Level: Grades 5 and 6

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Duration: One hour per
activity

Lesson

Introduction to Cyberbullying – Avatars and Identity

Overview

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

Learning Outcomes

Students will demonstrate:

- understanding of how online communication differs from face-to-face conversation
- awareness of how the distinct attributes of online communication may contribute to inappropriate or bullying behaviour
- recognition of cyberbullying behaviour
- understanding of the crucial role played by bystanders, including themselves, in fuelling or stopping bullying behaviour – online and offline
- awareness of the impact of cyberbullying on targeted individuals
- knowledge of appropriate action to take when cyberbullying occurs
- awareness of rules for "good Netizenship"

Preparation and Materials

- Read the Cyberbullying Backgrounder
- Read the A Word About (N)ethics backgrounder
- Distribute to parents or caregivers (via e-mail or hand delivery by students) the Parents' Guide to Cyberbullying backgrounder
- Provide art supplies for the avatar mask activity
- Prepare the Noah & Saskia screen capture overhead
- Print out the It's a Dog's Life story

Procedure

Activity One: Online Avatars

This lesson begins with a mask-making exercise. Depending on the availability of supplies and time permitted, you may have students make their masks out of plaster of Paris, papier mâché or construction paper. (If you want students to make more complicated masks, do a Web search for "how to make a plaster mask" or "how to make a papier mâché mask," which will bring up many excellent Web sites with step-by-step instructions.)

Class Discussion

Begin the class by writing the word "AVATAR" on the board.

Ask students:

- Does anyone know the meaning of this word? *(In online environments, an avatar is a virtual digital image that represents a person – an online identity. The term comes from a Sanskrit word meaning an incarnation in human form; however, online avatars can be anything from symbols to animals.)*

- Do any of you use avatars when you are communicating online? *(Many students will have used avatars on social networking sites like Neopets* or *Club Penguin.)*

- What kinds of avatars do you use?

Mask Making

Tell students, "Today we are going to make masks to represent your online identity. Think about online avatars that you use, or invent one that you would like to use."

Have students make their masks. Once their masks have been created, have them think of a name for their avatar. Ask them to write down the avatar's likes, dislikes and personality traits.

Role-Playing

Wearing their masks, have students mingle and introduce themselves to one another in character as their avatar. Once they have done this, instruct students to return to their seats and initiate the following discussion:

- Let's talk about your avatar. Is its personality similar or different to yours?

- How did you feel when you were going around the room as your avatar? Did you behave differently than you would have if you had just been going around the room as yourself?

- For those of you who have used avatars on the Internet, is your avatar like you or different?

- What kinds of things does your avatar do that are like you?

- What kinds of things does it do that are different?

Explain that avatars are lots of fun, but they can also complicate online relationships because of the "identity layers" they add.

Place the <u>Noah & Saskia</u> overhead onto the projector.

Tell students that this is the Web site for a popular Australian kids' show called *Noah & Saskia*. It's about two people who have never met in real life, but who have developed a friendship online. The real Noah and Saskia are on either side of this picture.

Ask whether anyone can explain who the other people are. *(The avatars directly beside Noah and Saskia are the ones they use when they're online. The girl and boy in the middle represent what Noah thinks Saskia looks like and what Saskia thinks Noah looks like, based on their avatars.)*

Present the following information to the class:

- When we talk about identity layers, there are a number of elements at work: there are the online identities that we choose for ourselves, and then there is the way that others imagine us, based on the names or avatars we use. But the one thing we can never forget is that real people are at the heart of all these identities.

- Online identities can be lots of fun: you can be anything or anyone you want to be, you can have super powers, and you can express who you really are inside in ways that you might not be able to in the real world. But sometimes, wearing an online "mask" can make kids behave in ways that they wouldn't in person.

Read the following quote to students:

> *[With] the Internet, you can really get away with a lot more because I don't think a lot of people would have enough confidence to walk up to someone and be like, "I hate you, you're ugly." But over the Internet you don't really see their face and they don't see yours and you don't have to look in their eyes and see they're hurt.*

- This is a quote from a 10-year-old boy. Ask students whether they agree or disagree with what he is saying.

