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Crossing the Digital Divide



A Guide for Parents
on Web-based Hate





The **League for Human Rights**, an agency of B'nai Brith Canada, is dedicated to combating antisemitism and racism. The objectives of the League include advocating for human rights for all Canadians, building bridges between communities, and fighting racial discrimination and bigotry in all its manifestations. The League accomplishes these goals through educational outreach programs, anti-racism initiatives, community action and legal/legislative interventions.

The *League* operates a twenty-four-hour, seven-day-a-week Anti-Hate Community Hotline (1-800-892-BNAI [2624]) offering assistance to victims of antisemitism and hate-motivated crimes. *League* members interact on an ongoing basis with the community, the police, synagogues and schools, legal and legislative experts, and government agencies that deal with racism.



Crossing the Digital Divide

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CROSSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

A Guide for Parents on Web-based Hate

Crossing the Digital Divide



Your child has become silent and withdrawn. Increasingly, she isolates herself in her bedroom, spending hours on the computer, her world defined by chat rooms, video games, instant messenger and the cell phone. Her homework is ignored, her grades begin to plummet and her social world has shrunk to the confines of just one room.

Should you be worried? – YES.

What is Hate on the Internet?



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Cyberbullying is rampant. Sexual predators lurk behind innocuous-sounding screen names. The lure of online gaming is ever-present. Children are at risk for Internet addiction. Recruitment by hate groups is on the rise. Today, more than ever, children and youth are in real danger of physical and emotional harm – and the perpetrator can be 'virtual' as well as 'real time'.

The dangers of children becoming entrapped in hate activity online become greater as more and more youth flirt with the thrill of anonymity. Some are not just victims of online hate but active perpetrators. A 2005 report released by the Media Awareness Network (MNet) report found that 60% of students pretend to be someone else when they are online. This allows them to harass and intimidate their peers without getting the blame.

Even if they are identified, they can accuse someone else of stealing their online identity. In this way a vicious circle of intimidation and guilt is created that implicates bystanders, as well as the victim and perpetrator.

Anonymity distances teens from the perception that they are acting inappropriately or illegally. It reduces the likelihood of social disapproval, allowing individuals to operate with multiple identities - an offline Dr. Jekyll with an online Mr. Hyde.

What is Hate on the Internet?

According to the *Canadian Human Rights Tribunal*, hate on the Internet has all the same hallmarks as hate through any other medium. All involve an attack on the inherent self-worth and dignity of the members of the targeted group. Web-based hate includes:

- Portraying the targeted group as a powerful menace that is taking control of the major institutions in society and depriving others of their livelihoods, safety, freedom of speech and general well-being
- Depicting the targeted group as preying upon children, the aged, the vulnerable, etc.
- Blaming the targeted group for the current problems in society and the world
- Portraying the targeted group as dangerous or violent by nature
- Communicating the message that nothing but the eradication of this group of people will save the rest of society
- De-humanizing the targeted group by comparing them to animals, vermin, or excrement
- Using highly inflammatory and derogatory language to describe this group
- Trivializing past persecution or tragedy involving members of the targeted group
- Calling for violent action against the targeted group

What Does the Law Say?

Section 13 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act* (CHRA) says it is discrimination to communicate Internet messages that expose one or more people to hate or contempt because they belong to a particular group based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, or disability. The scope of the CHRA is restricted to Internet hate speech that occurs in Canada, so it is essential that concerned citizens identify where the targeted hate speech originated. If either you or your child comes across examples of hate speech, this is what you can do:

- Record the name of the website and print out all the webpages containing hate.
- Identify the name of the person communicating hate on the Internet. Hate-mongers are often eager to take credit for their websites and postings, making this task easier.
- Find out who has registered a particular website. It is possible to learn who operates a website by reviewing the registration information. There are websites such as www.whois.net and www.register.com that can help you do this.
- Notify the police about the presence of the particular website conveying hate. In some cases, they may assist in identifying who is communicating these hateful messages.
- Report the incident to www.hateontheinternet.com, a site that specializes specifically in gathering and responding to hate and extremism on the Internet.
- Report the incident to your Internet Service Provider.

What Can Parents Do?

Protecting your children might mean **using filters to block harmful content**. There are several commercially available filters that can be effective in protecting younger children, as well as filters available free of charge from Internet Service Providers.

See GetNetWise at www.getnetwise.org for a comprehensive database of information on filtering, blocking and monitoring products and kid-friendly browsers.

