



LESSON PLAN

Level:	Grades 7-9
About the Author:	Emmanuelle Erny-Newton, Media Education Specialist, MediaSmarts
Duration:	One hour per activity

Promoting Ethical Behaviour Online – My Virtual Life

Overview

In this three-part lesson, students learn about online privacy and ethical behaviour by exploring their digital footprints to better understand that our online interactions may not be as anonymous as we think they are.

Learning Outcomes

Students will demonstrate:

- an understanding of their Web-based activities as well as their perceptions of, and attitudes towards, these activities
- an understanding of how to assess and measure their vulnerability to cyberbullying
- an understanding of the importance of ethical behaviour and “virtual reputation” in various Web environments
- an understanding of the importance of protecting one’s personal privacy online
- an understanding that on the Internet, individuals are not always as anonymous as they believe themselves to be

Activities Overview

Activity One: My Cyber Portrait (One hour)

In the first part of the lesson, students create a digital map of their Web-based activities and the various identities they assume by using a nickname or avatar online. They determine whether the “virtual worlds” where these identities exist are distinct and separate from one another, or whether they can be linked to a specific individual.

Activity Two: My Virtual Life (One hour)

In the second part of the lesson, students further assess the privacy and ethics of their online activities by applying their cyber portraits to a questionnaire that focuses on how they post materials in online profiles; the characteristics of their online communication with others; how well they protect their passwords; their understanding of the potential lifespan of online data and the consequences related to this; and their perceptions of anonymity. In addition, students determine whether their online activities put them at risk for harassment or cyberbullying – as victims or as perpetrators – and, through class discussion, they explore the importance of behaving ethically for its own sake, rather than out of fear of “being caught.”



Activity Three: Restoring Disaster Areas (One hour)

In the final activity, students look at areas in their virtual lives where they can make improvements. As a class, they brainstorm codes of conduct for privacy protection and ethical online behaviour.

Preparation and Materials

- Prior to the lesson, it is helpful if teachers go through the exercises and assess their own online activities
- Before starting the lesson write the instructions for the mapping exercise on the board
- Prepare the following overheads:
 - *Identity Footprints #1*
 - *Identity Footprints #2*
 - *Digital Footprints*
- Photocopy the following handouts:
 - *My Cyber Portrait*
 - *My Virtual Life Questionnaire*
 - *My Virtual Life Answer Sheet*

Preamble

Research has shown that perceived anonymity on the Internet may encourage some young people, who might not otherwise do so, to initiate or participate in bullying behaviour. These activities might include sending threatening and/or anonymous emails; posting rumours or taunts on online bulletin boards or forums; posting a fake or offensive profile of someone on social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook; or submitting a derogatory image of someone on a public polling site. However, students are not as anonymous as they believe themselves to be and, increasingly, where cyberbullying occurs, school officials and law enforcement officers are successfully tracking down – and charging – online bullies.

In addition, young people may not stop to think about the long-term ramifications of their online actions, where a single act of cruelty – such as forwarding a derogatory image of someone – can develop a life of its own online and have a devastating effect on the person being targeted.

In this lesson, students look closely at their online behaviour, taking into account both ethics and privacy protection. In addition to developing an understanding that there are consequences to online activities, students also explore the importance of good citizenship *for its own sake* in online communities. For this lesson to be effective, most of the classroom activities involved are largely introspective, private and based on personal experience. The teacher's main task is to work as a facilitator, so it should be made clear from the start that he or she will not be looking at the students' notes.



Procedure

Activity One: My Cyber Portrait (One hour)

Where Am I?

Explain to students that in this activity they will be drawing their own “cyber portraits.” Emphasize that this is to help them better understand themselves, that their cyber portraits are private and that they will not be seen by others unless they wish to share them.

Go over the instructions you have written on the board for the cyber portrait exercise.

