

# Classroom Resources to Counter Cyber Bullying

## Lessons on Cyber Bullying for Grades 5-12

Media Awareness Network

The Internet has created a whole new world of social communications for young people who are using e-mail, social networking Web sites, instant messaging, chat rooms and text messaging to stay in touch with friends and make new ones.

While most interactions are positive, increasingly kids are using these communication tools to antagonize and intimidate others. According to a 2008 University of Toronto cyber bullying survey, nearly one in five Canadian students surveyed reported having been bullied online in the past three months.<sup>1</sup> An Alberta study found that one-third of students who had cyber bullied, had also been victims themselves.<sup>2</sup>

Cyber bullying can be much more severe in its effects than offline bullying because the targets feel they have no escape. Also, given the wide scope of the Web, there can be many more witnesses to the bullying.

School administrators and teachers are struggling to address this issue with students. When real-world bullying occurs in a schoolyard or classroom, teachers are often able to intervene, but online bullying takes place off the radar screen of adults, making it difficult to detect in schools and impossible to monitor off school property.

Despite this, schools are increasingly being expected to address issues relating to cyber bullying. Dr. Shaheen Shariff of McGill University emphasizes that schools have a responsibility “to adapt to a rapidly evolving technological society, address emerging challenges, and guide children to become civic-minded individuals”.<sup>3</sup> According to Shariff, schools must support a preventive approach to cyber bullying that includes developing informed policies and providing pedagogy that is grounded in scholarship in order to grant *equal learning opportunities* to all students.

### The lessons

To help educators address this issue in their classrooms, Media Awareness Network has developed a series of lessons, in English and in French, to give students a better understanding of the ethical and legal implications of cyber



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bullying and to promote positive Internet use. Intended to support and enhance school-based anti-bullying and empathy-building programs, *Cyber Bullying: Encouraging Ethical Online Behaviour* comprises the following:

#### *Introduction to Cyber Bullying: Avatars and Identity* Grades 5-6

With the layering of identity through the use of nicknames and avatars, as well as a sense of anonymity, it is easy for young people to sometimes forget that real people – with real feelings – are at the heart of online conversations. In this lesson, students are provided with opportunities to explore this concept and discuss the importance of using empathy and common sense when talking to others online.

#### *Understanding Cyber Bullying: Virtual vs. Physical Worlds* Grades 7-8

In this lesson, students explore the concept of cyber bullying and learn how the attributes associated with online communication may fuel inappropriate or bullying behaviour. Connections between other contributing factors to bullying – online and offline – are also reinforced as students develop an understanding of the role played by bystanders and the ways in which our own responses may fuel or stop this kind of behaviour. As a class, students establish a class “code of (N)ethics” for online conduct.

*Cyber Bullying and the Law*  
*Grades 7-8 & Grades 9-12 (two lessons)*

In these lessons, secondary and middle school students learn about and discuss the legal aspects of cyber bullying. They review a variety of hypothetical scenarios and a case study, and consider the seriousness of the situations, who is legally responsible, what action (if any) should be taken and by whom. To determine this, students will seek answers to the following questions: How does cyber bullying differ from offline bullying? What aspects of a cyber bullying case make it a cause for legal action? What determines whether it is a civil or a criminal matter? How should rights to freedom of expression, guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, be balanced against rights to security of person? When and how are schools responsible for cyber bullying cases?

*Cyber Bullying and Civic Participation*  
*Grades 7-8*

This lesson allows students to explore the concept of civic participation in the creation of Canadian laws through a study of the consultation process found in the *Canada Gazette*. Students will create their own *School Gazette* by proposing and discussing rules against cyber bullying at school.

*Promoting Ethical Online Behaviour: Our Values and Ethics*  
*Grades 7-9*

In this 3-part lesson, students learn about online privacy and ethical behaviour by exploring their digital footprints to better understand how our online interactions may not be as anonymous as we think they are. In Part One, students create a digital map of their Web-based activities and the various characters and personas they assume online. In Part Two, students further assess the privacy and ethics of their online activities by applying their cyber-portraits to a questionnaire and, in Part Three, students look at areas in their virtual lives where they can make improvements.

## Supporting backgrounders

*Cyber Bullying: Encouraging Ethical Online Behaviour* is also supported by a number of backgrounders, based on current research. These include:

- A general *Cyber Bullying Backgrounder* for teachers
- A backgrounder for teachers outlining *Cyber Bullying – Rights and Responsibilities*
- A *Cyber Bullying and the Law Fact Sheet*
- A *Parents' Guide to Cyber Bullying*

All of these lessons and backgrounders are available to download from the MNet website: [www.media-awareness.ca](http://www.media-awareness.ca)

## Partners

*Cyber Bullying: Encouraging Ethical Online Behaviour* was produced with support from:

- Government of Canada
- Canadian Teachers' Federation
- Dr. Shaheen Shariff, Faculty of Education, McGill University
- Red Cross RespectEd Program

## Endnotes

- 1 University of Toronto, March 2008.
- 2 Quing Li, *New Bottle but Old Wine: A Research of Cyberbullying in Schools*, Elsevier Ltd., Calgary, Alberta, 2005.
- 3 Shaheen Shariff & Rachel Gouin, "Cyberdilemmas: Gendered Hierarchies, Free Expression and Cyber-safety in Schools." Presented at *Safety and Security in a Networked World: Balancing Cyber-Rights and Responsibilities*. Oxford Internet Institute Conference, Oxford, U.K., 2005.

MNet is a Canadian not-for-profit centre of expertise in media education. Its vision is to ensure children and youth possess the necessary critical thinking skills and tools to understand and actively engage with media ([www.media-awareness.ca](http://www.media-awareness.ca)).

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