



# Cyberbullying

## Awareness and Prevention

It's nice to be nice. Unfortunately, we sometimes don't live up to this standard.

According to *Saskatchewan's Action Plan to Address Bullying and Cyberbullying*, 30% of students reported that they cyberbullied another student. The Red Cross found that about 40% of people aged 12-18 have been cyberbullied.

But the news is not all bad. The Red Cross also found that 71% of people who have witnessed cyberbullying have intervened. In other words, people are willing to do something about cyberbullying.

This issue of *The PLEA* will build our understandings about cyberbullying. What is cyberbullying? What are its consequences? How can we help stop it? Knowing these things will set everyone on a path to be nicer to each other.





*"Cyberbullying can happen at any time. People can hide behind their computers and say hurtful things about others. This makes it hard to know who the bully is and makes it difficult to stop them."*

- Affleck & Barrison LLP

## What is Bullying?

We all have a general idea of what bullying is. Threatening someone can be bullying. Pressuring someone to do something they don't want to do can be bullying. Humiliating someone can be bullying. Excluding someone can be bullying.

According to The Red Cross, bullying typically is:

- ❶ WILLFUL - the behaviour is deliberate
- ❷ REPEATED - the behaviour happens more than once
- ❸ HARMFUL - the victim of the bullying experiences some sort of harm

As well, bullying often will involve a power imbalance: bigger against smaller, or groups against an individual.

Bullying hurts. It hurts the person being bullied, and it hurts the person doing the bullying too. There is no need for it.

Unfortunately, bullying is universal. It can happen to people of all ages, in any place in the world. Bullying can happen at schools, in clubs, in teams, at businesses, and even within families.

## Why do people cyberbully?

Cyberbullying could be unintentional. But it also could be more intentional, a result of:

- ❶ desiring popularity
- ❷ wanting to feel more powerful
- ❸ difficulties with empathy
- ❹ sense of belonging to a group
- ❺ a misplaced release of anger

## Joking vs. Bullying

- ★ *Does it upset or hurt you? If so, this is bullying.*
- ★ *Did the bully continue after being asked to stop? If so, this is bullying.*
- ★ *Is it repeated behaviour? If so, this is bullying.*



# What is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is a specific kind of bullying. Cyberbullying is bullying using the internet, social media, email, text messages, or other forms of electronic communication.

According to The Red Cross, some kinds of cyberbullying include:

- 🕒 **FLAMING** - arguing by using angry insults
- 🕒 **HARASSMENT** - sending numerous insults or threats
- 🕒 **CYBERSTALKING** - watching or monitoring someone online
- 🕒 **DENIGRATION** - gossiping about a person to hurt their reputation
- 🕒 **IMPERSONATION** - pretending to be somebody you are not, to harm their reputation or relationships
- 🕒 **OUTING** - sharing secrets online, sometimes to “out” someone’s sexuality
- 🕒 **TRICKERY** - convincing someone to share embarrassing or private information
- 🕒 **EXCLUSION** - intentionally excluding someone

**Remember:** If you like or share something online that was used to bully, you are cyberbullying too. Liking and sharing encourages the bully to continue their mean behaviour.

## Conflict vs. Bullying

Conflict is normal. Learning how to fairly resolve disagreements is an essential part of growing up. Bullying is not normal. It is harmful.

### Normal Conflict

- 🕒 Dan and Raj both want to be first to use the new classroom computer.
- 🕒 Kyle and Dave are both very competitive and play hard to control the puck in after-school hockey.
- 🕒 Debbie and Pia both want to be friends with the new student.

### Bullying

- 🕒 Dan organises all the boys on his side to tease Raj.
- 🕒 Kyle is bigger and more athletic than Dave, and during hockey he regularly checks Dave when he thinks nobody is looking.
- 🕒 Debbie tells the new student that she has to choose: you can only be my friend if you exclude Pia.



