

## Parents' Guide to Cyberbullying

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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.

