For most youth, the Internet is all about connecting and socializing. Online activities can allow youth to explore their identities and reduce feelings of social isolation. 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.

Cyberbullying can occur 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with no escape. Hurtful messages or images can last indefinitely due to the permanent nature of digital information, and the potential for repeated exposure can create feelings of hopelessness. Certain types of cyberbullying, such as the sharing of non-consensual images, can be witnessed by large numbers of people instantly, and can infiltrate all aspects of a person’s life including home, school, work and community.

The perceived anonymous nature of cyberbullying can lead the person harmed to feel heightened anxiety, unsure of who might know, who is involved, and who should be feared.

Those who are cyberbullied may feel shame, guilt and embarrassment, and may retreat from or be pushed out of their social network. As a result they may experience an intense sense of isolation, fear, loneliness and despair. They are more likely to engage in substance use to numb their feelings. School performance can decline and some youth who are cyberbullied become aggressive.
know the signs

If you think your child is involved in a bullying relationship online, there are some signs to watch for:

- avoiding using the Internet and cell phones
- appearing angry or depressed after using technology
- withdrawing from friends and family
- not wanting to talk about online activities or
- trying to hide the screen when people are in the room

Children who experience **cybervictimization** also tend to be victimized offline.

**Cybervictimization Experienced by Boys**

- 10% grade 6
- 9% grade 8
- 10% grade 10

**Cybervictimization Experienced by Girls**

- 14% grade 6
- 20% grade 8
- 20% grade 10

Source: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children in Canada: Focus on Relationships

what we can do

**Build healthy relationship skills:** Help youth develop the skills they need to establish successful healthy relationships. These skills include: communication, non-violent problem solving, and how to regulate intense emotions.

**Create a climate for youth to disclose experiences:** Youth often do not disclose for fear of retaliation, shame, or the belief they can/should handle the bullying on their own. Youth also don’t disclose to adults because they worry that they will take away their technology. Remember that although cyberbullying is happening online, it is not about the technology. It is ultimately a relationship problem, and that is what needs to be addressed.

**Expand digital literacy skills:** Youth may be avid users of the latest apps and social media platforms, but they still need modeling of good habits, guidance, and ongoing dialogue. Be sure to speak to youth about how to be safe online, and about how to identify cyberbullying and to be more aware of its detrimental effects.

**Recognize and identify:** Know the signs of involvement in cyberbullying, and if concerned, ask.

**Intervene:** Listen to your teen and remain calm. Try not to overreact or take away their phone. Document all evidence. Reach out for further help from coaches, teachers, or local law enforcement if necessary. If your child or teen is in distress, encourage them to utilize mental health resources.