

# Cyberbullying and online abuse



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This section talks about bullying and sharing pictures that should be private. It tells you what Canada's laws say and what you can do about cyberbullying, bullying at school, and private pictures or videos. It also talks about people trying to force other people to do sexual things they wouldn't normally do, which is called "sexual exploitation."

## WHAT IS CYBERBULLYING?

Cyberbullying is bullying where the meanness happens online or in email, text messages, online chat, or social media. It can make you feel really bad. The person might be doing it to hurt or scare you, or they might not care how you feel about it.

Cyberbullying can look like a lot of things. For example:

- ▶ creating a website, blog, poll or profile to make fun of someone
- ▶ sending mean, rude or threatening messages
- ▶ pretending to be someone or hacking their email or social media account
- ▶ tricking someone into giving personal or embarrassing information and then sharing it with others
- ▶ spreading rumours, secrets or gossip about another person through email, texts or social media
- ▶ sharing a private, intimate picture or video of someone or posting it online without their consent.

Cyberbullying can also include encouraging or forcing someone else to do these things.

## **What the law says**

It is against the law to cyberbully someone. Nova Scotia has a law about cyberbullying, and the Criminal Code also talks about it. This means cyberbullying can be a crime and someone could have to go to court for doing it. In really bad cases, they could go to jail. Another Nova Scotia law says people can't lie about you to try to ruin your reputation.

## What you can do

If someone is bullying you online, you can do something about it.

- ▶ Talk with police to find out if they might charge the person with a crime.
- ▶ Apply for a cyber-protection order or a peace bond if you are afraid for your safety. You can learn more about these below.
- ▶ Talk with a lawyer if someone is telling lies to make you look bad.
- ▶ Talk with someone at Nova Scotia's CyberScan Unit to learn more about your legal options. Read more about CyberScan below.

A cyber-protection order is when a judge makes someone:

- ▶ stop sharing an intimate image or sending bullying messages
- ▶ take down a post
- ▶ make the bully take part in negotiation or mediation
- ▶ give you money, called damages.

A peace bond is a court order that can help when a person threatens or hurts you or damages things you own. Even if the person tried to threaten or harm you, you might be able to get a peace bond. The court asks the person to stop their behaviour and to stay away from you. This person is called the defendant. If the defendant does not agree, the court may order them to not call, text, or contact you in any way.

CyberScan is a free service offered by the government of Nova Scotia to help people who face cyberbullying. CyberScan staff can talk with the person who is bullying you to try to sort out the problem. They talk to the person, give advice, negotiate and mediate between the two of you. You don't have to take part if you don't want to. (The bully also doesn't have to take part, but then the police might charge them with a crime.) CyberScan can also answer your questions about the Nova Scotia justice system.

WE HAVE A  
CYBER-PROTECTION  
ORDER. YOU HAVE  
TO TAKE DOWN  
THAT POST!



## AT WORK OR AT SCHOOL

Schools and workplaces must be safe environments for students and employees. This means a school might punish a student for the way they act in person or online.

### What the law says

In Nova Scotia, a principal may suspend a student if they believe that the student is cyberbullying others. The principal can do this even if the cyberbullying happens off school grounds.

### What you can do

If you feel harassed at school, tell a counsellor, teacher, principal, or vice-principal.

If you feel harassed at work, tell your supervisor. You can also ask someone you trust about your employer's harassment policy.

You could sue a school or employer that does not do everything it can to provide a safe environment.

Kids at Keisha's school were sharing a picture that looked like Keisha was having sex with someone. Keisha told their principal, but the principal said it had nothing to do with the school. But a lot of students saw the picture, and they sent Keisha mean messages and said things that hurt so much, Keisha had to change schools. Keisha's parents talked to a lawyer to see if they could sue the student who first shared the picture and the school for not protecting Keisha. They also called Nova Scotia's CyberScan Unit to find out what else they could do to stop the picture being shared. Her parents didn't want the picture to be shared at the new school.



## INTIMATE IMAGES AND THE LAW

It is a crime to take a picture or video of anyone who is naked or taking part in sexual activity if they don't know or don't consent. This is true no matter how old the person is. But if they're under 18, it might be child pornography.

When one person records people in this kind of private moment, they must be careful about the image. Sharing an image or video like that can hurt a person in ways you don't expect.

### What the law says

The Criminal Code says an intimate image is a recording that shows someone's breasts, genitals, or anal region for a sexual purpose. Or it could be an image that shows someone doing something sexual, or who is naked.

An intimate image is legal only when ALL of the following things are true.

- ▶ everyone in the image is over 18
- ▶ everyone gives their consent to any sexual activity shown in the image
- ▶ everyone in the image consents to having the image taken and shared.

If any of these things is not true, like if the person thinks the image will be private, then sharing it is a crime in Canada. If someone in the image is under 18, the image might be child pornography, which is another crime in Canada.

### What you can do

If you send intimate images to someone or post them online, you may want to think about how to hide your identity. Some people call this "safer sexting." This means not showing your face or tattoos or other markings people might recognize.

Use passwords on all accounts and devices. Keep your passwords private, especially if the accounts hold private photos or conversations.

If someone takes an intimate image of you or shares one without your consent, tell someone you trust. This could be a family member, a school counsellor, or a youth worker in your community. Ask them to help you get help from a victim services worker or the police, for example.

Save messages, texts, and videos that people send you, even if you are embarrassed. You may need to show them to police if a crime has been committed.

If you don't feel comfortable going to the police, find a community organization that helps people. You can find a list at the end of this section.



Remember, it's not your fault if someone is taking advantage of you, and you can get help. Even if you are embarrassed or feel like you've made mistakes, it will be better if you get help from experts and from people who care about you.

## SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Sexual exploitation is when a person takes advantage of you for sexual purposes. It often starts with the person getting you to trust them. They may ask you about your home life, interests or other topics that seem harmless. They may try to be friendly and make you feel comfortable. They may try to get your parents to trust them. Then they may use that trust to control you. If a person gains your trust to use you later for sex, that's called "grooming." It can happen online or in real life, and it is a crime.

Online, a new friendship becomes exploitation if the person says something sexual that makes you uncomfortable. Or they might send intimate images or ask you to send them. You can block that person on social media and delete their contact information. You can also report the person to whatever social media platform you are using to talk with the person.

In person, an adult you trust or who has power over you may abuse the relationship or trust for a sexual purpose. The adult could be a teacher, coach, or family member. They might sexually touch you or invite you to sexually touch someone else, or to send or receive intimate images.

Sometimes a person uses threats to make you do what they want. This is called "extortion." For example, someone might say they will share your personal information or photos to force you to do what they want. Extortion is also a crime.





# Resources

## 911

Phone 911 if you're in immediate danger.

You can also phone 911 to report online harassment and abuse.

## CyberTip

Canada's national tipline for reporting online sexual exploitation of children

## CyberScan

- ▶ 1-855-702-8324

## Get Cyber Safe

Learn about steps you can take to be safe online.

## Just the facts: Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying information from the RCMP

## Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team

- ▶ 1-888-429-8167

## NeedHelpNow.ca

NeedHelpNow.ca helps teens stop the spread of sexual pictures or videos and provides support along the way.

## Promoting Relationships & Eliminating Violence Network (PREVNet)

## Public Safety Canada - Cyberbullying for Youth