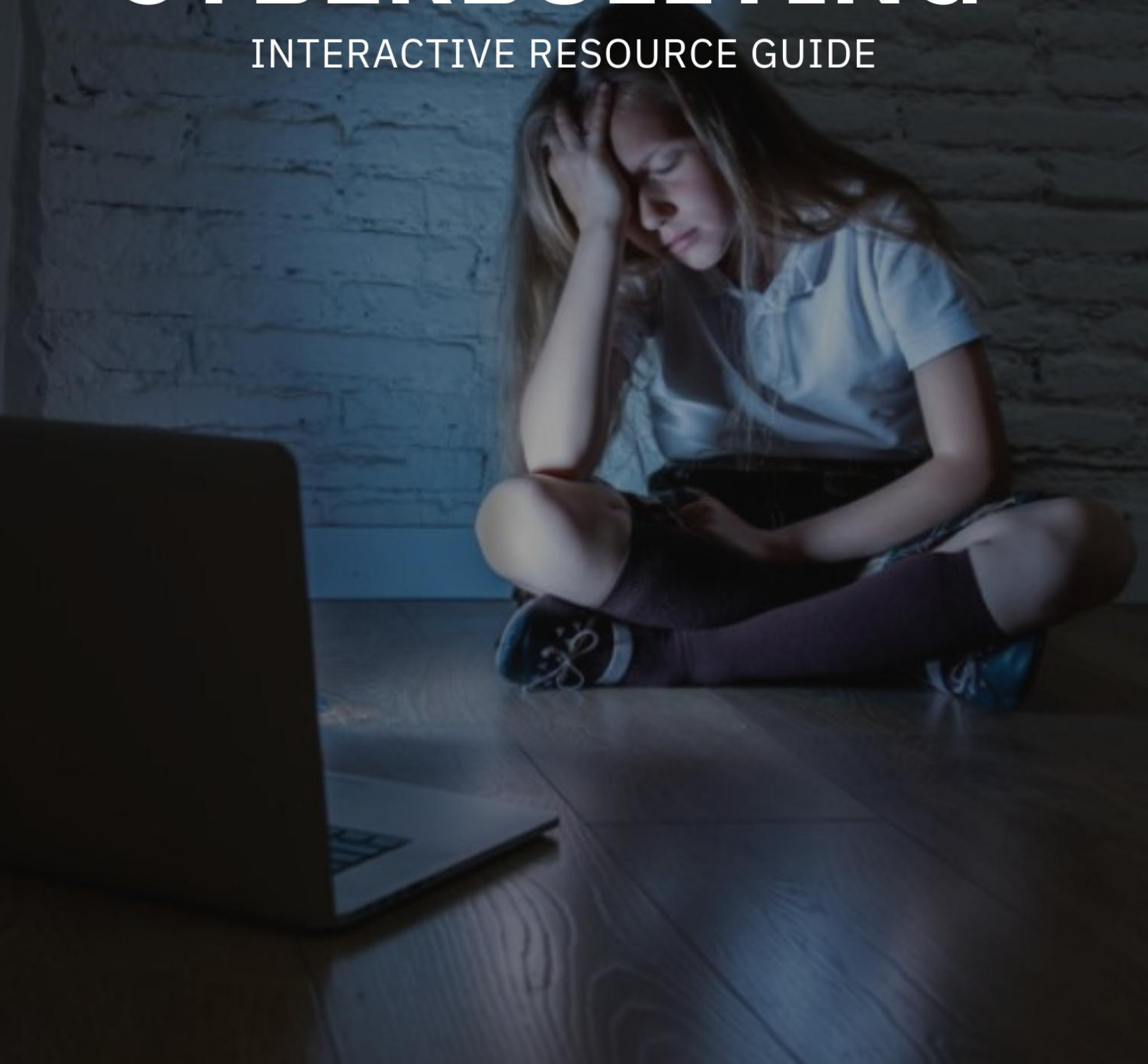


CYBERBULLYING

INTERACTIVE RESOURCE GUIDE



SAFER
SCHOOLS
TOGETHER



International Center for
Digital Threat Assessment



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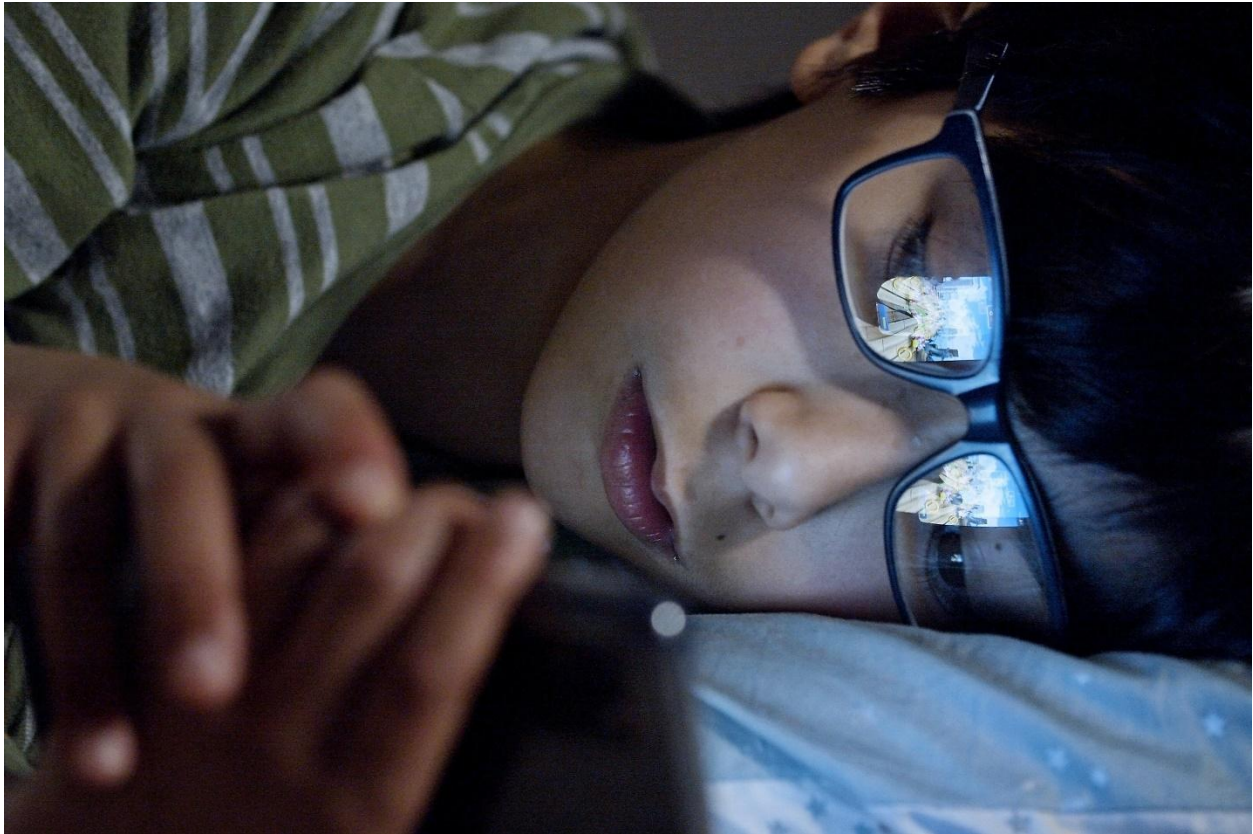
This is an interactive document. Click the underlined links to read more or navigate to the correlating section of the document.

