

Senate Committee on Human Rights

CYBER BULLYING HURTS

**Respect for Rights
in the Digital Age**

Youth Guide

The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights

Ce rapport est également offert en français



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Respect for Rights in the Digital Age

Message for Canadian Youth

It was my birthday ... and one of my best friends – well I thought she was my best friend – posted on Facebook and tagged me in it, so she knew everyone I knew and everyone she knew could see it. She posted [a lie about something shocking that she said I did]. Then hundreds of people started commenting and liking it and saying really mean things about me, and she was deleting all the things that were supporting me or trying to tell her to take it down. People that I worked for saw it; my whole family saw it, all my aunties and uncles. Everyone saw it and everyone in the town knew too.

I [have] been on both ends of the spectrum. I have said things. I have been the bully on the Internet and have had things said to me and sent to me. I see it happen on an everyday basis. It makes me sad because the Internet is a tool meant to connect people and it is meant to expand what is outside our immediate community. It is easy to pick up the phone or write something on the keyboard or say something rude or mean. A lot of us have become so desensitized to it, but it makes an impact and people do remember. It really has quite an effect on how I interact with people and how I live my day-to-day life.... I have come to terms with it now and am ok with it but it still hurts and it hurt a lot worse then.

Two young females witnesses (in closed session)

A challenge for your generation

You likely already know the realities and complexities of living life online. Connecting with friends through social networks, texting, researching websites for school projects and following sport statistics, for example, are a regular part of growing up in the digital age.

But, as exciting as it can be to share tweets with a celebrity, or to get instant status updates from cousins three time zones away, being connected 24/7 also presents real risks and hazards. Cell phones, computers and other communications devices are powerful tools —you can use them to help others or to cause harm. Your choice can make all the difference.

Anyone can be a victim of cyberbullying. Although most victims know their bully, the ability to be anonymous can give a false impression that it's okay to say or post anything, without thinking of the consequences. When someone's inbox fills up with mean-spirited comments or embarrassing images, and they see this every time they access it, they can feel like there is no escape.

In our report ***Cyberbullying Hurts: Respect for Rights in the Digital Age***, the **Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights** examines ways to address cyberbullying. We went to the experts for advice, including Canadian youth. We listened to the stories of young brave witnesses who came forward to share their perspective about what it means to grow up in Canada today. We learned that for the most part, young Canadians are using modern technology for their benefit and for the benefit of others. However, we also learned that cyberbullying can be a devastating experience. In particular, it can be very hard if you do not know who to turn to or do not have strategies for dealing with cyberbullies.

The biggest difference between being bullied while in the classroom or playground and being cyberbullied is that we can be targets of cyberbullying 24/7, and that makes you feel as if there is no safe place.

Whenever you are at school or home, everywhere you go, you can be a target of this. That puts a huge dent in your life, because you are always pretty shaken up by this and kind of scared.

Mariel Calvo,
Student,
Springbank Middle School



There are also many experts who can help you to deal with cyberbullying.

Resources that might help you are provided [here](#) – or you can reach Kids Help Phone at: 1-800-668-6868.

You do not need to feel alone, but you do need to feel safe to tell your story to the people that can help.

The good news is there are many bright and hard-working Canadians who are having success in developing ways not only to reduce cyberbullying instances, but also to create school cultures that are inclusive and tolerant. We listened to these academics, service providers, teachers and other experts and included their views in our report.

If there is one thing we learned that we want to pass on, it is that **you can make a difference**. Your generation is shaping the way that modern telecommunications are being used. You can be a model for positive behavior online and promote “digital citizenship” (a term explained below). You can also make a big impact on your school culture by working together to promote tolerance, respect and inclusion. You can urge your teachers and adults to better inform themselves about cyberbullying

and what is an appropriate use of technology in the classroom. Instead of being a bystander, you can let victims know that what has been done to them was wrong and help them to find help. You can promote human rights.

Know Your Rights - Empower Yourself

Young people have rights.

These rights are universal.

**They cannot be taken away
and they don't need to be
earned.**

In Canada, these rights can be found in our Constitution - the highest law in our country, federal and provincial human rights laws, and international treaties such as the United Nations **Convention on the Rights of the Child**.

