

Cyberbullying: Ethics and Empathy

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MediaSmarts is Canada's
bilingual centre for digital
media literacy.

A registered charity,
MediaSmarts has been
conducting research,
developing resources and
advancing digital media
literacy since 1996.

HabiloMédias est le centre
bilingue d' éducation aux
médias numériques du
Canada.

Organisme de bienfaisance
enregistré, HabiloMédias
réalise des recherches,
élabore des ressources et
contribue à l'avancement de
l'éducation aux médias
numériques depuis 1996.



What is
cyberbullying?



How common is it?

1 in 6 Canadian kids have **been mean or cruel** to someone online

1 in 3 have been **targets** of mean and cruel behaviour

Half of those who have been targets have **also** been **perpetrators**





Who does it and why?

There is **no single profile** of a child who bullies

Half say they did it to get back for something **done to them** or a **friend**

Half say they were “**just joking around**”





Where does it happen?

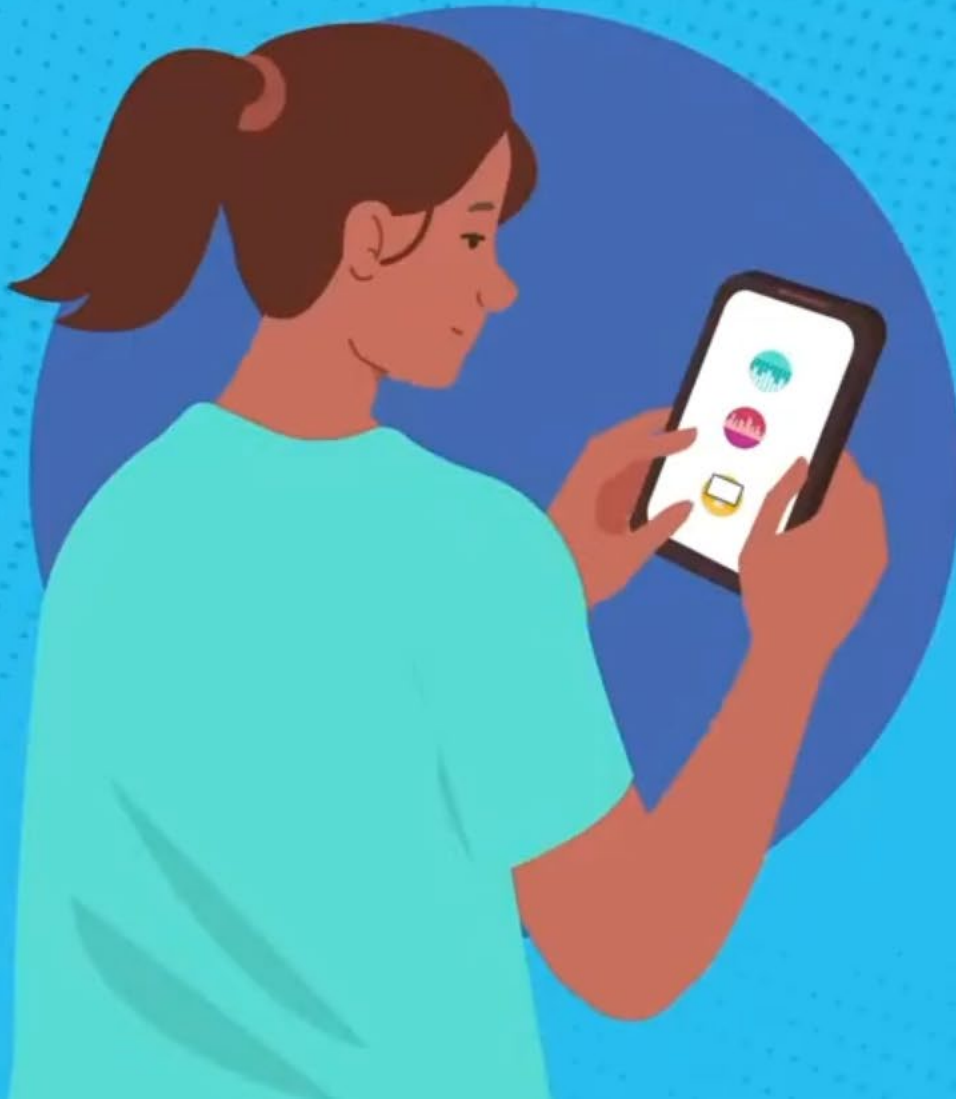
Social networks

Texting and instant messaging

Multiplayer games



Who experiences it?



Youth with **one or more disabilities**, **racialized** youth and youth who **identify as 2SLBTQ+** are all more likely to be targets...

... but **anything that makes them stand out** can also make them a target.



How does it happen?

