWW* focus groups repeatedly said that they had experienced anti-cyberbullying programs – usually one-time assemblies – that not only failed to resonate with them but made them take the issue less seriously. They were also often reluctant to report bullying because they felt that teachers were likely to escalate a situation into more than what it was, possibly due to teachers being bound by zero-tolerance policies.[21]

Effective intervention programs, on the other hand, have a number of characteristics in common: they include the whole school; they provide support both for targets and perpetrators after an incident; and they work at multiple levels – in the classroom, school-wide and in connection with parents and the surrounding community.[22] Zero-tolerance and one-size-fits-all approaches to dealing with online conflict are not only unsuccessful, but can be actively harmful as they prevent students from turning to what should be one of their main sources of help and support. Instead of a greater emphasis on punishment and criminalization, we need to foster empathy in youth; teach them to avoid the "empathy traps" of digital communication; provide them with effective tools for managing their emotions and dealing with online conflict; and promote awareness of the power of parents to teach their children to treat others with respect.

19 Steeves, Valerie. (2014). *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Cyberbullying: Dealing with Online Meanness, Cruelty and Threats*. Ottawa: MediaSmarts.

20 Ibid.

21 Steeves, Valerie. (2012). *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Talking to Youth and Parents*. Ottawa: MediaSmarts.

Finally, in order to fight cyberbullying effectively we need to make an effort to change the culture in which it happens. Both at school and at home, we can help kids understand that what may seem like "just a joke" may have a powerful effect on someone else. It's also important to teach kids that cyberbullying may be less common than they think it is: youth often overestimate how common this sort of bullying actually is, even though most report their own experiences as being positive.[23] This is significant because research indicates that when youth believe that bullying behaviour is the norm, they are more likely to exhibit and tolerate this behaviour – and that when youth are made aware of how uncommon bullying actually is, bullying rates drop.[24]

22 Craig, Wendy. Testimony before the Senate Committee on Human Rights, December 12, 2011.

23 *Teens, Kindness and Cruelty on Social Network Sites*. Pew Research Institute, November 9, 2011.

24 Craig, David W. and H. Wesley Perkins, *Assessing Bullying in New Jersey Secondary Schools: Applying the Social Norms Model to Adolescent Violence*, Presented at the 2008 National Conference on the Social Norms Approach, July 22, 2008.

Parents' Guide to Cyberbullying

For most youth, the Internet is all about socializing and while most of these social interactions are positive, increasing numbers of kids are using the technology to intimidate and harass others – a phenomenon known as cyberbullying.

The term "cyberbullying" can be a bit misleading. Unlike the traditional definition of bullying, which involves a difference in power or strength between children who bully and the children they target, a lot of the activities that adults might see as cyberbullying happen between children of roughly the same status. It can also be difficult to tell who is bullying whom in a cyberbullying scenario. Finally, much of the abusive behaviour that takes place within offline relationships may also take place online or be enhanced by digital technology.

How Common is It?

Just over a third of Canadian students say that someone has said something mean or cruel to them online, and just under a third say that someone has threatened them online (posting things like "I'm going to get you" or "You're going to get it"). Roughly a quarter of students say that they have been mean to someone online.

Parents have an important role to play in helping their children and teens learn how to respond to cyberbullying. In fact, parents are the number one group of people that they turn to for help with online meanness.

How Do I Know if my Child is Being Cyberbullied?

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

What Should I do if my Child is Targeted?

- Watch out for signs that your child is being bullied online – a reluctance to use the computer or go to school may be an indication.
- Listen and provide advice if your child asks for it. Make sure to check in regularly to make sure things are going better.
- Report online bullying to your Internet or cell phone service provider. Most companies have Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs) that clearly define privileges and guidelines for people who use their services and the actions that can be taken if those guidelines are violated. They should be able to respond to reports of cyberbullying over their networks or help you track down the appropriate service provider to respond to.

Report incidents of online harassment and physical threats to your local police. Some forms of online bullying are considered criminal acts. For example: 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.

We also need to teach our kids how to respond to an online bully. Your child has received a handout titled *What to Do if Someone is Mean to You Online*. Go through it together and emphasize the key points:

- Don't fight back
- Save the evidence
- Talk to someone about it

- Report it to the site where it's happening or to police if it's making you feel scared; making it hard for you to go to school or do things you enjoy; if you are being physically threatened; or if someone is threatening to publish something that would hurt or humiliate you.

