



WHAT IS Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is broadly defined as the “use of computers, smartphones, or other connected devices to embarrass, hurt, mock, threaten or be mean to someone online” ([Public Safety Canada](#), 2024).

Cyberbullying can happen on social media, in online gaming, and via texting. It can be anonymous, or it can be from someone you know. Since cyberbullying happens through technology, it can follow the person both online and offline, and the hurt can be felt at any time – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The term “cyberbullying” no longer captures the scope of harms that young people experience. It evokes an idea of schoolyard teasing that does not reflect the range of harms that can occur using technology. Using this term can downplay the seriousness of some of the more severe harms young people might experience, such as identity-based harassment or non-consensual intimate image distribution.



DIY: DIGITAL SAFETY PROJECT

This information sheet was created by the DIY: Digital Safety Team, you can learn more about our research team and find a variety of additional support resources that we have gathered on our website here:

www.diydigitalsafety.ca/resources

Here are some examples of the different harms that people can experience when interacting with others via technology:

- Online harassment (e.g., via texting, email, social media, gaming, or apps)
- Posting insults on someone's social media pages
- Trolling
- Doxing
- Fake accounts
- Spreading lies, rumours, or secrets online
- Sharing private or embarrassing pictures without consent, either online or among peers (including nude or sexual images)
- Recording someone secretly and sharing it on social media
- Extorting someone by threatening to release intimate images (aka "sextortion")
- AI-generated (nude or sexual) images

Many of these harms fall outside of what the average person would imagine when they think of "cyberbullying." For this reason, we encourage people to use the term **"technology-facilitated violence and bullying" (TFVB)** since it more accurately reflects the range of harms that people experience via digital technologies, devices, and platforms.

While you may still hear the term "cyberbullying" used by parents, teachers, and other people, it is important to note that the impacts of these harms can be severe.

Technology-facilitated violence and bullying can lead to:

- Depression
- Loneliness
- Anxiety and social anxiety
- Stress-related health problems
- Isolation
- Embarrassment
- Low self-esteem
- Trouble sleeping
- Low grades
- Skipping school
- Aggressive behaviour
- Detachment from friends and family
- Self-harm
- Suicidal ideation

More information about how to respond to technology-facilitated violence and bullying is provided in the following pages of this document. We also provide information about resources and legal responses to support people who have experienced harm.



WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOU EXPERIENCE TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED VIOLENCE OR BULLYING?

Being the target of TFVB can be scary and isolating. It is important to remember that it is not your fault and that there are many things you can do to address it.

- Avoid responding to messages, texts, or emails from the user.
 - We know it can be hard to resist, but sometimes it is better to not respond or to end communication entirely.
- Document the problem in case you need it as proof in the future (e.g., take screenshots or screen recordings).
- Unfollow and/or block the user (after documenting the problem).
- Set your profiles to private to avoid receiving messages from unwanted sources.
- Report the user and/or their behaviour to the platform.
 - Many platforms have community guidelines and terms of service that explicitly prohibit behaviours like TFVB. If you report the problem to the platform, they can remove the content and suspend/deactivate the user's account.
- Reach out to a trusted adult, if you feel comfortable, for support and advice.
- Reach out to trusted friends and family who can support you and help you feel better.
- Report TFVB to your school. By speaking up, you are protecting yourself and maybe even others. In more severe cases that rise to a criminal level, you might also consider reporting to the police, if you feel safe doing so.
- Take care of yourself. Remember that being the target of TFVB is never your fault. Be kind to yourself.
- If you need help coming up with a safety plan or want anonymous emotional support, you can always contact Kids Help Phone at [kidshelpphone.ca](https://www.kidshelpphone.ca) or **1-800-668-6868** (texts and calls).



WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOU WITNESS TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED VIOLENCE OR BULLYING?

Witnessing TFVB can be tough. You might feel helpless, afraid, and worried, and you might feel unsure if you should even intervene. Taking action as a bystander, if it is safe to do so, can help stop the behaviour, support the person who is experiencing it, and discourage others from engaging in it too.