- He says that "…over the Internet you don't really see their face and they don't see yours." Explain that this doesn't mean that their feelings aren't hurt – there is still a person at the other end of the screen. And sometimes the speed at which we send messages to people online means that we may not be thinking about the consequences of what we are saying.

"Think Before You Click" Self-Test

To teach students to quickly decide whether something they are about to do online is a good or a bad idea, ask each student to:

- Think of two people:
  - someone famous he or she admires for his or her courage, and
  - an adult in her or his life who is trusted and respected.

- Have students record these two names in a specific place in their agenda. Explain that as of today, these two people will be their "virtual conscience." Every time they intend to do something online which they're not sure is right, they will ask themselves: "What would these people think about this?"

Activity Two: It's a Dog's Life

Explain to the class that playing with identity is only one aspect of communicating online and that you will now look at another important element. Ask a student volunteer to read the story It's a Dog's Life to the class.

Deconstructing the Story

Engage in a class discussion based on the following, and record key ideas on the board.

- Imagine that you are Ray. Would you be scared if you received a message like the one sent by Orkad? Why? *(Ray doesn't know the identity of the person who is sending him the threat. Because of this, he doesn't know whether this is serious or a joke.)*

- Orkad does not feel that he is harming Ray. Why not? *(Orkad is a dog, and dogs use their sense of smell to identify fear in humans. But on the Internet, the sense of smell doesn't work – Orkad doesn't realize this.)*

- Think of what Katy could have told Orkad to convince him to stop sending this type of message over the Internet. *(Katy is the bystander, a positive witness trying to prevent cyberbullying. Katy's response must not be limited to "it's wrong." She must also explain to Orkad that although he cannot smell Ray's fear, it might still exist. The Internet does not provide all the sensory information that Orkad uses in the physical world.)*

- As human beings, are there signs that we cannot see when we communicate online, as opposed to speaking directly with someone in the physical world? *(There is a loss of visual and auditory information on the Internet – we can't read people's expressions or hear their tone of voice.)*

Draw the following table on the board:

ORKAD	KATY	RAY
(Perpetrator)	(Bystander)	(Target)

Explain that when people threaten or harass others using the Internet or cell phones, they are engaging in "cyberbullying." Like schoolyard bullying, there are usually three types of people involved: a **perpetrator** or perpetrators who are doing the bullying; a **bystander** or bystanders who see the bullying; and the person who is the **target**. In the story, Orkad is the perpetrator, Katy is the bystander and Ray is the target.

Discuss the following points with the class:

- In the story, Katy is a bystander watching Orkad send the message. In what other ways might people be bystanders to cyberbullying? *(They may be receiving mean messages*

about or images of others through instant messaging, or they may be following a hurtful conversation thread in a chat area.)

- If people ignore cyberbullying, is it likely to just go away? Why or why not?

  Key point: Anyone can, at any given time, become a target – you are not responsible for this. But this situation must never be tolerated: you must react to bullying in a *proactive way* – one that will lead to a resolution. In other words, to resolve the cyberbullying situation, you need to address it, but not get involved in further exchanges with the bully, which may escalate the situation.

- What can bystanders do to stop cyberbullying? *(List suggestions in the "Katy" column in the table.)*

- What can targets do to stop cyberbullying? (*List suggestions under "Ray" in the table.*)

- Orkad thought he was being funny, but it is clear how his joke might be interpreted by Ray as a threat, because Ray doesn't know who sent it. What rules about communicating online can you suggest here? (*List suggestions under "Orkad" in the table.*)

From this table, have students develop a "code of (N)ethics" or rules for online communication that will help everyone prevent cyberbullying.

Closure: Responding to Bullying

Generally, a four-step **STOP** process is recommended to actively deal with and stop bullying. Review the following with students:

- **STOP**— immediately leave the online environment or activity where bullying is going on.

- **BLOCK** e-mails or instant messages received from bullies. NEVER RESPOND.