How Can I Prevent Cyberbullying?

We can reduce the risks associated with Internet use by having open, ongoing conversations with our children about their online activities and by setting up rules that will grow along with them. MediaSmarts' research shows that having family Internet rules on things like treating people with respect can have a positive impact on your children's online behaviour. (This tip sheet can get you started: http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/tipsheet/TipSheet_FamilyOnlineRules.pdf.) Research has also shown that bullying rates drop when kids know that it is against the rules and how to report it.

Tell your children to come to you right away if they feel uncomfortable or threatened online. Don't take it for granted that your child will do this: only eight percent of teens who have been bullied online have told their parents.

Encourage your children to take action when they witness someone being bullied. This doesn't necessarily mean confronting the bully: they need to consider what they can do that is most likely to help the person being bullied and least likely to make the situation worse. This may include:

- *recording* the bullying by taking screenshots (see take-a-screenshot.org for tips on how to do this) and, if it seems that it will do more good than harm, reporting it;
- *helping the person who is being bullied feel better* and offering help privately (including help in reporting the bullying to authorities: young people who are being bullied are often reluctant to tell adults);
- *trying to help* both the person being bullied and person who is doing the bullying make up; or
- *confronting* the person who is doing the bullying, either privately or in public. If this is a friend, the best way to show that you don't approve of their behaviour is by not joining in or encouraging it.

In order to fight cyberbullying effectively we need to change the culture in which it happens, starting with helping kids understand that what may seem like "just a joke" can have a powerful effect on someone else. It's also important to teach them that cyberbullying may be less common than they think it is: young people often overestimate how common bullying actually is, even though most report their own experiences as being positive. Knowing the facts is important because research shows that when young people believe that bullying behaviour is the norm, they are more likely to engage in and tolerate this sort of behaviour – and that when they understand how *uncommon* bullying actually is, bullying rates drop.

What Should I Avoid Doing if my Child is Being Cyberbullied?

It can be difficult for a young person to come forward when they are being bullied; even to mom or dad. To build trust, try not to overreact. Don't forbid your child to use the Internet in the hope of eliminating the source of the problem: for your child, this is equal to 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).

Other things to avoid:

- Telling them to stop “tattling” or “snitching”
- Telling them they should solve the problem themselves
- Blaming them for being a target
- Minimizing or ignoring the situation

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.

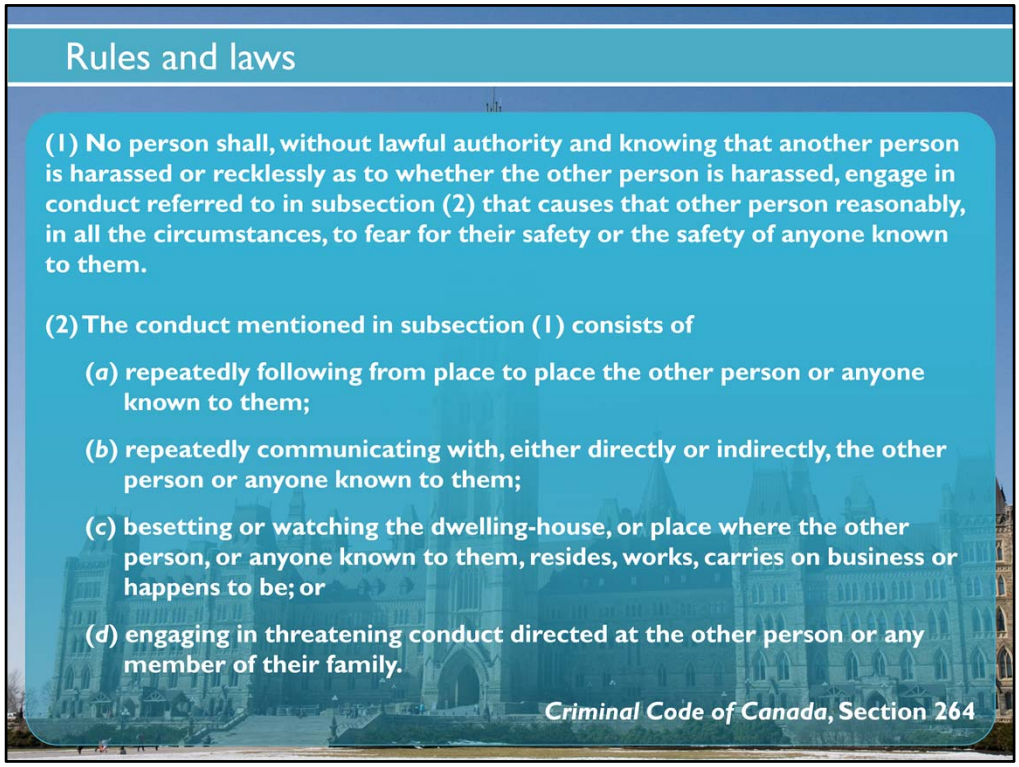
If you want to better understand your child’s online experience, check out MediaSmarts’ resources at: http://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/digital-issues/cyberbullying.