Reflect on your role as a witness. Ask yourself: *Am I letting this behaviour go unchecked? Am I afraid of retaliation? Do I think I have no power?* What you do is very important and can go a long way in supporting the target and building positive online spaces.

- React to TFVB when it happens, if you feel comfortable and able to do so.
- Stand up for the person who is experiencing TFVB.
 - Tell the person who is doing harm that their behaviour is not okay, and that you disagree with their behaviour. Talk to them about the impacts of their behaviour. For example, you could say, "Calling someone [a mean name] is not okay. I'm going to delete/report this comment because it's hurtful. I encourage others to do the same."
- Try distracting the person committing TFVB or redirecting the conversation so that the target can get out of the situation.
- Reach out and offer emotional support to the person who experienced TFVB. Actively listen to what they are saying, affirm their experience, and reassure them that you are on their side.
 - For example, you can tell them:
 - "It's not your fault."
 - "It's okay to ask for help."
 - "You're not alone."
 - "I will help you, or I will find someone who can."
- Offer to help the person to keep track of the incident(s) and keep documentation.
- Help the person manage their social media and avoid certain people/places.
- Help the person report the problem to the platform or website.
- Help the person talk to a trusted adult. Accompany them if they would feel better that way.
- Help the person report the problem to the school or the police, if you feel comfortable.



WHAT CAN YOU DO IF SOMEONE YOU KNOW PERPETRATES TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED VIOLENCE OR BULLYING?

Some people may intentionally hurt others online, and some people may not realize that they are perpetrating TFVB. Here are some suggestions of what you can say and do if someone you know is engaging in this kind of behaviour.

- Talk to them about it privately. Encourage the person to try to help others instead of hurting them.
 - If they are also experiencing TFVB themselves, encourage them to cope with it positively instead of repeating the cycle with someone else.
 - If they say they're only joking, remind them that it is not funny and it can really hurt someone.
 - If the incident of TFVB is in the context of a larger problem, tell them that escalating the drama will only make things worse.
- Explain to the person that you don't want to be involved, but tell them that the next time it happens, you'll take a stand. This can serve as a warning to them.
- Reach out to trusted friends and family for support and advice.
- Reach out to the target of the TFVB and let them know that you don't support it. Offer to help them.
 - If you want to do something public, post something positive about the target. Show your support for the person who was hurt.
- Support others who stand up for the target and let them know they are appreciated.
- Suggest to the person engaging in TFVB that they get in touch with Kids Help Phone to talk about ways to address the behaviour.



WHAT ARE SOME CONSEQUENCES OF TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED VIOLENCE AND BULLYING?

TFVB hurts people and can have negative impacts on their lives. Some acts of TFVB can also be against the law. People who commit severe forms of TFVB can face criminal responses, have their personal devices (like phones, tablets, or computers) taken away, and may have to pay their victims for the harm they did.

POSSIBLE CRIMINAL CHARGES

Depending on the behaviour, someone engaging in TFVB could be charged with one, or more, of the following offences under Canada's **Criminal Code**:

- **Sharing intimate images without consent**
- **Criminal harassment:** Constantly sending mean or threatening messages that make someone fear for their safety.
- **Uttering threats:** Threatening to share someone's personal information to others if they don't do what you want them to do.
- **Intimidation:** Frightening or intimidating someone, persistently following or stalking them, or threatening violence on someone and/or their relatives.
- **Mischief in relation to data:** Obstructing, interrupting, or interfering with someone's lawful use of computer data.
- **Unauthorized use of computer:** Using or causing to be used, directly or indirectly, a computer system with intent to commit an offence.
- **Identity theft:** Creating a fake profile to ruin one's reputation.
- **Extortion:** Blackmailing someone to try to get them to do something they don't want to do.
- **False messages, indecent or harassing telephone calls:** Conveying false information, making indecent communications, or harassing someone through telecommunications.
- **Counselling suicide**
- **Defamatory libel:** Spreading rumors about someone.
- **Public incitement of hatred**
- **Assault:** Threats or acts of violence and bodily harm.