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INTRODUCTION

Technology has become a part of our everyday lives and provides many new and positive educational benefits. However, this phenomenon also increases our concerns about personal safety and identity. Before technology's rapid evolution in the past 15-20 years, the home was usually a safe place for those who experienced bullying at school. Today, digital devices that live in our pockets facilitate and perpetuate bullying behaviors by allowing access to the victim 24/7. Although devices have an 'off' button, social media does not. The internet never sleeps.



Although mostly everyone utilizes modern technology in some way or another, there are still gaps in understanding communication technology today. These gaps imply that those who are expected to act when digital threats arise may lack the understanding of technology, the experience to relate to the concerns, and the means to respond effectively.

When discussing cyberbullying behavior, the importance of the language that is used to describe the outcome should be noted. The terms "target" and "victims" will be used interchangeably for the purposes of this training. In many cases, cyberbullying behavior can be in response to something that has happened in the past and may be retaliatory or offensive. Investigating each role in a reported incident is paramount in responding effectively.

Bullying is defined as seeking harm, intimidating, or coercing, especially in an instance where the victim is vulnerable. When the act of bullying is performed using electronic communication methods, it is referred to as cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying has become increasingly common due to the rapidly evolving nature of digital communications, especially among teenagers. Many school-aged children and teens understand cyberbullying because they are exposed to it online daily. Their sense of self-esteem, self-worth, and identity appears to be validated by 'likes', 'follows', and feedback on their posts as they disclose their lives to an audience of peers and strangers alike.

Technology is a true gift for individuals engaging in these behaviors. They do not have to look at their victims or deal with immediate, negative reactions from bystanders.

In consideration of the Youth Criminal Justice Act¹ (YCJA) of Canada, there is motivation to consider and divert youth cases whenever possible to avoid criminalizing adolescent behavior. However, some concerns about taking these measures may not always be enough to hold a young person accountable. Education and understanding of the YCJA and its available options, including restorative processes, must be provided to ensure appropriate outcomes based on the individual merits of each situation.

There needs to be room for dialogue as we educate others on the impact of cyberbullying. When referring to the unsettling trends of suicide among young people², we need to find an appropriate response to the behavior in cases where youth are not only encouraging but also supporting other peers in their expression of suicidal ideation and sometimes offering an improved plan for completion. There is a concerning increase in these behaviors with the escalating presence of anonymous apps and social networking platforms such as Reddit, 4Chan, and WhatsApp³.

Counseling Suicide, under the Criminal Code⁴, is a law created to address the notion of assisted suicides. It is deemed an indictable offence and thereby the punishment is more serious.

When supporting those who have engaged in and/or been targeted by cyberbullying, we must ensure that we provide relevant education, effective modelling, and coping strategies for all parties.



Photo courtesy of NordVPN.

¹ <https://www.laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/y-1.5/index.html>

² [Suicide rate highest among teens and young adults | UCLA Health Connect](#)

³ [Anonymous Apps Digital Threat Assessment® Training for Anonymous Apps \(icdta.org\)](#)

⁴ [Criminal Code \(justice.gc.ca\)](#)

BULLYING

In today's landscape, the word bullying has become an umbrella term used to describe a wide variety of inappropriate, hurtful, violent, and negative youth behaviors. For the purposes of this training, a more concise definition is needed. Bullying behavior involves the systematic abuse of power through unjustified and repeated acts intended to hurt or inflict some form of harm. Its impact can be direct (physical or verbal teasing) or indirect (relational, such as social exclusion or spreading nasty rumors).⁵

Bullying is any pattern of persistent, unwelcome, or aggressive behavior intended to make others uncomfortable, scared, or hurt. It is used as a means of control. Bullies get a sense of power from taking advantage of and disparaging those they target based on appearance, culture, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or expression of identity.

Bullying can generally be divided into four different categories:

- **Physical Bullying:** may include tripping, pinching, pushing, or damaging property.
- **Verbal Bullying:** may include name-calling, insulting, teasing, intimidating, or verbal abuse.
- **Social, Emotional, and Relational Bullying:** may include spreading negative or false rumors, social isolation, or damaging one's social reputation or relationships.
- **Cyber Bullying:** may include making online threats, sending hurtful text messages, emails, or social media posts.



Photo courtesy of SafetyMagnets.

⁵ [Introduction - Cyberbullying and the Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images \(justice.gc.ca\)](https://www.justice.gc.ca)

Relational bullying also falls under the category of social bullying and is a type of bullying behavior that can include physical aggression, taunting, or harming others through damaging their peer relationships and social isolation. Male youth can exhibit this behavior but relational bullying is more often seen in female youth⁶.

The results of a study released by MediaSmarts⁷ showed that males tended to harass more via online gaming and had a higher tendency to make negative comments regarding race, religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, while females were more likely to forward photos to make fun of others and engage in name-calling. Psychology Today suggests bullying behavior is learned at an early age⁸ and that bullies have a distinct psychological makeup⁹. However, it is not linked to socioeconomic status¹⁰.



Targets of relational bullying and aggression are socially and emotionally at risk due to constant harassment. The harassment can be direct and involve intimidation in front of peers or can be indirect to involve intimidation through a digital presence. It can also start in a direct or indirect way and continue through the opposite means. Either way, it is constant. Youth who are the frequent targets of relational bullying can feel rejected, depressed, and submissive; oftentimes seeing no resolution to the situation.

⁶ [Do Girls and Boys Bully Differently? \(verywellfamily.com\)](https://www.verywellfamily.com/do-girls-and-boys-bully-differently/)

⁷ [Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Cyberbullying: Dealing with Online Meanness, Cruelty and Threats | MediaSmarts](#)

⁸ [Big Bad Bully | Psychology Today](#)

⁹ [A Different Take on How to Stop Bullying | Psychology Today](#)

¹⁰ [Bullying behaviour in schools, socioeconomic position and psychiatric morbidity: a cross-sectional study in late adolescents in Greece | Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health | Full Text \(biomedcentral.com\)](#)

CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is overt or covert bullying behavior using digital technologies. Cyberbullying involves the one-time or repeated use of electronic information and communication technologies to engage in conduct that is intended or reasonably expected to cause fear, intimidation, humiliation, distress, or other harm to another person's health, emotional well-being, or reputation.