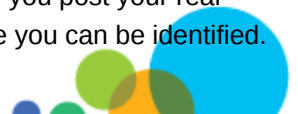
1. Take a sheet of white paper.
2. Draw a square representing the physical world.
3. Then draw a circle representing the virtual world. *(These can be drawn and positioned however the student wishes... there is no right or wrong way.)*
4. In the diagram, you are represented by an “x.”
5. Within the circle representing the virtual world, draw smaller circles to represent the various interactive environments where you have an online identity. These are online venues such as e-mail accounts, instant messaging sites, chat rooms, Web sites or gaming sites where you go by your own name, post a profile or use a nickname or avatar.
6. In each of the environments where you use your real identity, place an “x.”
7. In the environments where you use a nickname or avatar, put the letters “ID.”
8. Number each “ID” from 1 to 10. If you use the same nickname or avatar in several environments, show this by using the same number in your diagram.

To give students an idea of what their portraits might look like, review the *Identity Footprints #1* overhead as a class.

- Here's an example of a virtual world circle.
- The smaller circles represent the person's online environments: Facebook, Hotmail, Neopets, MSN and Abercrombie & Fitch.
- She uses her real name on her Facebook page and in her customer profile on the Abercrombie & Fitch site, and so these sites have an “x.”
- She uses a nickname rather than her real name in her Hotmail address, so that site is labelled “ID #1.”
- To send instant messages on MSN, she goes by a different nickname, so that site is labelled “ID #2.”
- And when she plays on Neopets, her virtual pet represents her, so this site is labelled “ID #3.”

Once students have mapped their portraits, have them bridge their various IDs.

Now I'd like you to draw connecting “bridges” between your various online identities. For example, if your nickname or avatar in one environment can be connected through a user profile to your email account, where you post your real name, then there is a bridge between an environment where you use a nickname and one where you can be identified. If at all possible, show how this “bridging” occurs.



Review the *Identity Footprints #2* overhead with students.

- For example, we can see a number of bridges between the different online identities in this cyber portrait.
 - Our friend lists her Hotmail address in her Facebook profile, so there's a bridge between her real identity, which she uses on Facebook, and one of her online nicknames, which is the basis for her Hotmail address.
 - There's also a bridge between her Abercrombie & Fitch customer profile and her Hotmail address.
 - She uses her Neopet's image and name to communicate with others on the Neopets site, but Neopets has her Hotmail address in her customer account. She has also talked about her Neopet while instant messaging on her MSN account, so we can build a bridge between ID #2 and ID #3.
 - And, her Hotmail address is underlined whenever someone scrolls over her MSN ID, which builds a bridge between her Hotmail ID and her MSN name.

Have students build bridges between their own environments.

Class Discussion

Ask students:

- Remember at the beginning of this exercise when you were asked to draw a square for the physical world, and a circle for the virtual world? On your piece of paper, how did you position the square in relation to the circle? Was your "virtual world" circle outside or inside the square representing the physical world? What were your reasons for placing the square and circle where you did? (*Point out that although it may not appear to be, the virtual world is part of the larger world: you talk to real people, laws apply to the digital world, things that happen online can affect how you feel in your daily life, etc.*)

Divide the class into groups of four. Distribute copies of the *My Cyber Portrait* handout and have students ask each other the questions on the sheet.

Note: The object of this exercise is to help students delve into their online identities. If they wish, students can choose not to publicly respond to some of the questions, although in such cases they should be encouraged to fill in the information privately. The questionnaires are filled out in groups so that peers may act as an "external conscience," asking for details if a response is not clear or convincing. However, students must feel comfortable with their group partners. They can choose not to respond to a question. The simple act of participating in the discussion will be beneficial for everyone involved.

Note: Students need to keep their cyber portraits handy for the next activity.

Activity Two: My Virtual Life (One hour)

What am I Doing?

Distribute the *My Virtual Life Questionnaire* and *My Virtual Life Answer Sheet* handouts to students.



Class Discussion

Explain that students are now going to assess how private their online activities are. But before doing this, they need to create a “virtual conscience” that can be used to gauge their online activities. A virtual conscience is an extra check that can be applied in order to measure whether or not what you are about to do online is wise and/or appropriate.