- **RECORD** all harassing messages and send them to your Internet provider (Yahoo, Hotmail, etc.). Most providers have policies about users harassing people on their server.

- **TALK** to a trusted adult about the cyberbullying; alert the police when bullying involves physical threats.

  o   Who are the people you could talk to about cyberbullying?
  o   Would the same process work for physical bullying?

Extension Activity

Have students design a poster to illustrate the four steps that are an appropriate response to cyberbullying: stop, block, record and talk. Encourage them to think of images they could develop to make these four steps easy to remember.

Ultimately, the poster they produce could be put up in a high traffic area of the school.

Noah & Saskia Screen Capture

http://www.abc.net.au/rollercoaster/noahandsaskia/
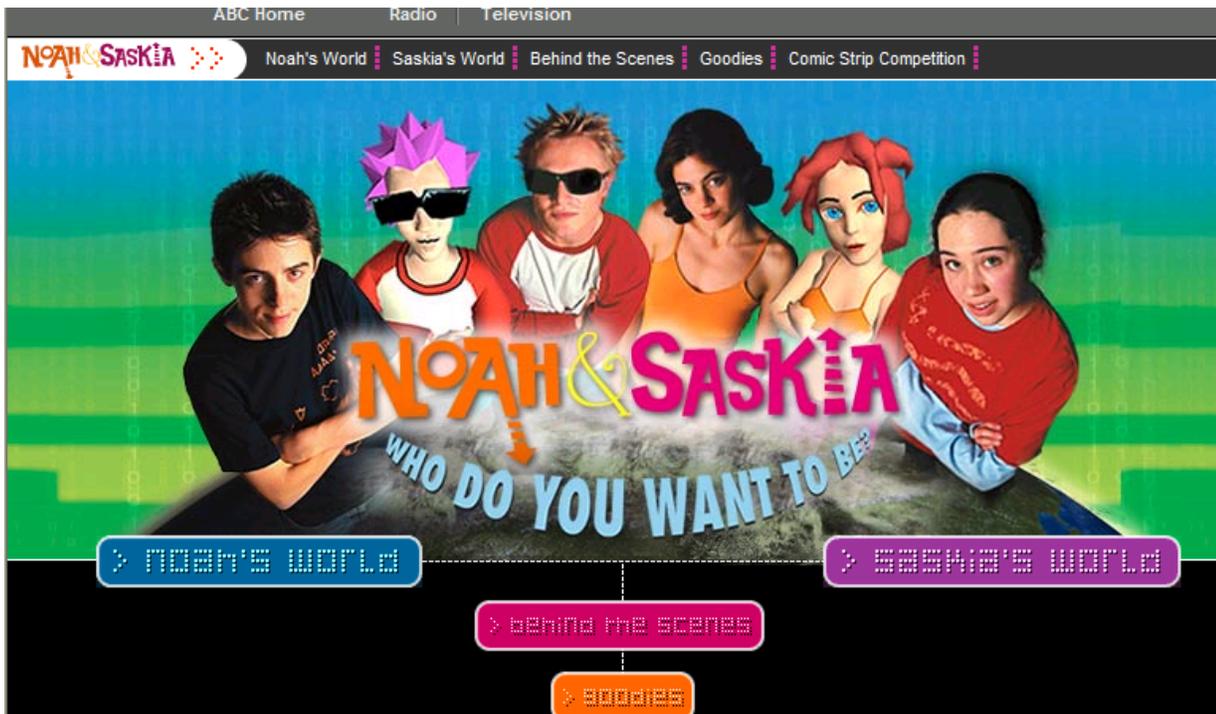
It's a Dog's Life

There once was a dog named Orkad. His master, Ray, took pretty good care of him; he walked him every day, but not for very long because Ray liked to spend his time playing Internet games. His favourite was a game where the player must look after a dog; there was an image of a dog on the screen and the player had to feed it, furnish its room and buy it toys to keep it entertained.