Name-calling

Gossiping

Exclusion

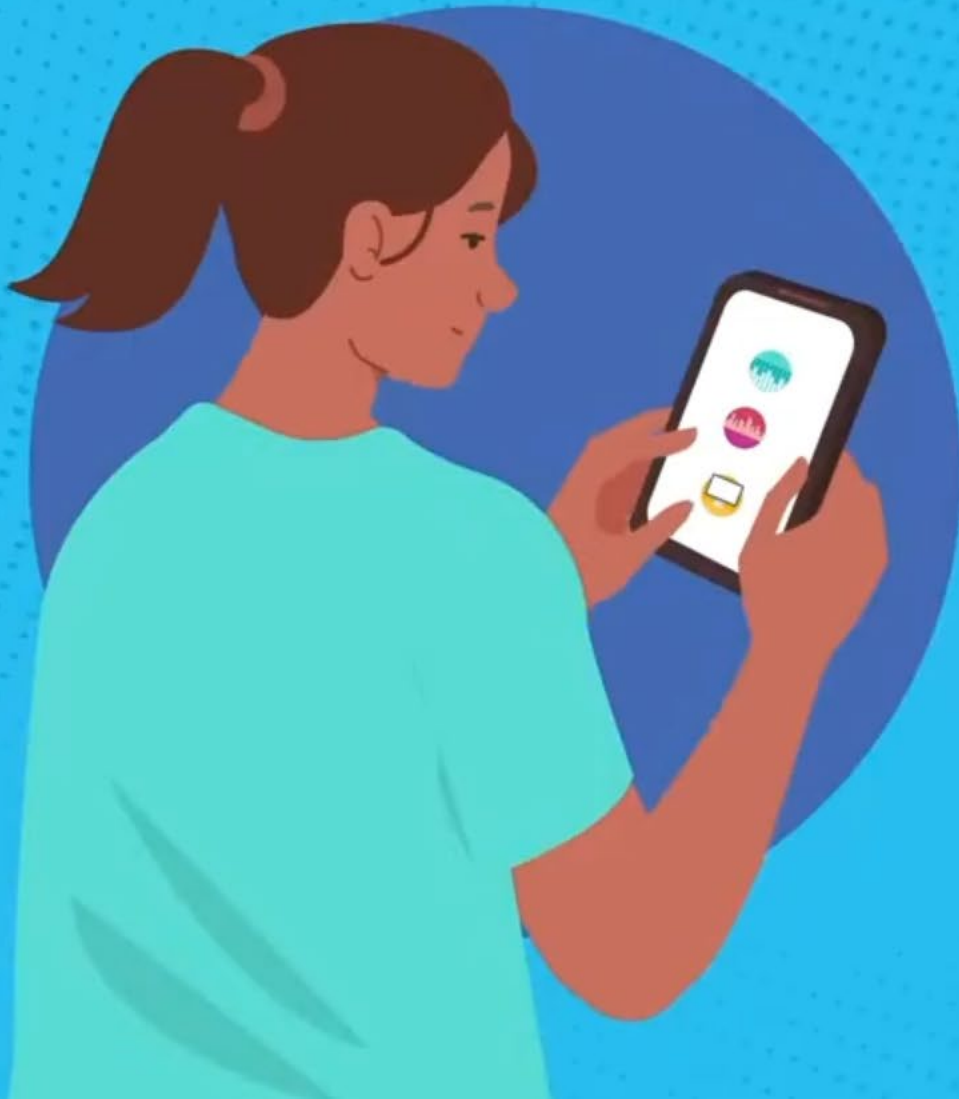
Sharing private content

Impersonation

Cyberstalking



How does it affect kids?



Kids who **experience** or **witness** cyberbullying have **worse mental and physical health ...**