Ask students:

- Why do you think this sort of self-check might be helpful before you do something or engage with others online? *(One of the great features of the Internet is the speed and ease it provides in doing things – such as downloading music, instant messaging friends, posting photos on social networking sites, etc. But the immediacy that the Internet offers can also lead to a “click before you think” syndrome, where we act so quickly we may inadvertently do things that are inappropriate or will get us into trouble. It’s important to remember that once something has been sent online, there is no taking it back. Unlike a verbal message, a written message is permanent and therefore more powerful. If we are in the habit of checking in with a virtual conscience, then we have a moment to pause and reflect on what we are about to say and/or do.)*

To teach students to quickly decide whether or not something they are about to do online is a good idea, ask each student to:

- Think of two people:
 - someone famous he or she admires for his or her courage, and
 - an adult in his or her life who is trusted and respected.
- Record these two names at the top of the *My Virtual Life Questionnaire*. As of today, these two people will be their “virtual conscience.” Each time they intend to do something online that they are not sure about, they should ask themselves: “What would these people think of such an action?”

Point out to students that their online actions are witnessed by far more people than just the two they have chosen as their virtual conscience, yet research has shown that many young people do things online that they would not do offline because they believe themselves to be anonymous.

Explain that the questionnaire they are about to do will help them to assess how easily they can be tracked online, and to measure how ethical their online activities are. Emphasize that this exercise is just for them – they won’t be showing it to anyone else.

Using their cyber portraits as a guide, ask students to apply the questions to the three online environments where they interact with others most often and, where applicable, record their answers on the *My Virtual Life Answer Sheet*. Tell them not to worry about the “colour” columns on the answer sheet for now, as they’ll be filling these out when the answers are taken up. *(Give students time to complete their Answer Sheets.)*

Calculating Scores

Class Discussion

Explain to students that you are going to rate their virtual lives in each of their three Web environments, beginning with interactive Web environments that call for online profiles.



Online Profiles

Question 1

Tell students to proceed as follows:

- if you answered “b,” “d” or “e,” give yourself a **blue** rating
- if you answered “c,” give yourself a **yellow** rating
- if you answered “a,” give yourself a **red** rating

Note: If you had a number of answers that included “a,” give yourself a **red** rating for this question, even though the other choices have different colour ratings.

Question 2

Tell students to proceed as follows:

- if you answered “a” or “c,” give yourself a **red** rating
- if you answered “b,” give yourself a **blue** rating

Question 3

Tell students to proceed as follows:

- if you answered “a,” give yourself a **blue** rating
- if you answered “b,” give yourself a **yellow** rating
- if you answered “c,” “d,” or “e,” give yourself a **red** rating

Question 4

Tell students to proceed as follows:

- if you answered “a,” give yourself a **yellow** rating
- if you answered “b,” give yourself a **red** rating
- if you answered “c,” give yourself a **blue** rating

Question 5

Tell students to proceed as follows:

- if you answered “a,” give yourself a **blue** rating
- if you answered “b,” give yourself a **red** rating



Stepping Back

Invite students to take a look at what the different colours mean. Explain that, with regard to their online profiles:

If you are mostly **blue**, give yourself a pat on the back. You are careful about what you post online and that's a good thing. You are not very vulnerable to being cyberbullied or harassed because the footprints you leave online are either not easily traced back to you or are directed only toward a limited group of people who you trust wholeheartedly.

You understand that information and images that you post online may be seen or downloaded and passed on by others, so you post only general images in your profile.

If you are mostly **yellow**, you are fairly cautious about your online profile. You do include some information and images of yourself or your friends, but you try to limit the number of people who can access such data.

You understand that information and images that you post online may be seen or downloaded and passed on by others, so you make sure to ask permission before posting images of your friends, and you make sure that nothing you do post would embarrass or hurt you or anyone else.

If you are mostly **red**, you may be setting yourself up for a lot of problems. You need to be more careful with the access to your personal life – and that of your friends – that you provide to others through your online profile. The rule of thumb on the Internet is that if you wouldn't want your virtual conscience – or, for that matter, a teacher or a parent – to see what you are posting online then the “world wide” Web may not be the best place to post it.

Next, move on to the students' virtual lives in Web environments where they communicate with others, such as chat rooms, instant messaging sites or email.