For hours on end, Orkad would watch Ray play this game, all the while waiting to be walked. Those were the times when he felt really lonely and dreamed about having someone to communicate with … oh, of course, there was always Katy—the neighbour's cat—but they really didn't have much in common.

There was something else that drove Orkad crazy: his kibble. He hated the kibble Ray bought for him. Obviously, he couldn't tell Ray how he felt because he was a dog and everyone knows dogs can't talk … and Orkad was no exception. But strange as it may seem, there was something he did know how to do: he could operate a computer. Watching Ray hit the keyboard day in, day out, Orkad had learned a thing or two.

One day, Ray left for school without turning off his computer. Orkad was home alone and bored out of his mind. He jumped up on the office chair and after only a moment's hesitation, typed out the word "dog" in the little window at the top of the screen. His heart beating like a drum, he clicked on the first link.

It was a discussion group where people talked about their problems with their dogs and gave each other advice. That was exactly what Orkad was looking for because he knew all about dog problems. He was just about to respond to a message when he heard Katy meowing mockingly at the window.

"What are you trying to do, Orkad? You're a dog, and the Internet is for humans!"

"You're right, Katy … but on the Internet, no one knows I'm a dog!"

From that day on, Orkad's life was transformed: he could communicate and help people resolve problems with their dogs, and everyone respected his advice. He was secretly hoping that Ray would one day join the discussion group to seek advice because then Orkad would be able to explain to him how he could improve his dog's life. But that day never came.

It was time for summer vacation and Ray left for camp, leaving Orkad with Ray's parents. Orkad was disappointed that his master hadn't joined the discussion group and, out of frustration, he decided to write a message directly to Ray. Of course, his message was anonymous … he didn't want to blow his cover!

The message read: "You're trying to poison your dog with this gross kibble. If you keep it up, I'll come after you!"

Orkad was just about to hit the "Send" button when he heard a shocked meow at the window. It was Katy again:

"Orkad!! Don't you send that message to Ray! You're making threats. He'll be absolutely terrified!"

"Come on! It's just a joke to get him to understand that I don't like my kibble," said Orkad, hitting "Send." "In fact, check it out. I'm sure Ray must have already received the message. Can you smell fear anywhere?" he asked, running his nose all over the screen and keyboard. "I know Ray's odour when he's afraid; I would recognize it anywhere, and I'm not smelling any fear here." (Sniff! Sniff!)

A Word About (N)ethics

In the course of the activities in this lesson, students will develop rules of online conduct. These rules can be grouped under a term such as "(N)ethics" or "Golden Rules." They share the goal of avoiding, dealing with and speaking out against cyberbullying.

Here is a relatively complete list that can be adapted to suit the students' age level:

1. Respect the private lives of other people online; don't spread rumours, don't share information about or photos of someone without getting his or her permission.
2. Respect other people's virtual space: don't go into someone else's files or computer.
3. In the online world, just like the offline world, never try to exclude other people.
4. Don't try to turn people against one another; making someone else be a bully is no different from being a bully yourself.
5. Follow the same values in the virtual world as in the physical world: never write to anyone something you wouldn't be willing to say face-to-face. If you feel an urge to write something angry, sleep on it.

If you witness cyberbullying:

6. Refuse to do it if someone asks you to pass on an insulting or embarrassing message, photo or video.
7. Take action against the perpetrator: react when your friends get involved in cyberbullying, and speak up every time you witness online harassment. Most young people are more sensitive to criticism from their peers than from their parents.

If you are a target of cyberbullying:

8. **Stop**: immediately leave the online environment or activity where the bullying is happening (chat room, newsgroup, game, IM, etc.)
9. **Block** all e-mails or instant messages from the perpetrator, and never reply.
10. **Record** all harassing messages and forward them to your Internet Service Provider. Most ISPs have policies against harassing messages
11. **Talk**: tell a trusted adult, such as a parent or teacher.

Cyberbullying Backgrounder

What is Bullying?

Bullying is a specific relationship characterized by recurrent abuse of power by a person (or group) over another person. Bullying is expressed differently depending on the age of the abuser.[1]

What is Cyberbullying?