You can find Internet Filter Reviews at Internet-filterreview.toptenreviews.com

You can guide your children to **kid-friendly portals** such as:

- **Headbone Zone** www.headbone.com
- **MSN Kidz** kids.msn.com/kidz/default.aspx
Send your children to **kid-friendly search engines and directories**:
- **Yahooligans!** yahooligans.yahoo.com
A kids' version of Yahoo which only links to safe and appropriate kids' sites.
- **Sympatico** www.sympatico.ca
This site has an Advanced Search filtering option.
- **Google** www.google.ca
You can choose a level for "SafeSearch Filtering" under Preferences.
- **AltaVista** ca.altavista.com
There is a "Family Filter" link under Settings

What Can Parents Do?

The following sites also allow filtering options:

- **Alltheweb** www.alltheweb.com
The Alltheweb filter is enabled automatically unless disabled.
- **WiseNut** www.wisenut.com
You can turn on the “WiseWatch” option to enable filtering with different filtering levels available.

These sites are pre-filtered to protect kids from unsafe sites:

- **DibDabDoo** www.dibdabdoo.com
This search engine only looks for adult-reviewed sites safe for children and teens.
- **Awesome Library** www.awesomelibrary.org
The sites on this directory are reviewed by educators and can be searched in many different languages.
- **Educational Software Directory**
www.educational-software-directory.net
Volunteers have reviewed and organized more than 23,000 sites into this directory into 14 categories.

Many excellent Canadian sites offer advice on how to protect your kids, including examples of parent-child contracts aimed at ensuring safe and responsible Internet use:

- **Child and Family Canada**
www.cfcefc.ca/docs/mnet/00001063.htm
- **Media Awareness Network**
www.media-awareness.ca/english/index.cfm
- **York Regional Police Be Net Aware Program**
www.police.york.on.ca/netaware.htm

What Can Parents Do?

Go to the sites listed with your child and choose one of the online agreements together. Or you could craft your own family-specific contract in which you agree when the Internet can be accessed and for how long, as well as which sites are unsuitable.

As your child gets older, it is too late for filters, contracts and kid-safe sites. Online social networking communities such as Facebook and MySpace have by now often set the tone of your teen's web interaction. That it is why you need to ensure that children learn as early as possible how to think critically about online activity.

You need to talk about the dangers of the Internet and sexual predators. Warn children about online recruitment by hate mongers, cyberbullying and illegal activity such as gambling. Discuss with them the need to respect their peers as well as other groups that are targeted by hate. Encourage them to talk to you about this issue.

Protect you child from web-based danger. Hate mongers, sexual predators and recruiters from extremist groups access the same chat rooms as your teens do. Teens, especially those with low self-esteem, are the most susceptible of all age groups to recruitment by hate groups and street gangs via online chat rooms. Go to the following Edmonton Police site for useful tips on protecting your kids: www.police.edmonton.ab.ca/Pages/Gangs/communities.asp

Ensure that your children understand the music they are downloading, where it comes from, and which hate groups profit from this online trade. Help them appreciate that hate set to music is still hate. To learn more about the online hate music your teen might come across, go to www.turnitdown.com

Monitor the video games they are playing. Hate groups have manipulated available technology to create violently racist games. With titles such as *Ethnic Cleansing* and *Shoot the Blacks*, these "games" can be purchased or downloaded for free from the sites of some of the most extreme hate groups.

What Can Parents Do?

Talk to your teens and give them the attention and support they need so they do not have to look elsewhere for significant social interaction. You can check the League for Human Rights' *Is Your Child a Target?* pamphlet for early warning signs of when you might need to call for outside professional help. This information can be found at www.bnaibrith.ca

Get help if you feel your teen is grappling with Internet addiction or gambling. You might need the resources of the Center for Internet Addiction Recovery at www.netaddiction.com



Avoid putting a computer in your teen's bedroom, especially one equipped with a webcam. You are more likely to be able to supervise and engage your child in discussion if you are nearby.

Remember to warn your kids not to share personal information or pictures of themselves with any stranger on the Internet, whether through e-mail, instant messaging, in chat rooms or through social networks such as MySpace. They may have a false sense of security that their information is only accessible to those they invite into their networks, but these systems are not secure.

Warn your children never to meet an on-line "friend" without your knowledge. It will take time and effort to prepare your children for the attractions and dangers of the online world. Start early, watch closely and make sure your kids know you are there for them. In an online world where youth can be the perpetrators as well as the victims, parents can make all the difference between ensuring safe, responsible Internet usage, and allowing their children to become swallowed up in a virtual world of hatred, harassment and exploitation.

Report on-line hate

www.bnaibrith.ca