Communication Characteristics

Question 1

Tell students to proceed as follows:

- if you answered “a,” give yourself a **yellow** rating
- if you answered “b,” give yourself a **blue** rating

Question 2

Tell students to proceed as follows:

- if you answered “a,” give yourself a **red** rating
- if you answered “b,” give yourself a **blue** rating

Question 3

Tell students to proceed as follows:

- if you answered “a,” give yourself a **red** rating
- if you answered “b,” give yourself a **blue** rating



Question 4

Tell students to proceed as follows:

- if you answered “a,” give yourself a **blue** rating
- if you answered “b,” give yourself a **red** rating

Stepping Back

Invite students to take a look at what the different colours mean. Explain that, with regard to communication characteristics:

If you are mostly **blue**, you are respectful and ethical in your online communications. You communicate *with* others, not *at* others. You don’t behave aggressively or in an intentionally mean way when you are chatting, e-mailing or instant messaging.

If you are mostly **red**, you may need to rethink how you communicate with others online. There’s an old saying, “What goes around comes around,” and, on the Internet, behaviour or activities that you might not be proud of can be spread far and wide very quickly, and can stick around in cyberspace and come back to haunt you for a long, long time. The Internet may appear to be a virtual place, but it is also a community and, just like communities in your town, it’s important to be a good citizen and to build up your reputation.

Passwords

This section shows how well students manage their passwords in their virtual lives. The answers are pretty straightforward: they will have coloured themselves **red** if they share their password(s) with others, and **blue** if they don’t. (And they will have given themselves an extra **blue** if they use passwords that *are not* related to things that can be easily traced to them, such as birthdays, pets’ names, favourite bands, etc.)

Explain to the students:

If you scored **blue**, you are password-savvy. You don’t share passwords, even with friends, and you don’t make up passwords that anyone who knows you could easily guess.

If you scored **red**: watch out! There are a lot of people out there who have had their identities stolen and/or misused as a result of sharing their password(s) with too many people.

Lifespan of Data

All these answers score **red**! Admit to students that this is something of a trick question since, contrary to what many people think, there is no such thing as “temporary” data on the Internet. Even something we consider to be temporary, like an instant message, can stay buried in the depths of the computer(s) that sent and/or received the message. In addition, that edgy image sent to a friend or posted on a site can be downloaded and distributed to thousands of people in the blink of an eye. In fact, it’s not uncommon for universities, colleges and prospective employers to check out what people have posted on sites like Facebook, to see whether or not they are desirable candidates for programs or positions.



And now ask students the bonus question.

Are We Ever Truly Anonymous When We Are Online?

Give students this example. Let's say you are true **blue**. You do everything right: you're careful with what you post about yourself, you are considerate in how you communicate with others, and you protect your privacy when you are on other websites.

Are you still anonymous? How do you know? *(Give students an opportunity to discuss and debate this.)*

Is "yes" the correct answer? Not really. *(Place the Digital Footprints overhead on the projector.)*

Explain to students that however careful we may be about privacy, whenever we go online our computer leaves a digital footprint or record that tells Internet Service Providers exactly who we are.

As an example, show students this message to users of Bebo, a popular social networking site (like Facebook).

When people sign in to use its services, Bebo lets them know, loud and clear, that their actions are not anonymous and that their site can read, monitor and record the Internet Protocol (IP) address of the user's computer. This means that, if necessary, Bebo can track down the user through the computer he or she is using. Similarly, the police are able to track down people committing crime online by accessing their IP addresses.

Class Discussion: Beyond Digital Footprints

Underscore to students the reality that we are never totally anonymous when we are online. This can be a problem when we put our safety at risk by not protecting our privacy on the Web, or when we behave in an inappropriate or foolish manner online and such behaviour comes back to haunt us.

Write the following quote on the board:

The measure of a man's real character
is what he would do if he knew he
would never be found out.

Thomas Babington Macaulay

Ask the students:

- What does this quote mean?

Remind students of the notion of the Internet as a community. Offline, we live in communities where, every day, we have to make choices about what we do and how we behave. These choices determine how others see us, and how we see ourselves.