Behaviors can include harassment via digital devices, setting up defamatory personal websites, or deliberately excluding someone from social networking spaces. This may also include online posting or electronic distribution of embarrassing or intimate images or videos, real or altered, without the consent of the person contained in the images. Cyberbullying can happen at any time and be in a public or private setting; sometimes only known to the target and the person perpetuating the bullying behavior.

Cyberbullying is the newest phenomenon of the four types of bullying. Given the pace of the development of new technology and the younger age at which young people are introduced to digital devices and the internet, information, and trends on this type of bullying behavior change rapidly.

Cyberbullying has changed the traditional face of bullying in three significant ways – Access, Scope, and Anonymity (ASA):

- **Access:** it is virtually impossible for targets to get away from those who cyberbully. Most youth have access to all types of technology, which provides those who cyberbully the ability to reach their targets almost all the time. Targets do not have a safe haven as they do in cases of traditional bullying, and sometimes allow traditional bullying to follow the victim online.
- **Scope:** unlike traditional bullying, due to technology, audiences of cyberbullying (both victims and those witnessing) have few barriers and can grow exponentially.
- **Anonymity:** those who cyberbully can hide their identity. Anonymity, which is inherent in electronic communication, promotes a lack of inhibition. As a result, normal behavior restraints can disappear, allowing youth to act harsher than they would offline.

Social Assassination

Online attacks are increasingly clever and creative. The simple way to define this behavior would be to call it what it is: social assassination. The term may seem aggressive, but so is the behavior. We need to identify this behavior for what it really is and look at ways of stopping the victimization occurring across North America as a result. (Campbell, 2009).

Youth continually find new online platforms and communities to attack the character and reputation of others. Social assassination behaviors can include, but are not limited to:

- Websites targeting youth through humiliation
- Humiliating others while playing online games
- Inflammatory and derogatory posts on discussion boards or social networking applications
- Social media applications or public forums that encourage students to 'vote' or 'rate' their peers

It has become evident that posting comments on various types of social media platforms is very simple. However, removing these derogatory and hurtful posts can be a challenge – especially on websites and applications that are hosted in different countries governed by different laws, difficult to contact, and often unwilling to remove any content from their platform, stating that their site is a venue to post and exchange opinions.

Although removing content may be difficult, it is not impossible. This is especially true with the use of tools such as the SEARCH ISP List and Law Enforcement Guides¹¹, as well as the increase of customer support for various platforms including Meta (Facebook and Instagram), Snapchat, Twitter, TikTok, and others.

The Impact of Cyberbullying Behavior: What Makes it Different?

Although everyone is unique when it comes to their response to bullying, there are some specific factors that make targets of cyberbullying different from targets in other types of bullying and/or criminal cases.

24/7 Access and Accessibility of the Internet

Unlike conventional bullying, there is no escape from the torment that can be caused by the negative online comments, repeated messaging, and taunts that can occur with cyberbullying. Cyberbullying can happen anywhere, at any time, even in places where a victim may traditionally feel safe such as their home.



The onus to prevent the behavior can fall on victims to “shut down” their devices and avoid further contact with those who may be harassing them online. Although it would be ideal if victims could simply “shut down” their devices, we know that this is not easy for young people, especially with the dependency our society currently has on using our devices as a means of communication and knowledge.

For many youths, having an online presence is essential to their social interaction and connection. Turning off their devices could mean losing that connection and potentially losing the positive support they could receive from their online network. It is also important to remember that even if a victim is not “plugged in” or reading the comments online, other people are, including their peers, and this action doesn’t necessarily improve the situation.

¹¹ [ISP List and LE Guides - SEARCH](#)

Possible Anonymity of the Perpetrator

One of the biggest issues when tackling cyberbullying is the ease of remaining anonymous online. Anonymity has the potential to cause increased fear for the target as they cannot pinpoint *who* is attacking them online. Anonymity does not make it easier for victims. Falling prey to this type of behavior erodes self-esteem and self-confidence in even the strongest young person. Moreover, the anonymity of being online can make the perpetrator take the level of harassment further as they are unable to see the victim's reaction. When we consider the extreme importance of social acceptance in the lives of young people, it becomes very clear how severe the impact of victimization can be.



Scope of Audience and Permanence of the Victimization

Young people need to understand the impact of being exposed and humiliated online. One posted message can be forwarded to thousands of people in mere minutes. Regardless of removed posts, the effect will often feel permanent for them. When we consider the scope of the information shared and the sheer volume of people who may be aware of their situation, it can lead to very intense feelings of humiliation. This intensity can lead to a negative self-image, self-harm, depression, and isolation from everyone who knows about the incident (school staff, parents, friends, etc.).

Trends Regarding Victimization and the Correlation to Self-Harm and Suicidal Ideation/Completion

More adolescents are accessing emergency rooms with self-inflicted wounds or suicide attempts than we have ever seen before¹². We need to understand the correlation between this identified increase and cyberbullying behaviors. Self-harming can include cutting¹³ or the act of physically hurting themselves by other means to focus on another form of pain.

It is becoming clear how climbing caseloads in mental health are affecting the health system. Researchers say they are seeing a distressing rise in the number of youths seeking help for self-inflicted wounds, especially in females¹⁴. However, many doctors and specialists report that the increasing number of youths seeking support for self-harm at the ER don't have the hallmarks of a psychiatric disorder, leaving doctors with no clear answers as to why they're seeing so many more adolescents with these types of injuries¹⁵.

Another increasing, concerning online trend is posting self-harm behaviors online, including still images and videos of the action of self-harm. While this behavior continues, we can predict that the number of adolescents engaged in these behaviors will continue to rise. We could refer to this as a contagion effect.

Self-harming behaviors and suicide attempts are very different behaviors and need to be responded to accordingly. Sameer Hinduja, Ph.D., Co-Author, Professor, Florida Atlantic University School of Criminology and Criminal Justice within the College of Social Work and Criminal Justice, Co-Director of the Cyberbullying Research Center, and a faculty associate at the Berkman Klein Center at Harvard University said,

“We have identified a strong association between digital self-harm and suicidality. As such, it's imperative for health professionals to screen for digital self-harm to address underlying mental health problems among youth that may occur prior to or alongside suicidality. Moreover, parents and caregivers must convey to children that they are available to dialog, support, and assist with the root issues that may eventually manifest as digital self-harm. Educators and other stakeholders must better prioritize the emotional and psychological needs of youth with opportunities for open dialog, skill-building, and the provision of interactive and easily accessible online and offline support resources to ensure that those at-risk know that other people care about them.”¹⁶

As educators and advocates, Safer Schools Together are very concerned about the contagion effect through social media and news media. Cyberbullying prevention advertising and educational messaging in the media often infer cyberbullying is the cause of suicides. We find this to be untrue, although it can be considered a risk enhancer for anyone already dealing with a level of emotional pain and provides further justification for someone already experiencing suicidal ideation.

Current Trends of Youth Behavior Online

As of September 2024, the world population has exceeded 8 billion, 5.44 billion of which are active internet users¹⁷. Of those 5.44 billion internet users, it's estimated that 4.59 billion of them have social media accounts¹⁸.