Children and youth have the right to be safe and free from violence... There is no question that electronic bullying is a violation of children's rights; and from that perspective, we need to find effective practices and policies.

Debra Pepler



A kid who is cyberbullied will always have the problem in the back of his or her mind it will distract them when they need to think, such as at school or at work.

Oliver Buchner,
Student,
Springbank Middle School

These laws create obligations to respect the rights of young people.

The ***Convention on the Rights of the Child*** sets out many rights that you can expect your federal, provincial or territorial governments to uphold. For instance, they must take all appropriate measures to protect you from all forms of physical or mental violence, including cyberbullying.

If you are cyberbullied, a number of other rights may not have been respected. If your studies suffer or you

I started getting bullied a lot in junior high because of my hair colour, because it is orange, and they used to call us gingers and stuff and like just that. When I was in grade nine there was a Facebook thing created. It was called 'kick a ginger day'. Kids with orange hair would get kicked on that day. I never went to school on that day.... I do not think that is right.

A young male witness (in closed session)

fear going to school, your right to receive an education and to develop to your full potential may have been violated. A climate affected by bullying can interfere with the whole school community's ability to achieve its full potential.

You have the right to receive the information and care needed to help you understand the full consequences of cyberbullying behaviour, and the negative impacts it can have on both the victims and the bullies.

You have the right to be treated equally, whether you are gay or straight, whatever your religion or creed, and no matter what the shade of your skin or your gender is.

You have the right to have your voice heard and for your best interests to be a primary consideration in any decisions made by your government or the other adults that provide care or services for you. This includes when anti-bullying initiatives are being created for you. So speak your mind and tell your parents and teachers about what you think will help address cyberbullying. Ask them about the Convention and make sure they are aware of your rights too.



Being a Good Digital Citizen

Rights and responsibilities go hand in hand. When you post a video online of a friend or send a text to a classmate, you are responsible for your words and actions. A person can be charged under the Criminal Code for acts of cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is everyone's responsibility.

Children and youth, parents, schools, volunteers, social service providers, corporations and businesses and all levels of government have a role to play in encouraging a positive online environment. Studies have shown that when everyone works together to stop cyberbullying, the chances of success are greater. This is called a “whole community approach.” Engaging the whole community means embracing its diversity, welcoming all of its members and learning to appreciate individual differences.

It is much easier to insult someone over texts or Facebook because you do not see that look of hurt and betrayal on their face.

Katie Allan,
Student,
Springbank Middle School

All Canadians can help to promote the values of digital citizenship. The basic idea is that our moral and ethical responsibilities continue in cyberspace – or in any of the environments where we are interacting through technology. **It is just as important to be a good human being online and to treat others with respect and dignity.** Talk to your school principal about having students work together to create codes of conduct for your school.

Being a good digital citizen also means being informed about how your online and virtual actions have very real consequences. They impact your peers, your family and your community.

I think we need to harness the power of the youth voice and create programs that are youth initiated and youth led. By engaging youth at genuine and not token levels, they will become active agents of change instead of passive victims who we are trying to protect.

Prof Jennifer Shapka

And, they can impact your future. What we post today is likely to be still accessible well into the future. What would a potential employer, school, club, team or date think if they saw evidence that you behaved inappropriately online? Remember to think before you post.