Ask the students:

- Which do you think is more important? Being a good citizen so that you can't be caught or punished for any wrongdoing, or being a good citizen because you feel it is important to do so for the common good?



- Is there a difference, as long as the end result is that everyone is behaving nicely? (*Give students time to discuss and debate this.*)

In our physical communities, when we interact with other people, we can quickly tell if we have crossed a line or hurt someone by seeing how they react to our comments or actions. On the Internet, this can be much trickier, because we can't always gauge the consequences of what we do. Experts tell us that the most important skill we can develop to address this problem is to build empathy for people we communicate with online. In the same way that we applied the virtual conscience to our online interactions, they recommend that we adopt some "ethical, decision-making strategies" before we engage in any activity or communicate a particular message online.¹

These strategies include:

- imagining how we would feel if someone sent us this same message
- imagining what people would think of us if this online activity was posted on the front page of a local newspaper
- imagining the kind of world it would be if everyone acted in a similar way
- asking ourselves "would it be ok or acceptable to do this offline?"²

Ask the students if they can think of any other strategies.

Wrap-up

Instruct the students to shade or mark the environments on their cyber portraits with a blue, yellow or red pencil crayon, according to the colour they scored most often. If a red area is "bridged" with another environment, then shade this other environment red, and so on. (*Unfortunately, red is the prevalent colour for spreading: the idea here is that if they have a bad reputation in one area and their identity can be traced to another area, then their reputation could follow them into that area. A bad reputation is not only a stain – it spreads like an oil stain!*)

Activity Three: Restoring Disaster Areas (One hour)

Instruct students:

Take a look at your cyber portrait. What can you do to improve any red or yellow shaded areas? Analyze the sections of the *My Virtual Life* questionnaire and think of what you might do to improve your risk factors. Jot down your thoughts on a piece of paper according to the following:

What increased my risk factors?	Why? How can that become a risk?	What can be done to reverse the trend?

1 Willard, Nancy (2007). *Fostering Responsible Online Behavior (Part II)*. *Guidance Channel E-Zine*. Downloaded March 1, 2008 from: <http://www.guidancechannel.com/default.aspx?index=505>.

2 Ibid.



Write the following headings on the board:

- Privacy Protection
- Respect for Others

Under each of these categories, invite students to share examples of behaviours in various Web environments that can jeopardize a person's reputation, put someone at risk for harassment by others, or get someone into trouble.

In response to these concerns, encourage students to brainstorm a “Code of Caution” to help protect privacy and minimize vulnerability to being bullied or harassed online, and a “Code of Nethics” to encourage respect for others online.

Potential guidelines may include:

Privacy Protection = Minimizing the risk of cyberbullying = Code of Caution

1. Guard your contact information – such as cell phone numbers or e-mail addresses – and don't give these out to people you don't know.
2. Don't share your passwords for instant messaging, e-mail or social networking site profiles.
3. Don't open email or instant messages from strangers.
4. In Web environments where you are active, make sure you know who can access any information you are posting.
5. Don't post any information (photos/ideas/text) that you wouldn't want your teachers or parents to see.
6. Always check a website's confidentiality policy before posting anything.