We have three basic ways of deciding what's right and what's wrong: rules, values and ethics.

Image used with permission:
http://jennyhanlonconsulting.com/blog/tag/stanley-london-compas/

You already know what rules are: they tell you what to do or, more often, what not to do. A lot of rules aren't about right or wrong but just about making things go smoothly, like everyone agreeing on the same rules to a game.

Photo CC Gord McKenna http://www.flickr.com/photos/23196822@N00/315490873/

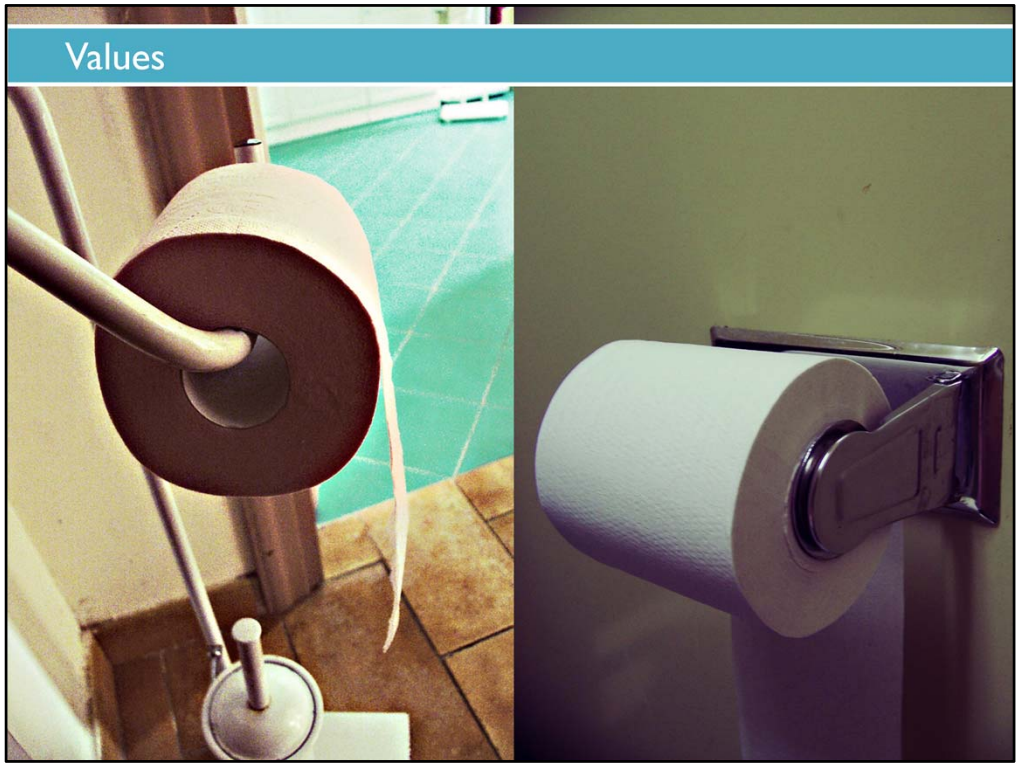


Laws are the rules that a country or province or territory makes. Some laws, like some rules, are aimed at making sure that people do the right thing.

For example, cyberbullying may be against the law in Canada if it involves threatening or scaring someone, as defined here in the Criminal Code section on harassment.

Image credit: Wikimedia Commons (public domain)

Lots of apps and online platforms have their own rules for dealing with cyberbullying as well. These rules generally define what kind of behaviour they see as wrong and also how users can report it.