Youths are no exception to these statistics. They are more connected than ever before. Their heads are down, and their eyes lit up by the glow of their smartphones. They connect and socialize with their peers through social media and text their parents from upstairs in their own homes. Self-esteem is validated through 'likes' and

¹² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9164513/>

¹³ [Cutting: Self-Harm, on Arm, Yourself, Self-Injury, in Adults, and More \(healthline.com\)](#)

¹⁴ [Emergency Department Visits for Self-Inflicted Injuries Increase among Young U.S. Females - For The Media - JAMA Network](#)

¹⁵ [Canadian hospitals stretched as self-harming teens seek help | CBC News](#)

¹⁶ <https://www.fau.edu/newsdesk/articles/digital-self-harm-suicide.php>

¹⁷ [How Many People Use the Internet in 2024? \[Feb 2022 Update\] \(oberlo.com\)](#)

¹⁸ [10 Social Media Statistics You Need to Know in 2024 \[Infographic\] \(oberlo.com\)](#)

feedback on their posts as they self-disclose their lives to a stadium audience of peers and strangers alike. Their devices have become their portable, personal lifeline portals to online access and without them, they can feel lost. The current statistics indicate just how attached our youth, and ourselves, are to the wireless world:

- Mobile devices and smartphones with access to 4G/5G/LTE and WiFi; such as
 - iPads and tablets
 - iPhones, Androids, and other smartphones
 - Nintendo DS and 3DS
 - Nintendo Switch, Wii, and WiiU
 - Sony Playstation 4 and Playstation 5
 - Xbox
 - Laptops and desktop computers (PC)
- Internet access is universal, 81-88% of students can access the internet outside of school¹⁹.
- 43% of tweens (age 8 to 12) and 88% to 95% of teens (age 13 to 18) have their own smartphone²⁰.
- Almost half (49%) of children aged 10-12 and 32% of children aged 7-9 have social media accounts²¹, despite social media user agreements that bar children under the age of 13 from using these platforms.
- At least 80% of adolescents will admit having used their devices when they were supposed to be asleep (also known as “vamping”)²².
- More than half (59%) of teens experienced some form of cyberbullying²³.
- 92% of teens report going online daily, and 24% say they go online “almost constantly”²⁴.

In 2024, the social media trends among youth have changed significantly since 2015²⁵. The current top-used social media platforms are:

- Facebook (3.065 Billion)
- YouTube (2.504 Billion)
- Instagram (2 Billion)
- WhatsApp Messenger (2 Billion)
- TikTok (1.582 Billion)
- WeChat (1.343 Billion)
- Facebook Messenger (1.01 Billion)
- Telegram (900 Million)

¹⁹ [NCES Blog | Students’ Access to the Internet and Digital Devices at Home \(ed.gov\)](#)

²⁰ [Common Sense Media](#)

²¹ [Sharing too soon? Children and social media apps | National Poll on Children's Health \(mottpoll.org\)](#)

²² [Awake, online and sleep-deprived – the rise of the teenage 'vamper' \(theconversation.com\)](#)

²³ [A Majority of Teens Have Experienced Some Form of Cyberbullying | Pew Research Center](#)

²⁴ [Teens, Social Media & Technology Overview 2015 | Pew Research Center](#)

²⁵ [Most Popular Social Media Apps in 2024](#)

The “Rules” No One Follows

WHAT ARE THE AGE RESTRICTIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

13+ <ul style="list-style-type: none">TikTokInstagramFacebookSnapchatTwitterYoutubeHousepartyKiKYouNowRedditTumblrYuboWhisperDiscordTwitchAskFm	16+ <ul style="list-style-type: none">WhatsAppLinkedInFlickrVimeoMySpace	18+ <ul style="list-style-type: none">TinderBumbleHingeLive.meMonkey4chanOmegle
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 SAFER SCHOOLS TOGETHER

The above table reflects the age “limits” that are set out by various social media companies in their Terms of Service. These restrictions are based on U.S. Federal Law: *Children’s Online Privacy Protections Act (COPPA)* which sets out to protect children under the age of 13 from sharing their personal information online.

These services encourage users to be truthful about their age when creating an account or using the platform. This age restriction tends to act more as a guideline than a rule or law. It does not tend to be enforced and is easily bypassed by youth 12 and younger or 17 and younger.

GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOLS & EDUCATION

Student safety is the number one priority for school safety and threat assessment teams. Boards of Education are responsible for addressing situations where the incident may have occurred outside of school property that has impacted the climate and culture of the school. This is especially prevalent in the case of cyberbullying-related incidents.

School safety and threat assessment teams are often unsure of how to address cyberbullying incidents as they can happen at any time, in any place – with or without the intended target(s) being aware. In addition, ensuring school safety and threat assessment teams address incidents without compromising any evidence can pose a significant challenge.

It is recommended that all school safety and threat assessment teams are knowledgeable and certified in Digital Threat Assessment²⁶ and stay up to date with current online and digital trends to ensure cyberbullying incidents are handled with a best practice approach.

[INSERT VIDEO: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfgffDMj63E>]

²⁶ <https://icdta.org/>

Criminal Code Offence

When a cyberbullying or online incident comes to light, school district staff should begin an initial information collection process. That process can include gathering data, photos, or any open-source information. However, if there is an indication of a crime being committed, school safety and threat assessment teams should contact the School Resource Officer (“SRO”)/police.

Using the Bullying Behavior Flowchart will help determine if the behavior or information meets the threshold for a criminal offence, which will assist in knowing when to call or not call the SRO or police to take over the investigation. It is important to note that collected evidence should be preserved and provided to the police. To preserve evidence, take screenshots, save photos, and place devices in airplane mode or a Faraday bag. Furthermore, do not interview students as this may jeopardize the case should it go to court.

School safety and threat assessment teams must be aware that as soon as they consult with the police, they have in essence become agents of the police. For example, if the school district staff contacts the SRO and asks if a search of a student’s locker should occur, they have entered the position of an agent. In law enforcement and legal practice, an agent takes direction from the police and must follow a strict set of legal guidelines.

Non-Criminal Code Offence

School safety and threat assessment teams should continue to gather data using the Bullying Behavior Checklist. Gather primary and secondary data including behavioral baselines for student(s) and address if and why the behavior may have changed. A lot of data can be collected at a school level outside of a police investigation. Pay special attention to a student file if it provides any indication of past site or target selection.

When digital devices are involved, always follow the same procedure as the police for securing the device whether the offence meets the Criminal Code threshold or not. This includes putting the device into airplane mode and a Faraday bag, if possible. Handling mobile devices in this manner is important as youth have found ways to remotely wipe their devices using alternate devices or software, such as a school computer or a friend’s device.

A non-compliant student who is unwilling to unlock a secured device should be given an opportunity to work with school administration or be referred to the School Liaison Officer.