This legal information is for general informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice.

WHAT ARE SOME RESOURCES FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED VIOLENCE AND BULLYING?

Kids Help Phone is a great place to get support for all kinds of technology-facilitated bullying or violence. They provide an e-mental health service available across Canada 24/7. Their website also provides a list of local resources for youth, both physical and virtual.

- Website: [kidshelpphone.ca](https://www.kidshelpphone.ca)
- Phone: 1-800-668-6868, or text 686868

NeedHelpNow.ca can help with someone sharing or threatening to share nude images of you or someone else. They also provide anonymous support and information.

- Website: [needhelpnow.ca](https://www.needhelpnow.ca)

Tech Safety provides resources for victims and people supporting victims of technology-facilitated gender-based violence. This can include non-consensual sharing of intimate images, harassment, location tracking, etc. Their “Preserving digital evidence” toolkit can help you keep a record of what happened in case you need proof of TFV.

- Website: [techsafety.ca](https://www.techsafety.ca)

Media Smarts offers information on digital media literacy, educational games, e-Tutorials, and resources for parents and teachers.

- Website: [mediasmarts.ca](https://www.mediasmarts.ca)

Digital First Aid Kit is a free online resource on digital safety. They help users diagnose and react to a variety of digital risks and attacks such as impersonation, monitoring, hacking, and online harassment.

- Website: [digitalfirstaid.org](https://www.digitalfirstaid.org)

PREVNet is a national organization that partners with researchers and community groups who aim to foster healthy relationships among children and youth. They have information about online and offline violence, and they explain the legal consequences of cyberbullying.

- Website: [prevnet.ca](https://www.prevnet.ca)
- For legal information, visit: [prevnet.ca/cyberbullying/legal-consequences-cyberbullying](https://www.prevnet.ca/cyberbullying/legal-consequences-cyberbullying)

Public Safety Canada offers a wide range of information and resources for youth, parents, caregivers, and educators. Check out their cyberbullying website to learn more:

- Website: [canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/campaigns/cyberbullying.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/campaigns/cyberbullying.html)



HERE ARE SOME OTHER RESOURCES THAT CAN BE USEFUL FOR EXPERIENCES RELATED TO TFVB

Cybertip.ca is Canada's national tipline for reporting the online sexual exploitation of children.

- Website: cybertip.ca/en/report

Get Cyber Safe is a national public awareness campaign created to inform Canadians about cyber security and the simple steps they can take to protect themselves online.

- Website: getcybersafe.gc.ca

GLAAD is a 2SLGBTQ+ activist organization. Their website hosts a large variety of resources like guides to queer terminology, a social media safety index for all major platforms, and guides to allyship. Their Digital Safety Guide helps 2SLGBTQ+ people increase their safety online.

- Website: glaad.org
- Digital Safety Guide: glaad.org/smsi/lgbtq-digital-safety-guide

Project Arachnid helps Canadians under 18 by 'hashing' their leaked nude images so that they are automatically removed from online websites.

- Website: projectarachnid.ca/en/survivors-contact

ReportingHate.ca offers one-on-one support and allows you to report hate or discrimination anonymously, for yourself or someone.

- Website: reportinghate.ca

Revenge Porn Helpline can help you find information about how to report your image on various social media platforms. They also provide resources on intimate image abuse, sextortion and webcam blackmail, deepfake images, threats and intimidation, and reporting online content.

- Website: revengepornhelpline.org.uk
- For information on how to report your images to social media platforms, visit: revengepornhelpline.org.uk/information-and-advice/reporting-content/reporting-to-social-media

Right To Be provides online resources and in-person training supporting 2SLGBTQ+ people. Their trainings include topics like bystander intervention, allyship and resilience.

- Website: righttobe.org

Salal is a sexual violence and support centre, offering a 24-hour crisis and information line. Salal provides support services to survivors of sexualized violence who are of marginalized genders: women, trans, nonbinary, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people.

- Phone: 1-877-392-7583
- Website: salalvsc.ca