Values are harder to pin down than rules. Basically, values are what a group of people – anywhere from a family to a country – thinks is important. Like rules, values may have nothing to do with right and wrong, like whether your family hangs toilet paper overhand or underhand –

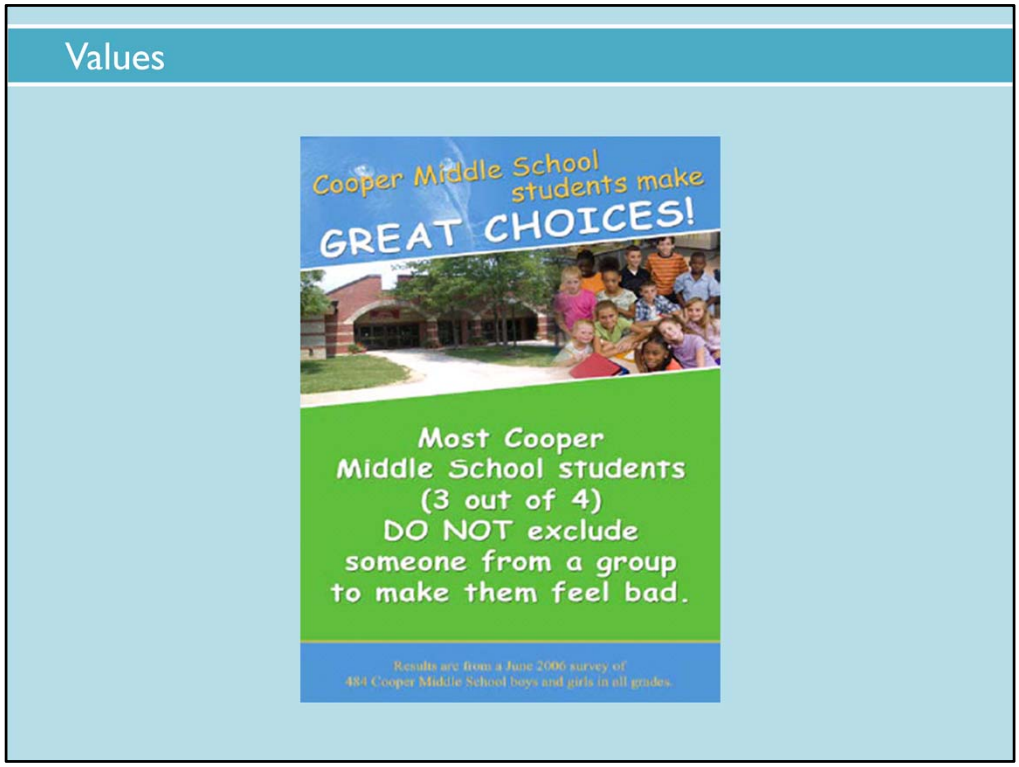
Picture credits

Overhand paper: CC Sara Fasullo
Underhand paper: CC A L

– or whether people in your city line up at bus stops.

Image credit: CC Frank Hank

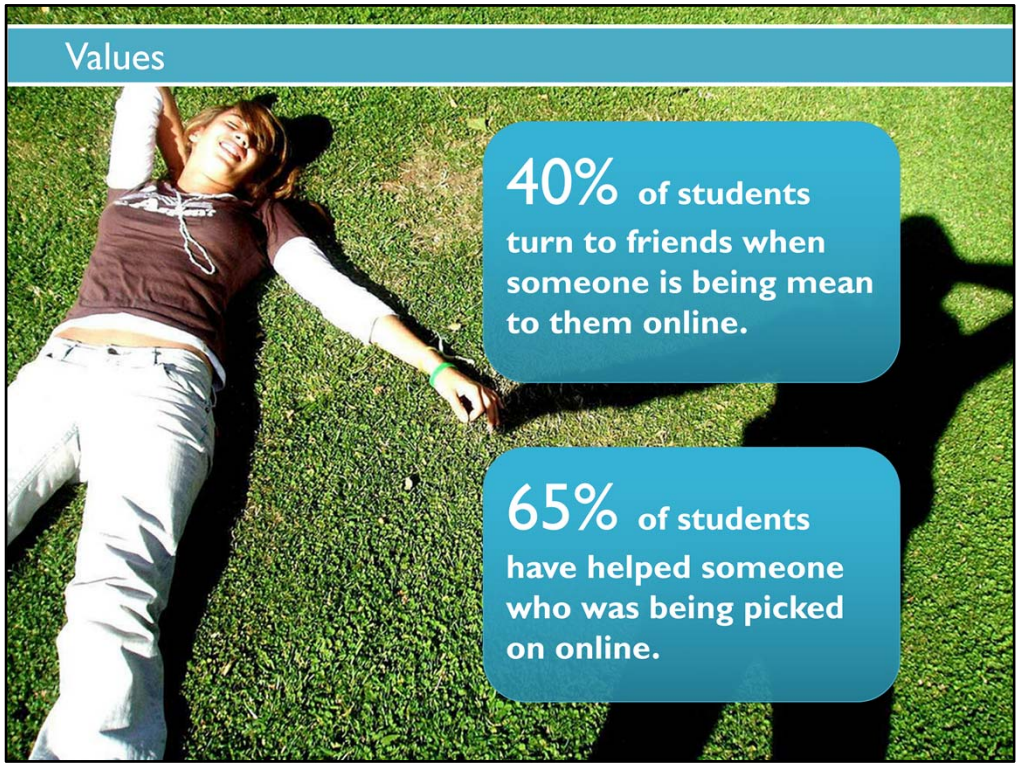
But our values do have a big impact on what we *think* is right or wrong. The number one reason Canadian kids give for being mean to someone online is that they were "just joking," but whether something is seen as a joke or as bullying depends mostly on the values of the group you're in. (Kids often say, for example, that parents and teachers see things as bullying that kids see as joking around.)