Lastly, when a student has contravened the Code of Conduct and/or engaged in behavior that has impacted the school climate and culture, school safety and threat assessment teams must contact the student’s parents or legal guardians as soon as possible.

Restorative Practices in Schools

When schools consider taking a restorative approach to cases that are not considered criminal, there still needs to be a clear understanding of the restorative approach. School-based restorative practice and its’ potential for success is largely based on the culture and climate of that particular classroom and school.

Restorative practices are driven by school administration, parents, students, and the community. Employing restorative practices in a school-based environment as a mechanism for maintaining a healthy learning environment requires both human and financial resources, along with training and commitment. In schools, it is meant as an integrated and proactive approach where a major goal is the effective reintegration of students when addressing situations where harm has been done.

Parachuting restorative practices into an environment where it isn’t the expectation will have limited success. This speaks directly to the importance of ensuring a school is a naturally open system with a positive school culture and climate. A naturally open system is one whereby school safety and threat assessment teams collaborate with

parents, police, and community members to keep students healthy, happy, and safe. Information sharing in open systems is bi-directional between leadership and other levels of that same system.

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice seeks to create just outcomes by repairing the harm done by crime and violence. Typically, this happens through facilitating a process that addresses victims' needs and holds offenders meaningfully accountable for their actions. In this approach, crime is understood not only as breaking the law but as a violation of people and relationships and a disruption of the peace in a community.

Restorative justice is based on an understanding of wrongdoing. The social expectation that follows is when someone is violated, there is an obligation to put right the wrongdoing²⁷.

The benefits of restorative justice give victims of crime, conflict, or wrongdoing an opportunity to:

- Discuss the personal impact an incident has had on them;
- Gain a greater understanding of the incident;
- Actively participate in a process of determining appropriate reparation; and
- Obtain resolution and sometimes closure.

Youth who have caused harm have an opportunity to:

- Take responsibility for their actions within the community;
- Participate in developing a fair and reasonable agreement with those who were harmed;
- Repair harm and make things right with the help of a supportive community; and
- Potentially avoid a lengthy court process and criminal record.

For the community, the process provides:

- A more expedient and cost-effective alternative to court;
- An opportunity for community involvement and active participation in the judicial process;
- A greater sense of justice defined by accountability, understanding, and healing; and
- An opportunity to build stronger and safer communities.

The following are keys to effective restorative justice practices:

- Offender must take responsibility for his/her actions (admit);
- Offender must show some level of remorse for their behavior;
- Offender must be ready and willing to make efforts to repair the harm;
- Victim(s) need to be genuinely interested in the process (not feel like it's their only option);
- Victims(s) need to be represented (either in person, by a representative or by proxy with a victim impact statement/letter/video);
- All parties must freely consent to the process and understand that it is voluntary and that they may withdraw or take a break from the process at any point;

²⁷ <https://livingjusticepress.org/product/little-book-of-restorative-justice/>

- There needs to be supports in place for each party (offender and victim); and
- There needs to be a reintegration plan regarding how each party will move forward from this process and how other people might support the reintegration plan.

Questions continue to be raised regarding the appropriate use of restorative justice when handling cyberbullying cases. Broader research is divided regarding the risks and benefits of using restorative justice in power-based crimes. Interviews with a variety of victim services personnel and restorative justice experts indicated the following situations should **not** be handled via restorative practices:

- Domestic violence
- Power-based crimes
- Hate crimes
- Sexual assault
- Serious harassment, intimidation or severe threats

Each case is unique and will require careful consideration of how to proceed. It is imperative that the school or community where the offence takes place is working collaboratively with experienced restorative justice practitioners and victim service agencies.

GUIDELINES FOR POLICE: DECISION-MAKING AND DIRECTION

One of the many challenges we are hearing from frontline police in investigating cyber and online-related offences is the lack of knowledge and understanding of the technologies and applications and how they work. Applications, social media platforms, and the overall culture and climate of the internet are rapidly evolving to the point of drastic changes being made in the dynamic of social media daily.

It is best practice to have regular professional development training for police, including Digital Threat Assessment²⁸, to keep up with current technology as it evolves.

Another challenge that police officers investigating a crime face is knowing who the offender(s) are. Once an IP address is verified and validated, it can still be difficult to know the offender as many people may use public computers.

Police Referrals to Community-Based Restorative Justice Programs: Considerations for Cyberbullying

A referral to a community-based restorative justice program is inappropriate when regarding sexual offences. These referral decisions can be less clear when dealing with the wide array of behavior referred to as cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is not an offence in itself; therefore, it is necessary to consider the actual behavior, intentions, and consequences when dealing with cyberbullying. When doing this, it becomes clear that cyberbullying can include offences such as uttering threats, extortion, counseling suicide, criminal harassment, assaults related to online content and/or sexting. These behaviors can constitute serious criminal offences, resulting in devastating consequences for the victim.

To Charge or Not to Charge?

Police officers have difficult decisions to make when dealing with potential youth offences. In non-urgent cases, there is an opportunity for them to consult with a local youth probation office or crown counsel to help them decide how to proceed. If a warning, caution, or referral is not considered sufficient to hold the young person accountable, a report to crown counsel is required.

It is important to take the following factors into consideration in each case to make the right decision for all involved:

- Seriousness of the offence
- Impact on the victim
- Intention of the young person
- Young person's willingness to take responsibility and make amends
- Young person's history of offences or involvement with police
- Availability of local resources to adequately hold the young person accountable for the offence

Youth Statements

Police investigations relating to allegations of cyberbullying often include statements provided to the police by young persons under the age of 18 years. The admissibility of these statements is an important issue. Crown counsel, in their charge assessment function, will be looking carefully at any statements provided by the young

²⁸ <https://icdta.org/>

person when determining if there is sufficient evidence to support a conclusion that the charge assessment standard has been met.

It is important that police officers investigating cyberbullying cases understand the law relating to the admissibility of youth statements; this includes the relevant legislation and the applicable case law.

Investigative Guidelines

There is a misconception surrounding digital forensic evidence that there is a powerful program that searches an entire computer device and cross-references any data to police databases. Similarly, people assume that there is a “magic” website that can find everything there is to know about a suspect’s digital footprint. Unfortunately, there are no such tools that exist. The investigating officer should document and print the evidence, ask around, and investigate the information they have access to first. For more information on documenting for Digital Threat Assessment®, [click here](#).

Exigent Circumstances

Investigating officers are permitted to search and seize evidence without a warrant in exigent circumstances. Exigent circumstances exist when there is imminent danger of loss, removal, destruction, or disappearance of the evidence if the search or seizure is delayed.

Exigent circumstances also exist if the seizure results from the investigator carrying out the search to save a person from life-threatening, immediate danger. Investigating officers must be able to articulate why the search was conducted without a warrant and why the circumstances were exigent. Canadian police officers must be familiar with section 487 of the Criminal Code²⁹ and conduct their investigations within this context.