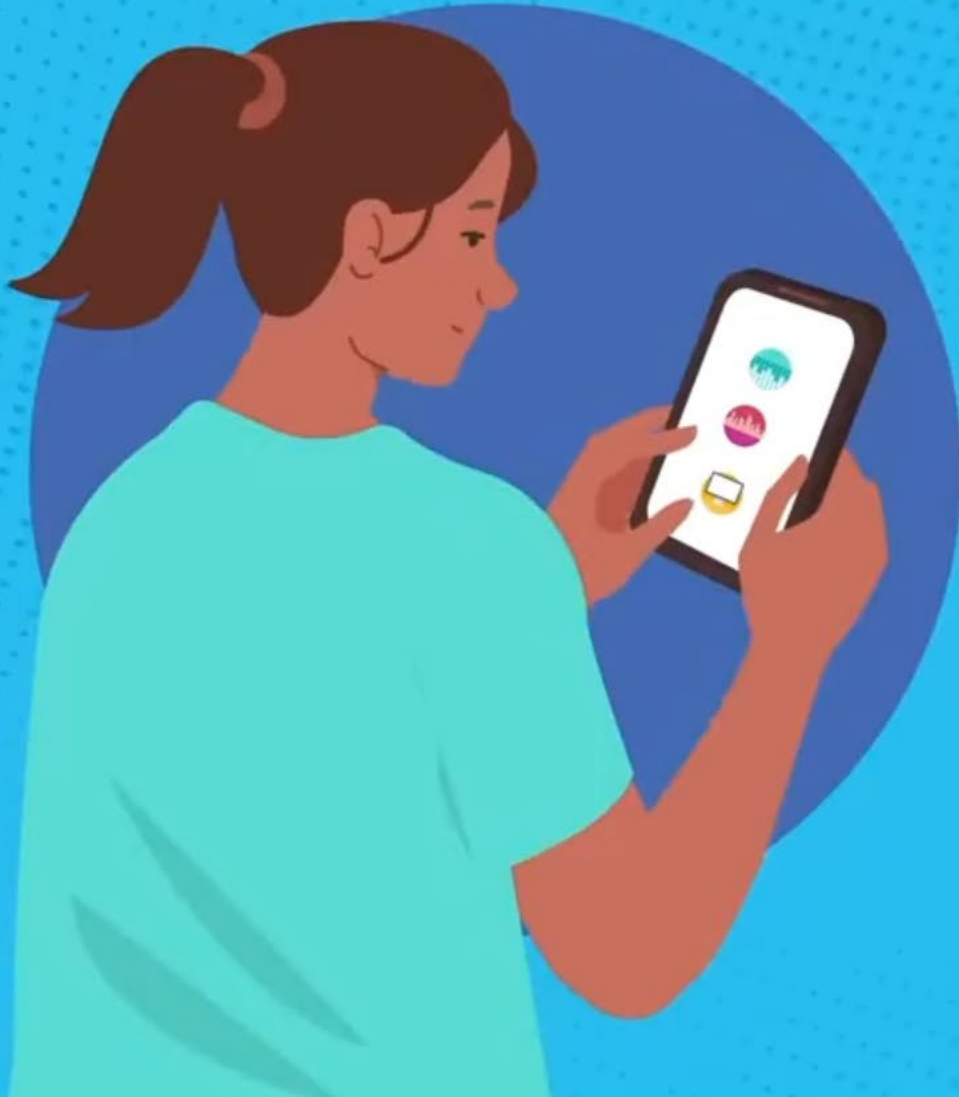
... and so do kids who cyberbully others.



Bullying is not a rite of passage; it is not a necessary part of growing up. It is critical that adults send a clear message that bullying behavior is wrong and has to stop. When bullying is not challenged, it is allowed to fester.

Mary Gordon, Roots of Empathy

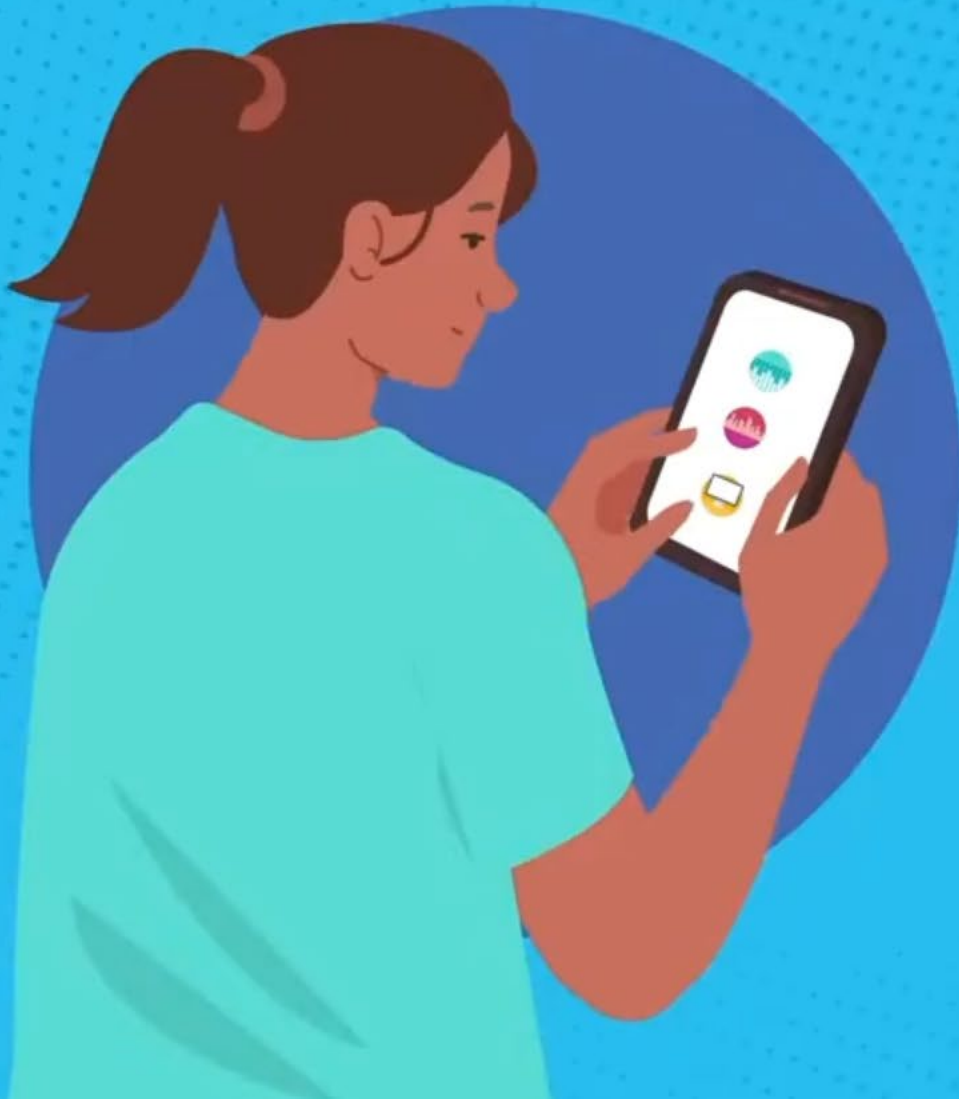
How does it happen?