Respect for Others = Online code of ethics = Nethics

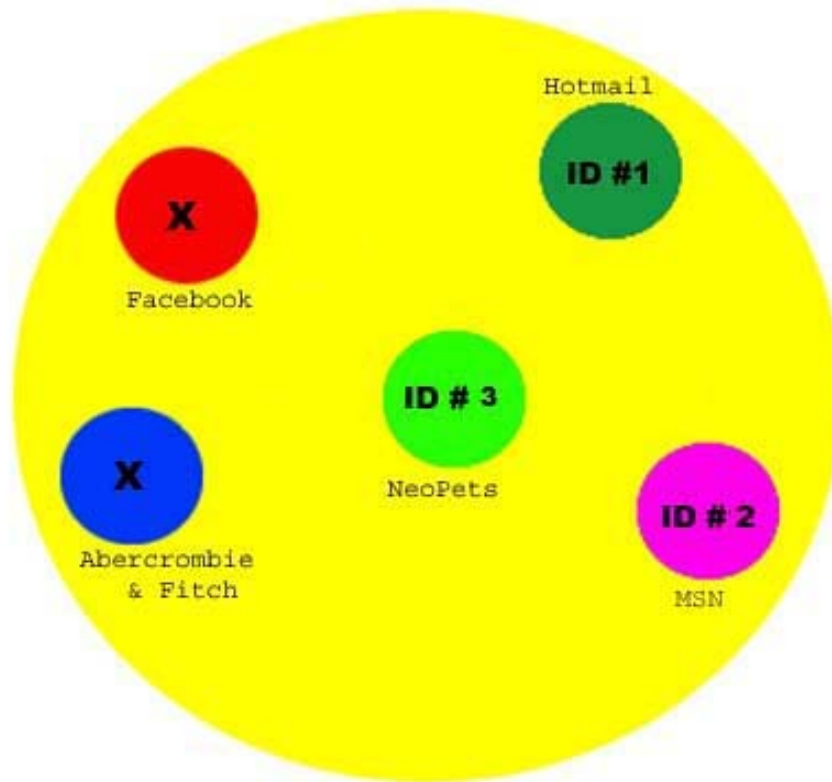
1. Don't spread rumours.
2. Don't post information/photos/videos online that someone has shared with you in confidence.
3. Don't post content (photos/ideas/text) about someone without first getting his or her permission to do so.
4. Don't post anything anonymously.
5. Don't send anyone an e-mail message that you wouldn't convey in person.
6. Avoid getting in any kind of confrontation online, particularly with people you don't know.

Extension Activity

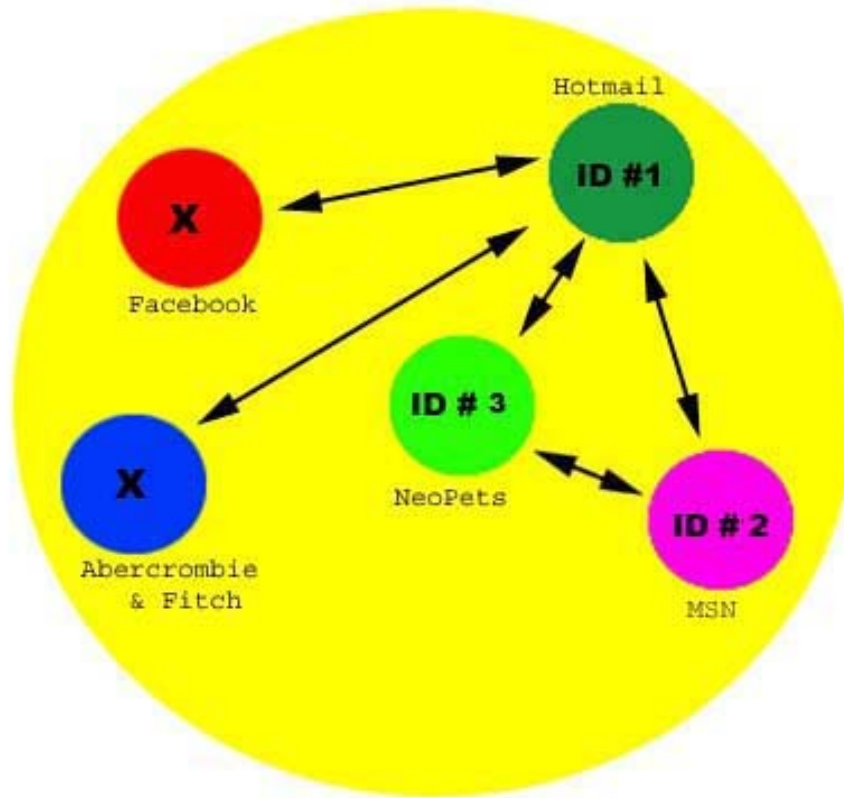
Have students conduct an online search of their own names to further assess their digital footprints.