When communicating with third parties in a time-sensitive investigation, investigating officers must be able to explain the urgency of their requests and the seriousness of the investigation. This can be achieved using specific language to convey the urgency of the situation.

In cyberbullying cases, it may be necessary for police officers to preserve and access the subscriber data that is retained by social media service providers. Challenges that often arise usually surround the jurisdiction of where the company is based. If the company is based out of the United States, this presents a jurisdictional challenge to Canadian cases that may sometimes require a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty³⁰.

Preservation and Production Orders

Police can obtain preservation orders to get private companies to preserve and retain data that relate to an investigation. Most companies will when ordered, preserve data for 30 to 90 days. During this time, authorities are expected to collect court-issued documents that authorize the disclosure of preserved information to public agencies. Preservation orders can be submitted without court documentation. Police can also obtain production orders, which compel private companies to deliver or make available information to authorities.

Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT)

A Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (“MLAT”) facilitates cross-border (international) policing actions. In essence, MLATs are treaties between different countries that outline how they will help one another during investigations where two or more legal jurisdictions are involved.

²⁹ <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/section-487.html?wbdisable=false>

³⁰ [https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/emla-eej/mlatocan-](https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/emla-eej/mlatocan-ejaucan.html#:~:text=The%20Mutual%20Legal%20Assistance%20in,provisions%20for%20mutual%20legal%20assistance.)

[ejaucan.html#:~:text=The%20Mutual%20Legal%20Assistance%20in,provisions%20for%20mutual%20legal%20assistance.](https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/emla-eej/mlatocan-ejaucan.html#:~:text=The%20Mutual%20Legal%20Assistance%20in,provisions%20for%20mutual%20legal%20assistance.)

The MLATs that Canadian authorities use to compel information from American social networking companies typically ask American law enforcement officials to get a local court order and serve it on the company that holds the sought-after data. Canadian authorities will immediately turn to an MLAT if they are investigating a serious crime such as a homicide. MLATs can take a long time to process, however, so it typically takes Canadian authorities a minimum of 6 to 8 months to receive data. Because MLATs require significant amounts of bureaucratic work and can be slow to return data to authorities, these treaties are sometimes shunned in favor of open-source intelligence and evidence-gathering techniques.

All open-source data that can be gathered on the internet or through non-login social media applications are admissible, but evidence must prove that the accused was the individual who pressed send. The digital evidence helps prove where the information came from, such as which device was used, but doesn't necessarily help prove the user of that device. To prove the elements of the offence, the evidence must prove who had care and control of the computer or device used to commit the offence.

Investigators using open-source information and resources should ask themselves:

- What is the level of reliability of the source information?
- Will the information be relied on in future search warrants or orders?

HOW TO BEST SUPPORT VICTIMS OF CYBERBULLYING

When considering means of supporting those who have been victimized online, be mindful of the challenges and emotional volatility of these occurrences. Victims of cyberbullying are often in need of information and emotional support. However, there are unique factors present in cyberbullying cases that make them different from other instances of victimization. Some of those unique factors include:

- 24/7 availability to the internet;
- Possible anonymity of the perpetrator; and
- Scope of the audience and permanence of the victimization.

Because of the unique nature of cyberbullying, a unique approach may be needed to support victims more effectively. Some additional things that are important in providing support may include:

- Understanding the victim's role in the incident;
- Recognizing the emotional responses;
- Working effectively with support networks; and
- Providing support and education moving forward.

Understanding the Victim's Role in the Incident

Without victim blaming or shaming, it is important to be aware of the role that the victim may have played in the incident and how their role could be affecting their reaction to it. Depending on their role in the incident, victims can feel shame, humiliation, resentment, self-blame, guilt, and anger. It is important to be able to understand their role and to convey a message to the victim that it is not their fault as they were victimized.

Recognizing and Responding to the Emotional Responses

Victims can produce physical responses to cyberbullying when a severe online attack becomes a traumatizing experience. Research has shown that there are many different potential physiological impacts³¹ of cyberbullying including headaches, stomach issues, skin reactions, sleep disturbances, eating disorders, and mental health concerns such as depression, self-harming behaviors, or suicide attempts.

Self-harm is thought to be directly linked with suicide, but this isn't the case. The two will often get lumped together because both are reflections of emotional pain. Generally, people who self-harm do not have the intention of committing suicide. The most significant difference between suicide and self-harm is intent.

Suicide	Self-injury
Intent to end life	Intent to feel relief from intense feelings or numbness
Lethal means used	Non-lethal means used
Often a single event	Repeated behavior
No sense of relief after attempt	Immediate sense of relief after self-injuring
Feeling hopeless and helpless	A sense of having some control over emotions
In response to feeling of inescapable and unending pain	In response to feeling overwhelmed by emotions or feeling numb

Warning Signs of Potential Self-Harming Behaviors:

- Long sleeves in warm weather or refusing to show arms/other body parts
- Frequent injuries with weak explanations
- Tools (unbent paperclips, razors, lighters, knives, etc.)
- Risk-taking behaviors
- Lack of healthy coping skills

What to Do:

- Ask about suicide
- Ask to see cuts (if you are comfortable and they are willing) – how many? How deep? How are they healing? Are they infected?
- Find out about triggers – what feelings or situations make them want to self-injure?
- What brings their risk/urge to self-injure down?

³¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4552909/>

- What do they do to cope when they can't injure?

Self-harm is a way of dealing with feelings and difficult situations. If they're going to stop, they need to have alternative ways of coping in place so they can respond differently next time they have an urge.

Providing Support and Education Moving Forward

The best support for a victim is dependent on the unique needs of that individual. Young victims can often be assisted through emotional support and counseling. Education can be used to prevent future occurrences of bullying; this could include discussing digital responsibility and creating healthy online networks.

Experience has indicated that bullying behaviors tend to subside somewhat when there isn't retaliation from the victim or their supporters. It is important to be clear with both the victim and their supporters that retaliation can often escalate a bullying situation further.