As its name implies, cyberbullying is bullying through an electronic medium such as a computer or cell phone.

Roles

For the purposes of this document, those who are involved in cyberbullying are categorized as perpetrators, targets and bystanders.

> **Perpetrators:** Although cyberbullying might appear to be simply another means used by "traditional" bullies to reach their target, the virtual attributes of the Internet have fostered a new type of bully: someone who capitalizes on online anonymity to initiate bullying behaviour.
>
> Believing themselves to be anonymous, some young people feel free to commit acts online that they would never carry out in person. In addition, the frequency with which adolescents share online passwords provides perpetrators, when caught, with the ready excuse that someone else may have assumed their identity to send bullying messages.
>
> In addition to anonymity, the absence of visual and auditory feedback online can also fuel hurtful behaviour. According to Nancy Willard, from the Responsible Netizen Institute, this type of technology can affect students' ethical behaviour because they are not fully aware of the impact of their actions on others. This lack of feedback reduces feelings of empathy or remorse. "When people use technology, there is a lack of tangible feedback about the consequences of actions on others".[2]
>
> As such, students may write things online that they would never say in person because they feel removed from their own actions and from the person at the receiving end. As a student who participated in focus testing for Media Awareness Network's *Young Canadians in a Wired World* research commented:
>
> *[With] the Internet, you can really get away with a lot more because I don't think a lot of people would have enough confidence to walk up to someone and be like, "I hate you, you're ugly." But over the Internet you don't really see their face or they don't see yours and you don't have to look in their eyes and see they're hurt.*
>
> **Targets:** In this lesson series the term "target" is used instead of "victim." The term "victim" implies powerlessness and passivity, whereas "target" is considered to be more neutral.
>
> Although there is no physical violence, cyberbullying may be more frightening to targets because there are, potentially, an unlimited number of witnesses. When perpetrators are anonymous, targets don't know which peers to watch out for or respond to – leading to feelings of helplessness. With no one to point to, targets may be less likely to file complaints.
>
> The targets' situation is compounded by the reality that the home, which traditionally offers respite to bullying, is no longer safe, with cyberbullying continuing on the home computer.

Bystanders: This important group forms the social consensus for bullying behaviour – online and offline. In a study of 2,095 students conducted by the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto in March, 2008, 28% reported having witnessed cyberbullying. Of this percentage:

- 9% became involved in the bullying behaviour
- 32% watched but didn't participate
- 14% voiced their objection to the person doing the bullying
- 21% tried to stop the bully
- 11% left the online environment
- 7% tried to befriend the bully, and
- 7% reported the bully to someone who could help.[3]

In general, the longer the bullying persists, the more likely it is that the number of witnesses who are willing to join in will increase.[4]

Online Methods of Cyberbullying

There are several ways that young people bully others online. They may send e-mails or instant messages containing insults or threats directly to a person. They may also spread hateful comments about a person to others through e-mail, instant messaging or postings on Web sites and online diaries (blogs). Or they may steal passwords to e-mail or instant messaging accounts belonging to other youth and send out threatening e-mails or instant messages under an assumed identity. It's not unknown for technically savvy kids to build password-protected Web sites to target specific students or teachers.

Increasing numbers of children and youth are being bullied through text messaging with cell phones. The use of cell phones is challenging the ability of adults to monitor and guide children because, unlike a computer placed in a public area of a home, school or library, mobiles are personal, private, connected – and always accessible. Kids tend to keep their phones turned on at all times, meaning that bullies can harass victims at school or even in their own bedrooms.

Built-in digital cameras in cell phones add a new dimension to the problem. In one case students used a camera-enabled cell phone to take a photo of an overweight classmate in the shower after gym. The picture was distributed throughout the school e-mail list within minutes.