Unlike rules, values aren't usually something we're *told* : we learn them mostly by watching other people in the group to get an idea of what's seen as normal or unusual. If we think something is normal, we're less likely to think it's wrong. But sometimes we have a false idea of how normal things actually are: nine out of ten kids think that bullying is more common than it actually is.

The places we spend our time in online have their own values, too, and in a lot of them racism, sexism and similar attitudes are normal and even encouraged.

A lot of the time, though, we don't realize just how few people in these places actually hold those values. Scientists have found that it can take as little as *ten percent* of a group's members to change the values of that group, if they're noisy and committed to their view.



Our values – and the values of the group we're currently in – have a big effect on what we do when we witness cyberbullying, too. Kids rely heavily on their friends when people are mean to them online, and most kids have helped someone who was being picked on online.

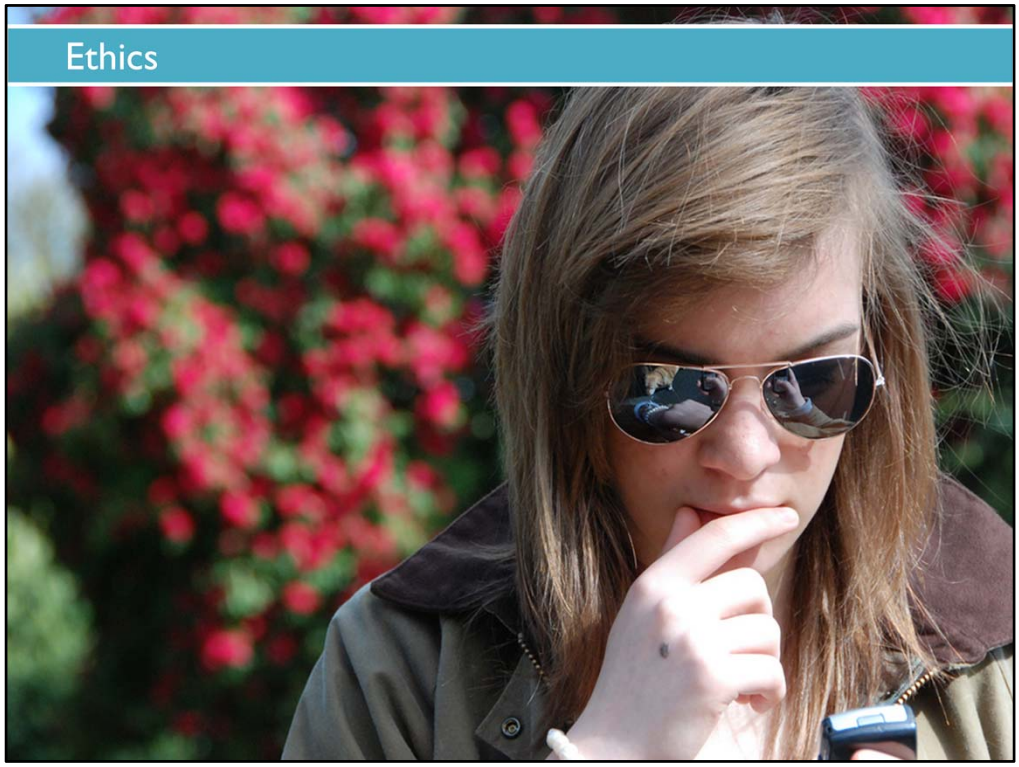
Most kids decide what to do when they witness bullying based on three questions.