### Chat!

★ *Have you ever received a message or seen an online post that has made you feel uncomfortable? Do you think it was bullying? Why or why not?*



# What are the Consequences of Cyberbullying?

## Emotional and Social Consequences

Cyberbullying is bad for our mental and physical health. It hurts the people who bully, the people who are bullied, and the witnesses of bullying. Some consequences of cyberbullying can include:

- 🕒 loneliness, isolation, lack of friends
- 🕒 school absenteeism and dropping out
- 🕒 general aggressive behaviour
- 🕒 substance abuse
- 🕒 low self-esteem and depression
- 🕒 thoughts of self-harm or suicide

It's important that we all think about the impacts of our words and actions.

**Remember:** Positive feelings escalate. The nicer we are to others, the better everyone will feel, including ourselves.

## Legal Consequences

Everyone 12 and older has reached the age of criminal responsibility. This means that criminal laws will apply to your actions, including bullying behaviour. Criminal offences that may apply to cyberbullying include uttering threats, criminal harassment, sharing intimate images without consent, extortion, and child pornography offenses.

If a young person's bullying or cyberbullying is criminal, the consequences could be serious. In extreme cases, possible consequences could include:

- 🕒 criminal charges
- 🕒 seizure of electronic devices
- 🕒 criminal conviction/record
- 🕒 completing programming and treatment
- 🕒 reporting to a probation officer
- 🕒 jail

The Youth Criminal Justice Act deals with people aged 12-17 who are involved with the criminal justice system.



## Chat!

★ **What does anyone have to gain from hurting people or harming their reputations? When should such actions have legal consequences?**



# CASE STUDIES

*What can you learn from these two cases?*



## **A.B. v. Bragg Communications Inc., 2012 SCC 46**

### *The Facts:*

A 15-year-old girl found out that someone had posted a fake Facebook profile of her. The profile used her picture and a slightly modified version of her name. The picture was accompanied by unflattering comments about the girl, including sexual comments.

The girl and her father went to court to force the internet service provider to reveal who created the fake account. They wanted to sue the account's creator for harming her reputation. However, they had no way of knowing who created the account.

### *The Ruling:*

The Supreme Court ruled that the internet service provider must reveal who created the fake profile. There was no other way to identify the profile's creator. The case showed that bullies cannot remain anonymous on the internet.



## **R v. Zhou, 2016 ONCJ 547**

### *The Facts:*

A 16-year-old boyfriend asked his 14-year-old girlfriend to take intimate photos of herself. Without her permission, he posted 10 photos to a pornographic website. People were invited to rate and comment on the photos. They were viewed 1,300 times over two years.

This caused the girlfriend extreme anxiety and depression. Her privacy was violated, and people were given the opportunity to humiliate her by making comments on the website.

### *The Ruling:*

The boyfriend pled guilty to criminal harassment. He cooperated with the police and attended counselling to take responsibility for his actions. The judge put him on probation—meaning he was under supervision—for a year. In addition, he served a short time in prison while awaiting his sentence. He was also ordered to not communicate with his former girlfriend. The case reinforced that “sexting” is a serious crime with long-term consequences for everyone.



# What Can I Do if I'm Cyberbullied?

Often the bully or cyberbully's goal is to get a reaction. They want a reaction from you, and a reaction from others. When bullying or cyberbullying happens, walk away or leave the online conversation. You may want to block the person, too.

## Report

For bullying to be stopped, it needs to be reported. Social media websites allow you to report and block cyberbullies. Evidence is key when reporting. Collect facts. Save messages. Take screenshots.

## Reach Out

Reach out to someone you trust. This could be a parent, a family member, a counsellor, a teacher, an elder, or a police officer. If you are in immediate danger—for example, receiving threats or are being exploited sexually—contact someone you trust or emergency services as soon as possible. Contact information for some emergency services are listed on the back page.

## When should you talk to someone?

If you have concerns about how you are being treated online, it's a good idea to talk to someone you trust. This is especially true if:

- 🕒 you fear for your safety
- 🕒 your mental health is suffering
- 🕒 you may potentially harm yourself or others
- 🕒 you have feelings of despair
- 🕒 you are otherwise scared

When confronting a person who is cyberbullying, create a plan. Ensure that all the important facts are collected. Develop a step-by-step program for how that person will be approached.