Identity Footprints # 1



Identity Footprints # 2



Digital Footprints

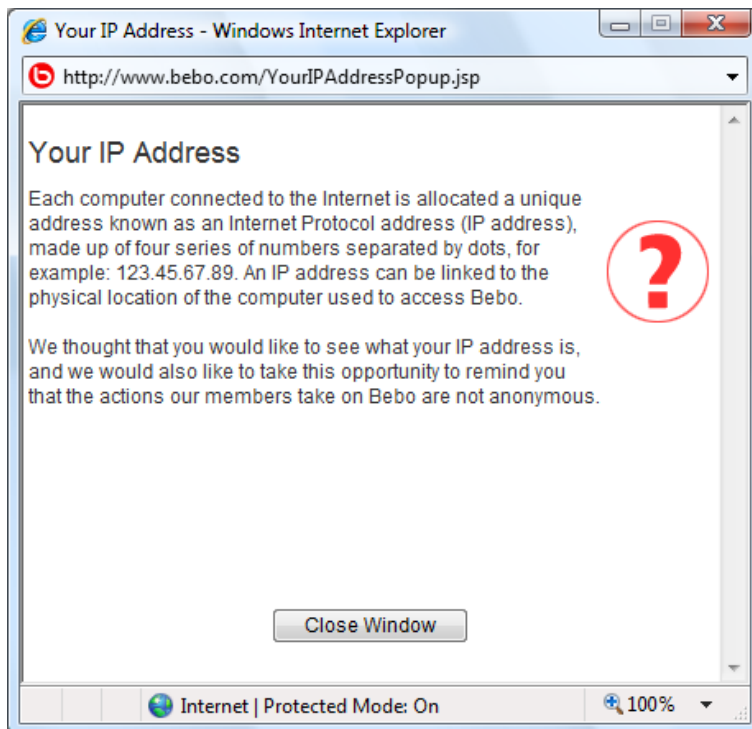


Please Sign In to View this Profile

If you are not yet registered please Register Now

Username or Email		Register
Password		Lost Password?
☐ Automatically for 2 weeks.		
Sign In >		

Your IP address is: 99.241.72.196 [Learn more](#)



My Cyber Portrait

- On your sheet of paper, did you place your virtual world outside or inside the square that represents your physical world? _____
- Why? _____

- How many different nicknames or avatars do you use online?
- Are your online characters different from you? In what way? (i.e., are they more gossipy, more outgoing, funnier, more cynical, unafraid of saying what they think, able to respond aggressively if upset by an online comment...)

Digital Identity/ies	Traits: This character is ...

- Look at your “bridges.” How difficult or easy is it for people to connect your online characters with the real you?



My Virtual Life – Questionnaire

My virtual conscience: _____

Using your cyber portrait as a reference, select the three interactive Web environments in which you are most active. On the Answer Sheet provided, write their names at the top of each Web Environment column and answer the following questions for each one.

Online Profile

1. This profile has:
 - a) one (or several) recognizable photo(s) of me
 - b) one (or several) unrecognizable general photo(s)
 - c) personal data that could be used to identify me (e.g., email address, birthday, name, school, reference to a sports team, etc.)
 - d) there is no profile option on this website
 - e) I have chosen not to complete an online profile on this site
2. Imagine that someone you know in the physical world comes across this online profile. Could this person link this profile to you (either by reading the profile content or by following your email address)?
 - a) yes
 - b) no
 - c) not sure
3. Who can see this profile?
 - a) only people I invite (secret profile)
 - b) only people I accept (limited profile)
 - c) people in my network: school, town (public profile)
 - d) everyone
 - e) not sure
4. Have you ever posted recognizable photos of your friends in your profile?
 - a) yes, after checking with them to make sure they didn't mind
 - b) yes, without checking with them
 - c) no
5. Profile Content
 - a) I would have no problem showing what I have posted in my profile to my virtual conscience
 - b) I would not want to show my profile to my virtual conscience



Communication Characteristics

1. Characteristics
 - a) one-way communication (where your audience or the object of your comments has no way of responding directly to you)
 - b) two-way communication (where your audience or the object of your comments may respond, online or otherwise)
2. Have you ever sent, forwarded or posted an image of someone that was intended to put down, make fun of, or embarrass them?
 - a) yes
 - b) no
3. Have you ever sent, forwarded or posted comments about someone that were intended to put down, make fun of, or embarrass them?
 - a) yes
 - b) no
4. Nature of Communication
 - a) I would have no problem showing my chat logs or what I have posted to my virtual conscience
 - b) I would not want to show my chat logs to my virtual conscience

Passwords

1. Does anyone else know any of the passwords that you use online?
 - a) yes
 - b) no

Lifespan of Data

1. What is the lifespan of the images, and/or information I have posted or shared in this online environment?
 - a) temporary
 - b) permanent
 - c) don't know

Bonus Question

Are you ever truly anonymous when you are online?