The first is, "Are they just kidding or are they taking it too far?" In other words, is what's happening outside of what's allowed by the values of the group.

As we've seen, most people who are being mean online see themselves as just kidding, and if a witness agrees they usually won't do anything – and may even join in.

The second question is, "Who is my friend?" Most kids are more likely to do something to help their friends.

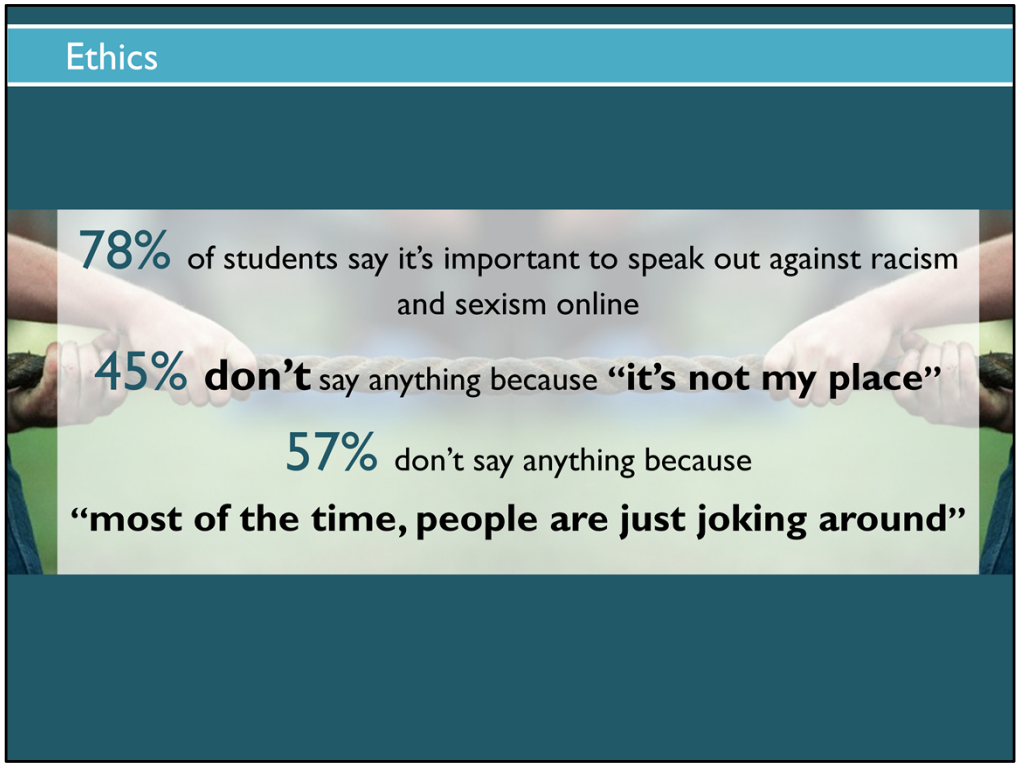
The last question follows from that: "If the target isn't my friend, what do I owe to them?" The kids that feel that it's important to stand up to bullying even if the person being bullied isn't their friend are the ones most likely to intervene in all cases.



That's an example of an *ethical* decision, one based on your own ideas of what's right and wrong.