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

The Extent of the Problem

The Pew Report *Cyberbullying and Online Teens* (2007) reports that "about one third (32%) of all teenagers who use the Internet say they have been targets of a range of annoying and potentially menacing online activities, such as receiving threatening messages; having their private e-mails or text messages forwarded without consent; having an embarrassing picture posted without permission; or having rumours about them spread online."[5] As well, 38% of girls reported having been bullied online, compared to 26% of boys. The group reporting the highest rate of cyberbullying was girls 15 to 17 years of age, at 41%.[6]

In Canada, in its 2007 poll on the state of the teaching profession, Ontario's College of Teachers found 84 % of respondents reporting having been targets of cyberbullying by their students (a figure that rises to 93% for French-language teachers).

Cyberbullying and the Law

Young people should be aware that some forms of online bullying are considered criminal acts. Under the Criminal Code of Canada, it is a crime to communicate repeatedly with someone if your communication causes them to fear for their own safety or the safety of others. It's also a crime to publish a "defamatory libel" – writing something that is designed to insult a person or is likely to injure a person's reputation by exposing him or her to hatred, contempt or ridicule.

A cyberbully may also be violating the Canadian Human Rights Act if he or she spreads hate or discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or disability.
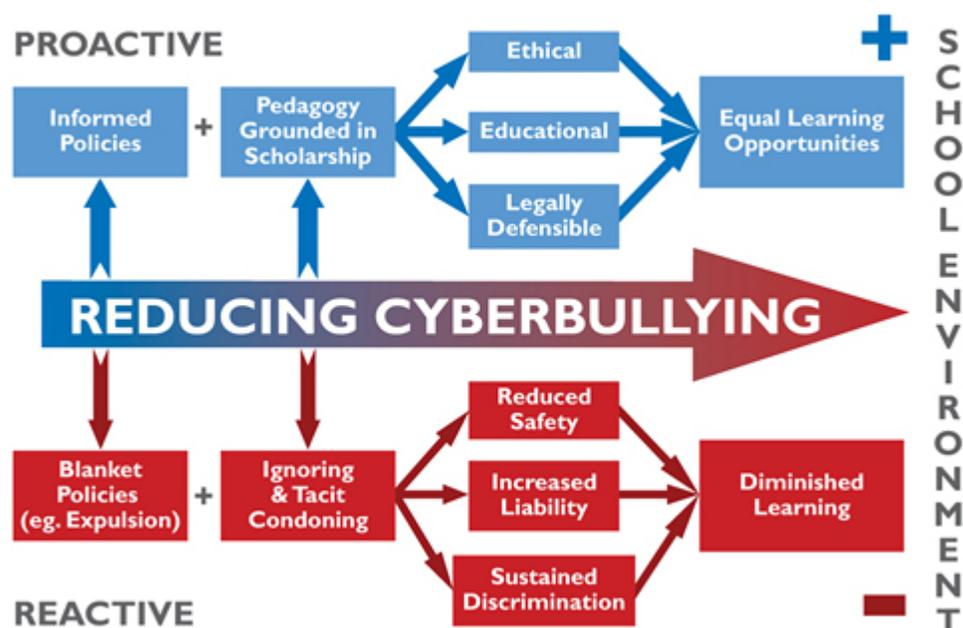
The Role of the School

Most bullying relationships are struck at school and, therefore, cyberbullying has a direct negative impact on the atmosphere at school or in the classroom. In her 2004 *Educator's Guide to Cyber Bullying*, Nancy Willard recommends schools develop a comprehensive approach to address cyberbullying that includes:

- engaging in participatory planning that involves current school-based programs (such as safe schools initiatives) and non-school participants – police, parents and community groups and social agencies
- conducting a needs assessment
- ensuring that an effective anti-bullying program is in place
- reviewing existing policies and procedures (update their bullying policy to include harassment perpetrated with mobile and Internet technology, and computer Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) to specifically prohibit using the Internet for bullying)
- conducting professional development
- providing parent education (organize parent education nights and workshops)
- providing student education (integrate anti-bullying and cyberbullying education into existing curriculum, so it is not another 'add on')
- evaluating the program to determine its effectiveness

