

## WHAT TO DO IF

# YOUR CHILD IS BEING CYBERBULLIED



Over the past few years, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection has witnessed a marked increase in reports to [Cybertip.ca](https://www.cybertip.ca) from youth ranging from 13 to 17 years of age. A large percentage of these reports are with regard to sexual images/videos being created and distributed among their peers via the Internet and/or electronic devices, sometimes as a form of cyberbullying. When children are sexually exploited/abused and technology has been used to memorialize the sexual harm, there is often an additional layer of trauma for the child.

Educators, school-based resource (liaison) officers, families and the community-at-large play a fundamental role in assisting and supporting youth who are cyberbullied. If you are concerned that your child may be affected by cyberbullying, consider the following strategies.

**THE CANADIAN CENTRE FOR CHILD PROTECTION DEFINES CYBERBULLYING AS A FORM OF EXTREME BULLYING AMONG YOUTH VIA TECHNOLOGY. IT IS ABUSIVE, TARGETED, DELIBERATE AND REPEATED BEHAVIOUR THAT IS INTENDED TO DAMAGE AND HARM ANOTHER YOUNG PERSON.**

1.

### DISCONTINUE THE CONTACT

**Make sure your child does NOT respond to the bully.** Teach your child not to respond to any attempts made by the bully to engage in conversation or dialogue (e.g., walking away or ignoring any in-person contact and not responding to any texts or other online messages). Explain to your child that responding may only fuel the bully into escalating the activity. Not responding is especially critical if your child is being threatened or blackmailed – this should be reported to the police immediately.

**Have your child adjust their privacy settings on social networking sites and block or delete the bully as a friend/contact on these sites.** Most sites allow users to set limits on who can access their profile and send/post messages to their profile, and many provide users with the option to block or delete contacts. Having your child adjust their settings and block or delete contacts will help them limit or eliminate unwanted contact by the bully. This will not only help reduce their exposure to hurtful comments but will also help to reduce any distress they may feel whenever they are exposed to what the bully is posting. *Before your child deletes the bully, they should make a copy of any prior communication in case they need to involve the police at some point.*

**Have your child change their email address and username.** Deleting their accounts for a period of time will give your child an important emotional break from seeing the cruel commentary that may be happening online. They may also wish to create new accounts that only close and trusted friends and family know about.

2.

### ADDRESS ANY SEXUAL PICTURES/VIDEOS POSTED ONLINE

**Contact the site where the picture/video is posted.** Most popular sites (i.e., Facebook®, Twitter®, Instagram®) have a process for reporting, and many place a higher priority on situations involving youth. It's important to include the exact URL (website address) where the content is posted and your child's age at the time the picture/video was taken. Also identify your child as the person in the picture/video and indicate that your child did not post the picture/video, did not consent for it to be posted and objects to the continued posting of the content. For more information on how to contact popular websites, please visit [needhelppnow.ca](https://www.needhelppnow.ca).



**3.****REPORT THE BULLY**

**Report the bully to your child's school.** If the bullying involves school peers, telling people in a position to do something about it, such as the administrators at your child's school, is important.

**Report to the website or cell phone service providers.** If the bullying is occurring online, your child can report the situation to the provider that runs the website or service where the bullying is taking place (e.g., Facebook®, Twitter®). For bullying occurring via text messaging, explore what options exist to block contacts with your mobile service provider.

**Report the bully to the police.** Depending on the nature of the situation, who is involved and what the bullying has escalated to, there may be Criminal Code (Canada) violations to consider such as criminal harassment, intimidation, uttering threats, extortion, defamatory libel, personation, use of a computer in an unauthorized way or interference with data, child pornography, luring, counselling to commit suicide etc.



**Remember, if you are at all concerned that the situation involves something potentially illegal, reporting to a law enforcement agency as soon as possible is extremely important.**

**4.****REINFORCE THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDS**

Being around close friends can help your child feel safe, supported and give them strength to get through this difficult time.

## When Peers or Friends are Being Bullied

Often, youth aren't sure what to do when a peer or friend is being bullied and feel that being silent is the answer. They may think: it's not my problem, they aren't my friend, I don't really like them anyway, they deserve it, I don't want to make it worse by bringing attention to it, I don't want to be targeted next, etc.

It's important for youth to have a variety of options for ways they can stand up against the mistreatment of others and this needs to be reinforced by adults. You can encourage a range of actions that include:

- Refusing to participate (including not "liking" or forwarding harmful messages) and removing themselves from the situation
- Including the person being bullied in school groups, what your child is doing at lunch, etc.
- Challenging hurtful messages with responses such as, "That's not cool," "I think they are awesome," etc.
- Letting the person who is being mistreated know how they are being treated is wrong and that it's not okay
- Going to a safe adult to let them know what is going on

**If you are concerned that your child may be having suicidal thoughts, seek professional help immediately. Take all signs of suicidal behaviour seriously.**

**Visit [protectchildren.ca](http://protectchildren.ca) for more information**

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The safety tips and other information provided herein is intended as general information only, not as advice. Readers should assess all information in light of their own circumstances, the age and maturity level of the child they wish to protect and any other relevant factors.



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Helping families. Protecting children.