Grieving

Drama

How does it happen?



Griefing

Drama

Harassment

Relationship Violence



What can we do
about it?





Help your child **curate** their online world

Provide **other channels** for chatting with friends during games

Show them how to **Mute, Block and Report**



Be your child's **media coach**

Set clear **household rules** that:

Communicate **values**

Give kids a chance to earn **trust**

Foster **independence**

Explain **how** and **when** to do something

Be the **beginning** of a conversation, not the end



Be your child's **media coach**

Set clear **household rules**:

Rules for young kids should be **specific**

Rules for teens should focus on **goals**





Be your child's **media coach**

Set clear **household rules**

Encourage **open communication**
over **surveillance**





Teens will approach their parents for help with social issues if they believe their parents will listen without judgment.

Dr. Katie Hurley, The Jed Foundation





Be your child's **media coach**

Set clear **household rules**

Encourage **open communication**
over **surveillance**

Identify **sources of support**





Be your child's **media coach**

Set clear **household rules**

Encourage **open communication**
over **surveillance**

Identify **sources of support**

Watch for **teachable moments**
while co-viewing



Tools for managing feelings online

Help build their **emotional toolbox**:

- Name and validate emotions





Build their **emotional skills**

Help **children** learn to **recognize**
and **talk about** their emotions



Build their **emotional skills**

Help **children** learn to **recognize**
and **talk about** their emotions:

How do different emotions **feel** in
our bodies?



Tools for managing feelings online

Help build their **emotional toolbox**:

- Name and validate emotions
- Slow down
- Shift your feelings
- Use self-coaching
- If... Then planning





Tools for managing feelings online



Specific tips for **online** interactions:

- Imagine they're **next to you**
- Try to **assume the best**
- Talk things out **offline**
- Don't have your **posse** back you up



Tools for managing feelings online

Discourage “sneaky excuses”

... but don't make bullying seem
more common than it is.





Recognizing unhealthy relationships

- 
- Control
 - Isolation
 - Humiliation
 - Surveillance

Empower witnesses

Teach a **range of actions**, not just "stand up":

Document

Distract

Escape

Mediate

Comfort





Empower witnesses

Encourage **calling in** over **calling out**



Empower witnesses

Before **taking sides**, kids should ask:

- “**Why** am I doing this?”
- “Is it really going to **make things better?**”
- “Would I **do the same thing** if the **positions were reversed?**”





What do I do if...



What do I do if... I'm worried my child is being cyberbullied?

- Open conversation
- Listen without judgment
- Ask open-ended questions:
 - “What exactly happened?”
 - “What can we do to fix this?”





What do I do if...

my child is cyberbullied?

- Get a record of what happened
- Tell them it's not their fault
- Empower them to fix things
- *Don't* cut off access to devices or apps





What do I do if...

my child may be cyberbullying someone else?

- Stay calm
- Get their point of view
- Get other perspectives



What do I do if...

my child **did** cyberbully someone else?

- Find out why and respond accordingly
- Challenge “sneaky excuses”
- Impose a consequence



Special considerations

Youth with disabilities and neurodivergent youth experience more risks **and** benefits from being online



- Make sure rules are clear
- Don't make assumptions
- Don't overprotect

Special considerations

The **Safe Schools Act** covers **online behaviour**, even if it is done outside the school



A judge can order **intimate images** to be taken down

One in six young people would turn to the law if **two efforts** had failed

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