**Remember:** A trusted adult can give you guidance on how to approach a person bullying or cyberbullying.





# What Can I Do if Someone Else is Being Cyberbullied?

If someone is being cyberbullied, be supportive! Let them know you are there for them. They don't have to deal with this alone. To help, you can:

- 🕒 express disapproval of the bullying
- 🕒 encourage them to talk to a trusted adult
- 🕒 check up on them
- 🕒 let the victim know it isn't their fault
- 🕒 ask the person doing the bullying to stop, if it is safe to do so
- 🕒 remember that retaliation is not the answer

Generally, if your friend asks you not to tell anyone, check with them before talking to somebody else about the problem. They trusted you, and they might not feel comfortable involving anyone else.

However, do not hesitate to talk to a trusted adult if you think someone's safety or well-being is at risk. This includes such situations as when threats are being made, or intimate images are being shared.

If you are unsure, it is always best to talk to a trusted adult.



*"Remaining silent could be misinterpreted as approval by both the person cyberbullying and the victim.... Don't wait, and don't tell yourself it's none of your business. You don't want to be looking back on this moment years from now, wishing you'd done or said something."*

- Canada Public Safety

## Bystander Effect

Students who witness others being bullied often feel:

- 🕒 afraid for their own safety
- 🕒 powerless and powerless to act
- 🕒 guilty or ashamed for not intervening
- 🕒 tempted to participate
- 🕒 someone else may step up to help so they don't get involved

## Chat!

★ **Have you ever blocked or reported someone online? Have you ever discussed an incident of cyberbullying with a trusted adult? How did it go? What did you learn? What advice would you give to others?**



## Be Proactive!

Have open conversations with teachers, parents, and other people you trust before bullying starts. By setting out some initial ground rules, you can become a better online citizen. Things to talk about could include:

- the importance of passwords and privacy
- the implications of sexting and sharing intimate images
- creating a code of conduct for online behaviour
- understanding the importance of limiting “screen time”
- what kinds of social media accounts are appropriate
- what kinds of social media accounts are inappropriate
- sharing passwords with parents or trusted adults
- establishing that phones, tablets, or computers will not be confiscated for simply coming forward to discuss an issue

It's a good idea to have these conversations early on, as soon as you start using technology.

## Resources

Many of the organisations and resources listed below helped inform this issue of *The PLEA*. Check them out for further guidance and support.

**UNICEF** Cyberbullying: What is It and How to Stop It  
[www.unicef.org/end-violence/how-to-stop-cyberbullying](http://www.unicef.org/end-violence/how-to-stop-cyberbullying)


**RCMP** Bullying and Cyberbullying [www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/bullying](http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/bullying)

**Public Safety Canada** Together We Can Stop Cyberbullying  
[www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/campaigns/cyberbullying.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/campaigns/cyberbullying.html)

**Saskatoon Crisis Intervention Service** [www.saskatooncrisis.ca](http://www.saskatooncrisis.ca)

**24 Hour Crisis Line** for people within Saskatoon 306-933-6200

**Kids Help Phone** 1-800-668-6868 or chat online at [kidshelpphone.ca](http://kidshelpphone.ca)

**PLEA**   
Legal Information for Everyone

**Free Class Sets** [teachers.plea.org](http://teachers.plea.org)

This issue of *The PLEA* was created in conjunction with volunteers from Pro Bono Students Canada, University of Saskatchewan chapter and Arjun Shankar, Senior Crown Prosecutor with the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice. Some elements (p. 2-3) adapted from David Katzman's *Bullying Radar*.

Graphics credit Shutterstock.

Public Legal Education Association of Saskatchewan  
[plea.org](http://plea.org) | [plea@plea.org](mailto:plea@plea.org) | 306.653.1868

© 41.3 - 05/22  
ISSN: 0715-4224