Dr. Shaheen Shariff at McGill University emphasizes that schools have a responsibility "to adapt to a rapidly evolving technological society, address emerging challenges, and guide children to become civic-minded individuals".[7] According to Shariff, schools must support a preventive approach to cyberbullying in order to promote equal opportunity learning. A reactive approach (where, for example, cyberbullies are suspended) weakens learning.[8]

Cyberbullying School Response: Proactive and Reactive

PROACTIVE
Informed Policies
+
Pedagogy Grounded in Scholarship
Ethical
Educational
Legally Defensible
Equal Learning Opportunities
+
REDUCING CYBERBULLYING
Blanket Policies (eg. Expulsion)
+
Ignoring & Tacit Condoning
Reduced Safety
Increased Liability
Sustained Discrimination
Diminished Learning
REACTIVE
SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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As this table illustrates, schools must take a proactive approach in order to strike a balance between freedom of expression and providing a safe learning environment where students feel safe and protected from all kinds of bullying.

In the classroom, teachers can create an environment of inclusiveness in which every student is valued. Teachers should:

- examine their own attitudes and demonstrate a respectful attitude towards all students and other staff
- intervene whenever a child is being bullied – this includes speaking out if they see other teachers exhibiting aggressive or demeaning behaviour towards a student
- seek out shy, marginalized students and encourage their involvement in the classroom by promoting any special talents they have
- encourage healthy relationships by integrating strategies for discouraging bullying into classroom activities

Developing a sense of *control* – a belief in one's ability to take charge of the controllable aspects of a situation and influence a more positive outcome – can make a difference in helping young people build resiliency toward and take control of bullying situations.[9] Adults can help young people deal with bullying, wherever it is encountered, by encouraging them, as a community, to develop and agree to uphold codes of conduct. Adults can also provide young people with support and tools to actively address bullying behaviour.

The Canadian Federation of Teachers has developed a *CyberTips* guide for teachers that can be viewed at: http://www.ctf-fce.ca/publications/pd_newsletter/PD2008_Volume7-2English_Article9.pdf.

Helping Students Take Action

Just as students need to understand that online bullying may be a criminal act, it is also important for them to understand their own responsibilities as "Netizens" in building and contributing to positive online communities. Teachers and parents have an essential role to play in helping young people develop their own moral compasses to guide their online behaviour. The following rules can be used as a starting point to help students develop a code for ethical conduct online, to encourage positive online interactions, and to help them respond proactively if they find themselves targeted by a cyberbully.

5

1. Protect your privacy, and respect the privacy of others: don't give out your personal information and avoid spreading rumours or posting any information or photo on the Web without first obtaining permission from the person who provided it.
2. Respect people's virtual space: don't go digging through someone's files or computer.
3. Stay true to yourself: do not send anonymous personal messages.
4. Stay true to your values in cyberspace: never write something that you wouldn't say to someone's face. Before you decide to send someone an aggressive message, sleep on it.
5. Don't behave like a troll (someone who posts controversial messages in an online discussion with the intention of baiting other users and pitting them against each other).[10]

If you witness bullying online:

6. Stand up to the perpetrator: speak out every time that friends cyberbully someone and every time you witness aggressive behaviour against a person online. Criticism from friends usually carries more weight than when it comes from parents.
7. Don't be a doormat! If someone asks you to spread an offending message, photo or video about someone, refuse to do it!

If you are the target of cyberbullying, use the four-step STOP process:

8. **STOP**—immediately leave the online environment or activity where bullying is going on (chat room, forum, game, instant messenger, etc.).
9. **BLOCK** e-mails or instant messages received from the perpetrator. NEVER RESPOND.
10. **RECORD** all harassing messages and send them to your Internet provider (Yahoo, Hotmail, etc.). Most providers have policies about users harassing people on their server.
11. **TALK** about it to a trusted adult; alert the police when bullying involves physical threats.