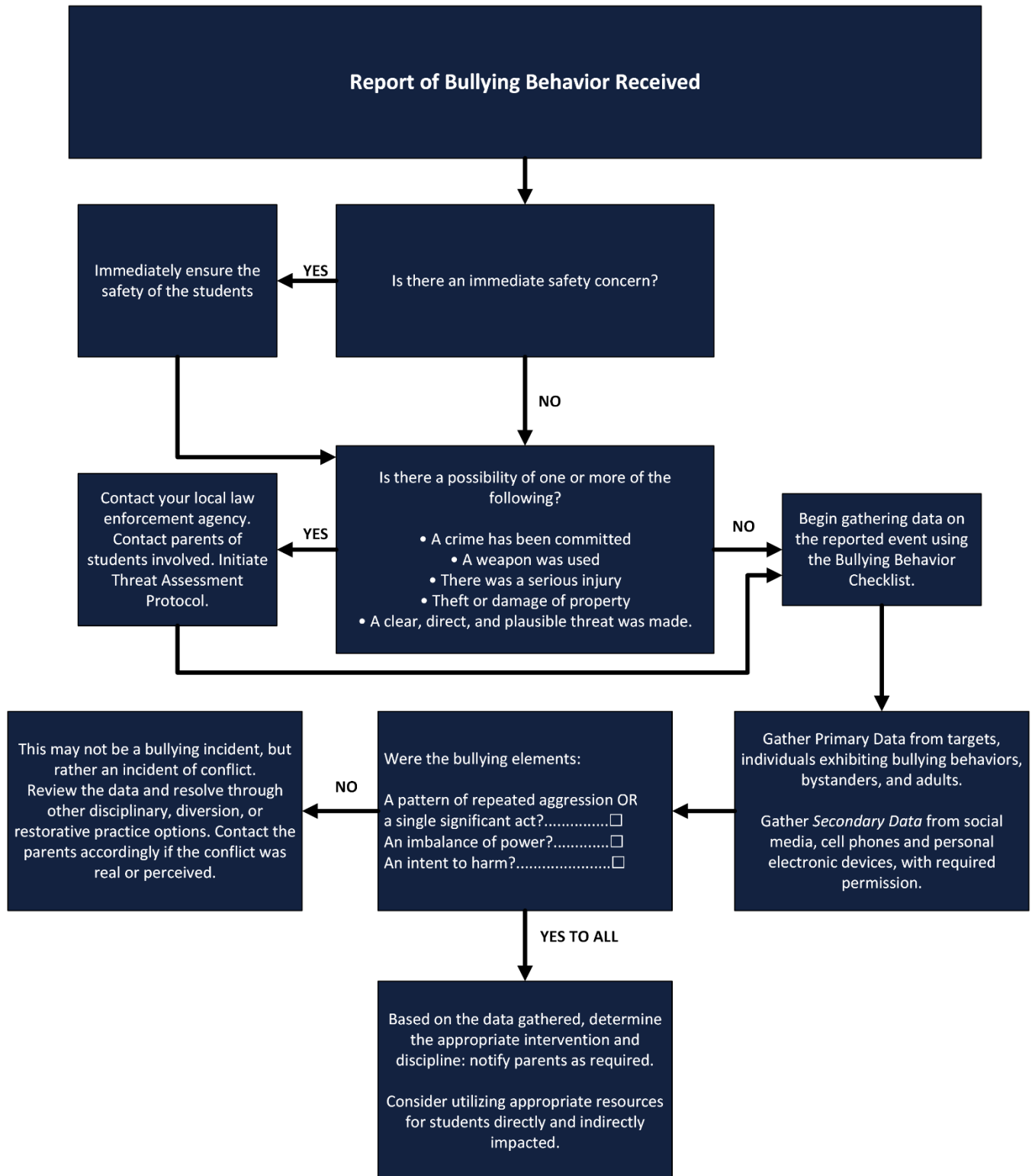
Victim service professionals also note that the role of the family members who are "supporting" the target can also be problematic³². Parents of young victims are understandably protective of their children and want to do what they can to help. Oftentimes, they can also make things more complex when they over-protect long after the incident. When a young victim wants to move forward and try to forget about a situation, parents may stand in the way as they seek their own version of justice against the wishes of their child. Supporting a victim can also mean ensuring that their support networks understand the impact that they may be having on the victim's recovery from the incident.

While there still exists a large generational gap in understanding technology and various forms of communication, we hope this training module has helped bridge the understanding related bullying and cyberbullying.

Our data has shown that there is a clear need to address cyberbullying head-on as it has lasting impacts on youth. The more we ensure we provide relevant education, effective modelling, and coping strategies for all parties, the better we can utilize using today for a safer tomorrow.

³² <https://www.connectsafely.org/cyberbullying/>

APPENDIX A: BULLYING FLOWCHART (SAFER SCHOOLS TOGETHER, SST)



APPENDIX B: SCHOOL-BASED BULLYING CHECKLIST

School-Based Bullying Incident Checklist

Checklist Completed By:

Name:

Date:

Students Involved:

Victim(s)	Perpetrator(s)	Helpful Bystander(s)	Hurtful Bystander(s)

Indicate the section of School District policy that has been breached:

Incident Synopsis

Physical Bullying

Verbal Bullying

Social-Diversity-Relational Bullying

Cyber Bullying

Narrative

Incident Management

	Yes	No
Do parents need to be notified?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do Superintendents need to be notified? Do police need to be notified?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have cell phones been checked for pictures, videos and text?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have social media sites been checked for pictures, video, and text?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Incident Intervention

	Yes	No
Will student discipline be required?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are alternatives to discipline appropriate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have school-based resources been accessed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have district resources been accessed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have community resources been accessed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is school or classroom education required?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Check in #1	<input type="checkbox"/>	2 Days after reported incident
Check in #2	<input type="checkbox"/>	7 Days after reported incident
Check in #3	<input type="checkbox"/>	14 Days after reported incident
Check in #4	<input type="checkbox"/>	1 Month after reported incident
Check in #5	<input type="checkbox"/>	As required
Check in #6	<input type="checkbox"/>	As required

SCHOOL CULTURE CHECK



9. Is the inside of the school clean and well maintained? 1---2---3---4---5---6
Not at all Extremely
10. Is the outside of the school clean and well maintained? 1---2---3---4---5---6
Not at all Extremely
11. What one word describes the school's physical environment? _____

SCHOOL CLIMATE

12. Does the school feel safe to you? 1---2---3---4---5---6
Not at all Extremely
13. Does the school feel comfortable to you? 1---2---3---4---5---6
Not at all Extremely
14. Does the school feel welcoming to you? 1---2---3---4---5---6
Not at all Extremely
15. Do you feel your colleagues like working at the school? 1---2---3---4---5---6
Not at all Extremely
16. What one word describes the climate in the school? _____

SCHOOL CULTURE

17. Is there a student council and/or other leadership initiatives in the school? Yes No DK
18. Does someone greet students at the door of the school each day? Yes No DK
19. Is there a process for welcoming new students? Yes No DK
20. Is there a process for welcoming new staff? Yes No DK
21. Is there a process for welcoming TOCs? Yes No DK
22. Are there intra-mural sports activities? Yes No DK
23. Do school events reflect the diversity of the student population? Yes No DK
24. Are parents included as part of the school community? Yes No DK
25. Do parents have meaningful input into school decision-making processes? Yes No DK
26. What is the level of participation in school activities by:
- a) Students 1---2---3---4---5---6
None Very High
 - b) Teachers 1---2---3---4---5---6
None Very High
 - c) Staff 1---2---3---4---5---6
None Very High
 - d) Parents 1---2---3---4---5---6
None Very High
 - e) Community members 1---2---3---4---5---6
None Very High

RELATIONSHIPS

27. Internal

What is the quality of the relationship between:

- i. Student peer groups 1---2---3---4---5---6 Excellent DK
Very poor
- ii. Student grade groups 1---2---3---4---5---6 DK
Very poor Excellent
- iii. Student ethnic/cultural groups 1---2---3---4---5---6 DK
Very poor Excellent
- iv. Students and staff 1---2---3---4---5---6 DK
Very poor Excellent
- v. Students and administrators 1---2---3---4---5---6 DK
Very poor Excellent
- vi. Older students with younger students 1---2---3---4---5---6 DK
Very poor Excellent

28. External

What is the quality of relationship between:

- i. Students and community 1---2---3---4---5---6 DK
Very poor Excellent
- ii. School and parents 1---2---3---4---5---6 DK
Very poor Excellent
- iii. School and community 1---2---3---4---5---6 DK
Very poor Excellent
- iv. School and local organizations 1---2---3---4---5---6 DK
Very poor Excellent

COMMUNICATIONS

29. Is there effective and well-defined communication between:

- i. Students and staff Yes No DK
 - a. Is this communication One way Two-way
- ii. Students and administrators Yes No DK
 - a. Is this communication One way Two-way
- iii. Staff/Administration with parents Yes No DK
 - a. Is this communication One way Two-way

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

30. Is there a school-based Safety Team? Yes No DK

if yes:

- a) Does it meet frequently and regularly Yes No DK
- b) Does it have a defined mandate? Yes No DK
- c) How effective is it? 1---2---3---4---5---6
Not at all Extremely

31. Is there a formal Code of Conduct? Yes No DK

If yes:

a) Does it clearly define appropriate behaviours? Yes No DK

b) Does it clearly define inappropriate behaviours? Yes No DK

If Yes, does it clearly outline consequences? Yes No DK

c) Is it displayed where students can see it? Yes No DK

d) Who participated in its development?

i. Students Yes No DK

ii. Teachers Yes No DK

iii. Principals/Vice Principals Yes No DK

iv. Parents Yes No DK

v. Staff Yes No DK

e) Is the Code reviewed regularly? Yes No DK

32. Does the Code of Conduct include references to sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI)?

Yes No DK

33. Are effective intervention strategies in place?

Yes No DK

a) Are there defined guidelines for:

i. Truancy Yes No DK

ii. Bullying (verbal, physical, emotional) Yes No DK

iii. Cyber-bullying Yes No DK

iv. Alcohol/drug possession and/or use Yes No DK

v. Weapons (including replicas) Yes No DK

vi. Threats Yes No DK

vii. Fighting Yes No DK

viii. Vandalism Yes No DK

34. Are school/campus incidents reported?

Yes No DK

If yes, for which of the following are records kept:

i. Suspensions Yes No DK

ii. Fights Yes No DK

iii. Police files Yes No DK

iv. Threats Yes No DK

v. Vandalism Yes No DK

35. If there was an incident of violence on campus, who would you report it to first?

DK

36. Does your school have social media guidelines for students and staff? Yes No DK

37. Does your school have a positive digital presence? Yes No DK
38. Is there an anonymous reporting system for students? If so, are they familiar with it? Yes No DK
39. Do you use social media platforms to promote a positive school climate? Yes No DK

PREVENTION

40. Are there proactive measures aimed at discouraging:
- a) Truancy Yes No DK
 - b) Bullying (verbal, physical, emotional) Yes No DK
 - c) Cyber-bullying Yes No DK
 - d) Alcohol/drug possession and/or use Yes No DK
 - e) Weapons (including replicas) Yes No DK
 - f) Threats Yes No DK
 - g) Fighting Yes No DK
 - h) Vandalism Yes No DK
41. Are there proactive measures aimed at encouraging:
- a) Volunteerism Yes No DK
 - b) Participation Yes No DK
 - c) Attendance Yes No DK
 - d) Student leadership initiatives Yes No DK

CRITICAL INCIDENT AND TRAUMA RESPONSE

42. Have you received any training in:
- i. Identifying critical incidents and traumatic events Yes No DK
 - ii. Responding to critical incidents and traumatic events Yes No DK
- b) Is there a Critical Incident/Trauma Response Protocol? Yes No DK
- if yes, does it include sections on:*
- i. Weapons (including replicas) Yes No DK
 - ii. Violence Yes No DK
 - iii. Intrusions Yes No DK
 - iv. Threats Yes No DK
 - v. Natural disasters Yes No DK
 - vi. Dangerous/Hazardous materials Yes No DK
 - vii. Lockdown Yes No DK
 - viii. Suicide/death Yes No DK
- c) Is it reviewed regularly? Yes No DK
- d) How many critical incidents/traumatic events are there each year?
 Number ____ *if don't know: My best estimate is* ____

e) Are critical incidents/traumatic events recorded? Yes No DK

f) How many requests for police services are there each year?
Official number _____ If don't know: My best estimate is _____

g) Are incidents that involve police recorded/documented? Yes No DK

h) The school's response after a critical incident/traumatic event can be characterized as:

Please check one of each pair:

- | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|----|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| i. Coping | <input type="checkbox"/> | or | Denial | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ii. Responsive | <input type="checkbox"/> | or | Defensive | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iii. Focus on providing services | <input type="checkbox"/> | or | Focus on restoring "normal" | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iv. Cater only to student needs | <input type="checkbox"/> | or | Cater to needs of all | <input type="checkbox"/> |

i) Does the district provide post-incident support? Yes No DK

If yes:

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| i. For students | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DK <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ii. For teachers | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DK <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iii. For principals | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DK <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iv. For staff | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DK <input type="checkbox"/> |
| v. For parents | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DK <input type="checkbox"/> |

j) Is there a Crisis and Trauma Response Team? Yes No DK

If yes:

- | | |
|---|--|
| i. Who is on the team? Check all that apply | Principal <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Parents <input type="checkbox"/> Others <input type="checkbox"/> DK <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ii. Does the Team focus primarily on the needs of students? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DK <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iii. Are district resources available for critical incident response? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DK <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>If yes, how effective are these resources?</i> | 1—2—3—4—5—6
Not at all Extremely |

43. Is there a Threat Assessment policy/protocol? Yes No DK

If yes:

- | | |
|---|--|
| a) Does it clearly define "Threat?" | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DK <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b) Does it categorize threat-making behaviours? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DK <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c) Is it reviewed on a regular basis? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DK <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d) Do you know who is responsible for defining level of risk in a threat? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DK <input type="checkbox"/> |

Thank you for the time and thought you have put into answering our questions. If there is something you wish to add, please write below.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Safer Schools Together

<https://saferschoolstogether.com>



International Center for
Digital Threat Assessment

International Center for Digital Threat Assessment

<https://icdta.org>



PSST World Anonymous Online Reporting Tool

<https://www.psstworld.com>

Cyberbullying, Kids Health

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/cyberbullying.html>

StopBullying.Gov

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/what-is-it>

MediaSmarts

<https://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/digital-issues/cyberbullying>

UNICEF

<https://www.unicef.org/end-violence/how-to-stop-cyberbullying>



SAFER
SCHOOLS
TOGETHER



International Center for
Digital Threat Assessment