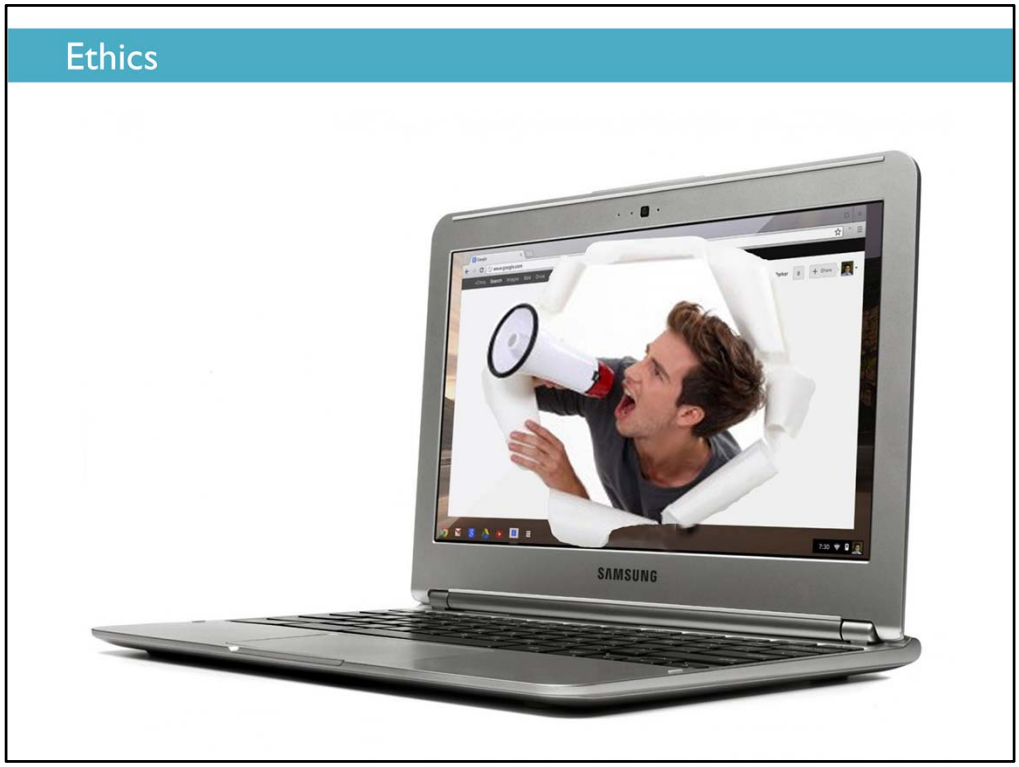
Sometimes our *ethics* may disagree with the *values* of the group we're in --

-- and our ethics may lead us to feel that current *rules and laws* may be wrong. Sometimes, that leads to laws being changed as more people come to agree with that view.



A lot of kids say that they feel they should speak out against racism and sexism online, but many don't because they don't feel it's "their place" or because the people involved are "just joking around."

In both cases, the *values* of the places they're spending time in online are telling them *not* to speak out, even though they may believe it's *ethically* right to do this.



It's important to realize, though, that *we* can change the values of the groups we're in. Remember, it can take as little as ten percent of a group's members to change the values of that group. On the Internet, *your* voice is just as loud as anyone else's and *you* have just as much right to help decide the values of the places where you spend your time.

Assessment Task: Action Plan

	Learning Expectations	***Achievement***
Use Skills and competencies that fall under "use" range from basic technical know-how – using computer programs such as word processors, web browsers, email, and other communication tools – to the more sophisticated abilities for accessing and using knowledge resources, such as search engines and online databases, and emerging technologies such as cloud computing.	demonstrate understanding the difference between being a passive bystander and an active intervener in cyberbullying situations demonstrate awareness of the benefits of online communication and able to handle situations of online behaviour that may make him or her uncomfortable	Insufficient (R); Beginning (1); Developing (2); Competent (3) Confident (4)
Understand Understand includes recognizing how networked technology affects our behaviour and our perceptions, beliefs and feelings about the world around us. Understand also prepares us for a knowledge economy as we develop information management skills for finding, evaluating and effectively using information to communicate, collaborate and solve problems.	demonstrate understanding how it feels to be cyberbullied, how cyberbullying is similar to or different than in-person bullying and strategies for handling cyberbullying when it arises identify and communicate values and beliefs that affect healthy choices	Insufficient (R); Beginning (1); Developing (2); Competent (3) Confident (4)

	Learning Expectations	***Achievement***
Create Create is the ability to produce content and effectively communicate through a variety of digital media tools. It includes being able to adapt what we produce for various contexts and audiences; to create and communicate using rich media such as images, video and sound; and to effectively and responsibly engage with user-generated content such as blogs and discussion forums, video and photo sharing, social gaming and other forms of social media. The ability to create using digital media ensures that Canadians are active contributors to digital society.	participate in society through online engagement in democratic actions (e.g. lobbying, petitions, parliament)	Insufficient (R); Beginning (1); Developing (2); Competent (3) Confident (4)