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1 J. Jaanen and S. Graham, eds., *Peer Harassment in School: The Plight of the Vulnerable and Victimized*. London: Guilford Press, 2001.
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4 S. Shariff and R. Gouin, "Cyberdilemmas: Gendered Hierarchies, Free Expression and Cyber-safety in Schools." Presented at *Safety and Security in a Networked World: Balancing Cyber-Rights and Responsibilities*, Oxford Internet Institute Conference, Oxford, U.K., 2005.
5 A. Lenhart, "Data Memo: Cyberbullying and Online Teens." Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 27, 2007. http://www.pewinternet.org/ ~/media//Files/Reports/2007/PIP%20Cyberbullying%20Memo.pdf.pdf.
6 Ibid.
7 S. Shariff and R. Gouin (2005).
8 S. Shariff and L. Johnny, "Cyber-libel and cyber-bullying: Can Schools Protect Student Reputations and Free-expression in Virtual Environments?" *Education & Law Journal*, 16 (2007), pp. 307–42.
9 J. Pearson and D. Kordich Hall, "Reaching IN … Reaching Out Resiliency Guidebook.." Child & Family Partnership, 2006, p. 5. http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/documents/Guidebook%20-%20Guide2.pdf.
10 When a troll attack occurs on a discussion list, the moderator will generally take action (from issuing a warning to suspending the troll's subscription).

Cyberbullying Backgrounder / Backgrounder / © 2008 Media Awareness Network

Parents' Guide to Cyberbullying

What is Bullying?

Bullying is a specific relationship characterized by recurrent abuse of power by a person (or group) over another person. Bullying is expressed differently depending on the age of the abuser.

What is Cyberbullying?

As its name implies, cyberbullying is bullying through an electronic medium, such as a computer or cell phone.

The Internet's reach and perceived anonymity means that children who might not otherwise initiate bullying may initiate this sort of behaviour, and an unlimited number of young people may become bystanders who perpetuate the victimization as they read and forward harassing messages and/or images.

It is extremely important that young people learn how to respond to cyberbullying. Adults can help.

How Do I Know Whether or Not my Child is a Target of Cyberbullying?

Signs that your child is being bullied online include fear of using the computer or going to school, anxiety and psychological distress, and withdrawal from friends and usual activities.

What Should I do If my Child is Targeted?

- Report the cyberbullying to your local police. The abuser is probably breaking other laws, too.
- You can also call the tip line at the Canadian Crime Stoppers Association: 1-800-222-TIPS (8477)
- Meet with school officials if your child is being bullied by a peer at school.
- File a complaint:
    - For bullying using e-mail or instant messaging (IM), contact the Internet Service Provider (ISP) of the perpetrator at <contact@ispname> or <abuse@ispname>. Forward offending e-mails or IM message logs to the ISP with your complaint.
    - For bullying material posted on a Web site, use the Contact Us section of the site and ask to have the material removed.
    - For bullying through a cell phone, have your service provider trace the call and contact the perpetrator's service provider.

How Can I Prevent Cyberbullying?

As a large portion of cyberbullying occurs in the home, you must get better informed about your children's online activities. Get involved and talk to your child about behaving ethically online.

Establish rules regarding appropriate Internet use. Media Awareness Network (MNet) research shows that these rules have a very positive impact on your children's online behaviour. You can consult MNet's resources on developing household Internet rules at www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/tip_sheets/family_online_rules.cfm.

Urge your children to come to you as soon as they feel uncomfortable or threatened online.

What Should I <u>Avoid Doing</u> if my Child is a Target of Cyberbullying?

It can be difficult for a young person to come forward when being bullied; even to mum or dad. To foster a climate of trust, do not overreact. Do not forbid your child to use the Internet in the hope of eliminating the source of the problem: for your child, this is the equivalent of social death and will leave her or him feeling even more victimized (not to mention the fact that an extreme reaction such as this will probably cause your child to avoid confiding in you again when feeling threatened).

How Can I Learn More?

As much as possible, show an interest in your child's online life: where does he or she go online? What does he or she do? What is it about these online experiences that are so absorbing? If you're in the habit of sharing your own online experiences with your child, she or he will be more likely to talk to you when having a negative experience.

If you want to better understand your child's online experience, visit MNet's BeWebAware site at: http://www.bewebaware.ca.