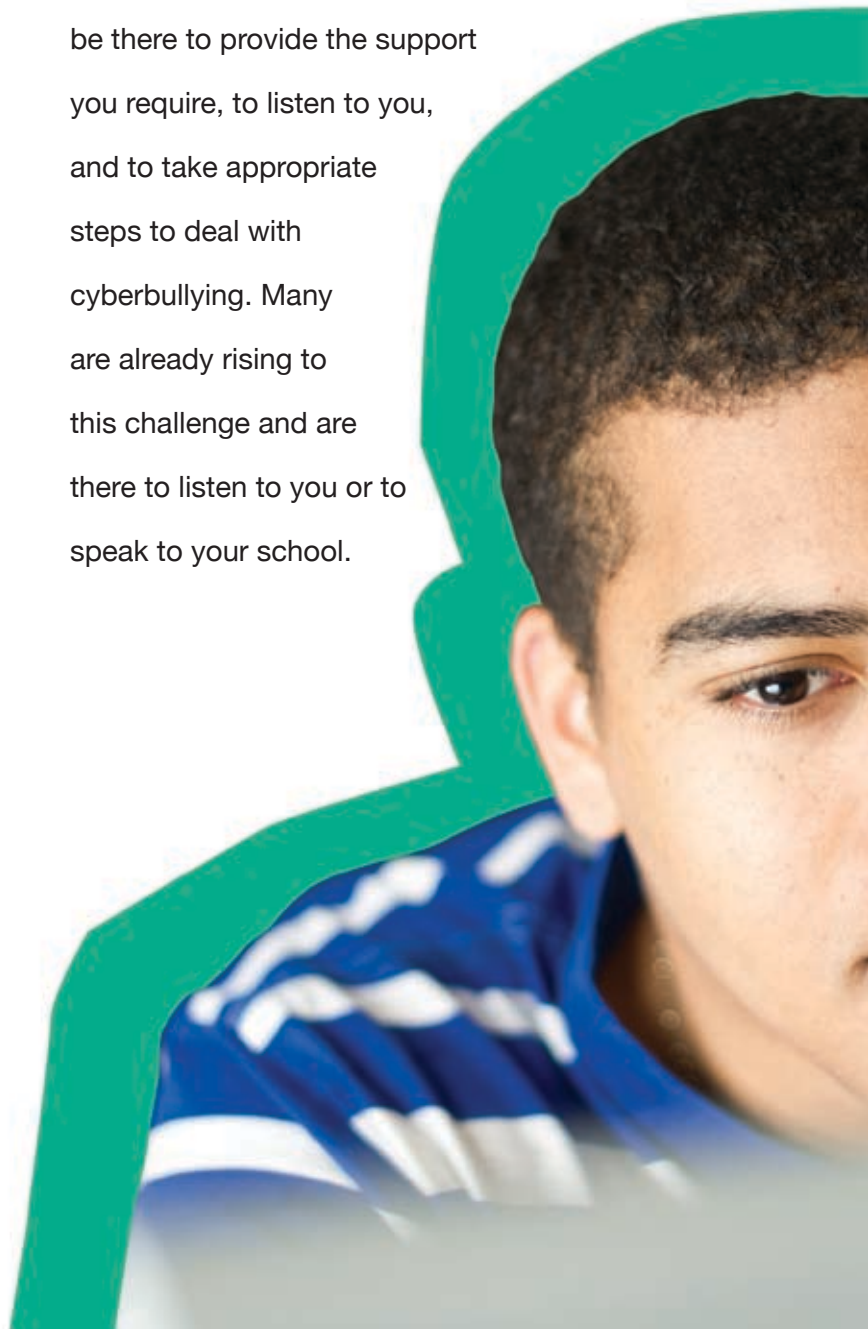
Your Actions Can Make a Difference

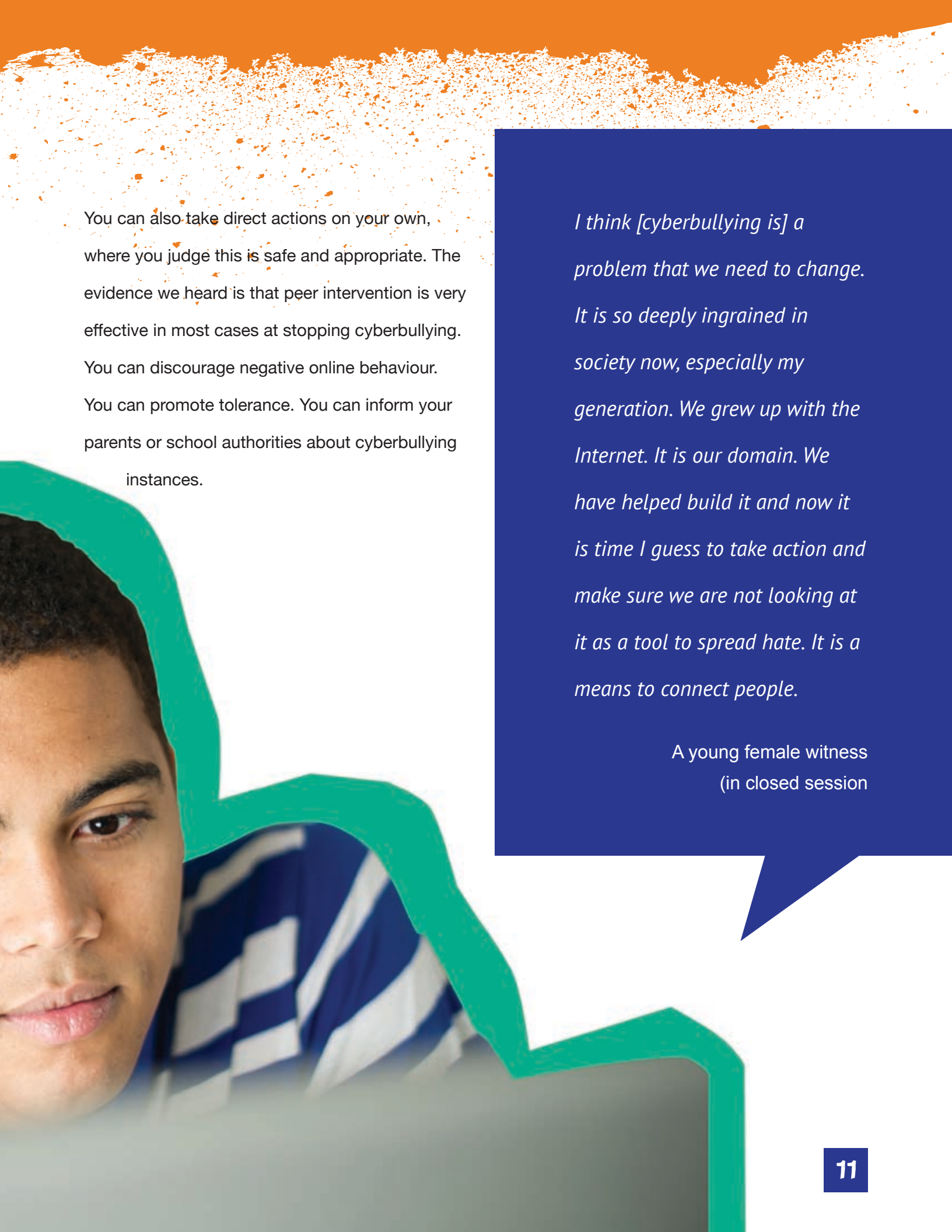
There are practical steps that you can take to deal with cyberbullying. Unfortunately, young Canadians rarely report acts of cyberbullying. This is something we hope will change. Unless your parents, school authorities or, in some cases, the police are

informed about cyberbullying incidents, there is little they can do to help. But, you need to feel confident that the help is there when you need it. We are also therefore encouraging adults to be there to provide the support you require, to listen to you, and to take appropriate steps to deal with cyberbullying. Many are already rising to this challenge and are there to listen to you or to speak to your school.

Sometimes parents do need to improve and get more involved with their children. I think that would also help because they could talk about this. A lot of kids who are being cyberbullied do not come forward and do not talk about it and it eats them up inside. That is a big problem, too. If you talk about it with your parents you can prevent it more and stop it.

Mariel Calvo





You can also take direct actions on your own, where you judge this is safe and appropriate. The evidence we heard is that peer intervention is very effective in most cases at stopping cyberbullying. You can discourage negative online behaviour. You can promote tolerance. You can inform your parents or school authorities about cyberbullying instances.

I think [cyberbullying is] a problem that we need to change. It is so deeply ingrained in society now, especially my generation. We grew up with the Internet. It is our domain. We have helped build it and now it is time I guess to take action and make sure we are not looking at it as a tool to spread hate. It is a means to connect people.

A young female witness
(in closed session)

Talk about cyberbullying

Our report includes recommendations that have been presented in the Senate and are now available to share with all Canadians. Among our recommendations, we called on the Government of Canada to work with provincial governments to come up with a coordinated strategy to address cyberbullying. One of the most important elements of this strategy should be for young Canadians to be consulted in the design and implementation of this strategy. **We hope that you will speak up and be heard.**

By sharing this report with others, you can help start conversations with your family, friends, and teachers about how your community can work together to make change.

Keep connected with activities at the Senate by following us on **Twitter @SenateCA** or use the hashtag **#SenCA**

Or visit our website: **www.sen.parl.gc.ca**.