- a) yes
- b) No

What do you base your answer on?



My Virtual Life – Answer Sheet

For each of the three Web environments you have chosen, record the answer(s) on your questionnaire that most closely match your online experiences.

Environment #1:		Environment #2:		Environment #3:	
Online Profile					
Answers	Colour	Answers	Colour	Answers	Colour
1 =		1 =		1 =	
2 =		2 =		2 =	
3 =		3 =		3 =	
4 =		4 =		4 =	
5 =		5 =		5 =	
Communication Characteristics					
Answers	Colour	Answers	Colour	Answers	Colour
1 =		1 =		1 =	
2 =		2 =		2 =	
3 =		3 =		3 =	
4 =		4 =		4 =	
Passwords					
Answer	Colour	Answer	Colour	Answer	Colour
1 =		1 =		1 =	
Lifespan of Data					
Answer	Colour	Answer	Colour	Answer	Colour
1 =		1 =		1 =	

Bonus Question:

Are we ever truly anonymous when we are online?



Cyberbullying Backgrounder

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.¹

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”.²

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.³

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.⁴

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.”⁵ 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%.⁶

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

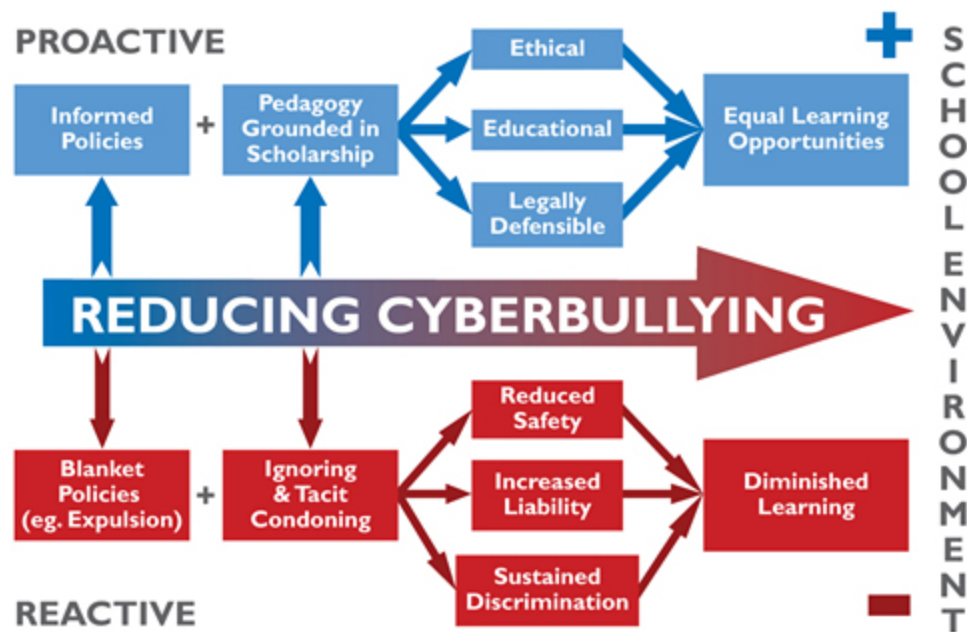
Most bullying relationships are struck at school and, therefore, cyberbullying has a direct negative impact on the atmosphere at school or in the classroom. In her 2004 *Educator's Guide to Cyber Bullying*, Nancy Willard recommends schools develop a comprehensive approach to address cyberbullying that 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".⁷

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.⁸

Cyberbullying School Response: Proactive and Reactive



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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.

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.⁹ 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.

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).¹⁰

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.

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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

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.

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>.