



RESPONDING
TO ONLINE HATE

The *Responding to Online Hate* guide was produced by Media Awareness Network (MNet) with the support of the Government of Ontario.



The guide is part of MNet's *Diversity and Media Toolbox*, a suite of anti-hate resources for schools and communities.



For more information contact:

Media Awareness Network
950 Gladstone Avenue, Suite 120
Ottawa, ON Canada K1Y 3E6
T: 613-224-7721
F: 613-761-9024
info@media-awareness.ca
www.media-awareness.ca



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MEDIA AWARENESS NETWORK

Media Awareness Network (MNet) is a Canadian not-for-profit centre for digital and media literacy that supports the development of critical thinking skills in children and youth so they can engage with media as active and informed digital citizens. MNet develops digital and media literacy resources and awareness programs for Canadian educators, parents, librarians, children and youth, and the community at large. MNet programs and resources are available in English and French through its website (www.media-awareness.ca).

INTRODUCTION

This guide was created to help teachers, parents, youth, community organizations and law enforcement personnel respond to online hate.

Personal computers, the Internet and wireless devices have changed the face of hate speech, providing hate groups with greater reach, a mask of anonymity and new ways to appeal to youth. In 2011, the Simon Wiesenthal Center identified 14,000 hate websites, a number that doesn't include user-generated content on sites such as Facebook and YouTube.¹

Although racist and hateful comments are offensive to the vast majority of Canadians, they are not necessarily illegal. Internet blocking software is also largely ineffectual in filtering hateful content, so to counter hateful ideologies it is essential that we learn to recognize online hate and know how and where to report it. To prevent hate from flourishing, we can all play a role in creating cultures of tolerance, respect and empathy for others in our schools and communities.



WHAT IS ONLINE HATE?

✕ DEFINITIONS

There are two definitions of hate speech in Canadian law: one in the *Criminal Code* and another in the *Canadian Human Rights Act*. (Many provinces and territories have their own human rights legislation, some of which defines hate speech, but these definitions are generally similar to the one found in the *Canadian Human Rights Act*.) The types of online hate referred to in this guide meet the definition found in the *Canadian Human Rights Act*. Many — though not all — also fit the definition found in the *Criminal Code*.

CRIMINAL CODE

According to the *Criminal Code*, it is against the law to advocate genocide, to publicly encourage hatred and to promote hatred against an “identifiable group”. A person found guilty of advocating genocide may be imprisoned for up to five years, while promoting hatred can result in a sentence of up to two years. As well, the *Criminal Code* gives judges the power to order the removal of hate material from any computer system in Canada.

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Section 13 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act* forbids using telecommunications technologies like cell phones and the Internet to communicate messages that are likely to expose a person to hatred or contempt on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, disability or having a conviction that has been pardoned. Cases under Section 13 are considered by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. If the Tribunal decides that the message is hateful, it can order the person who published it to remove it or face a charge of contempt of court.

The *Criminal Code* and the *Canadian Human Rights Act* only apply to material that is published or made public. Postings to an online forum would be considered public, but it's not yet clear whether posting to a forum with limited access (such as a social networking profile) would meet this test.

It's important to keep in mind that an online hate incident that doesn't meet either legal standard should still be addressed.

Note: At the time of publication of this guide, an act was before the House of Commons to repeal Section 13 of the *Human Rights Act*. If this act becomes law, the *Criminal Code* may become the only legal avenue for addressing online hate in Canada.

X HOW HATE IS COMMUNICATED ONLINE

Hate is communicated in many different ways on the Internet. The most widely known method is through websites created by organized hate groups. Some of these are open about their purpose, while others — often called *cloaked* hate sites — disguise their messages by pretending to provide legitimate information or debate.² Cloaked hate sites rely on being taken for real sources of information, especially by students who are doing research for school projects. A small number of these websites are designed specifically to appeal to children.³

To attract older youth, some organizations have created simple video games that communicate hateful messages.⁴ Others spread hate through music or “hate rock”, which can be easily found online either as music tracks or videos on mainstream sites such as YouTube⁵ and iTunes.⁶ Finally, both organized hate groups and individuals who promote hate are increasingly using social networks such as Facebook to spread their messages.⁷



TARGETING YOUTH

There are a number of reasons to be concerned about young people and online hate: adolescents and teens are among the heaviest Internet users, frequently use the Internet unsupervised, and often lack the critical thinking skills to deal with the content they are exposed to. Canadian teens ages 12–17 are among the most active Internet users, spending about 12 hours a week online⁸ (a number that doesn't include time spent using cell phones or playing online video games). In addition, three-quarters of children ages 13–15 are allowed to use the Internet without supervision.⁹ This combination of heavy use and lack of supervision makes youth more likely than other groups to be exposed to online hate messages and less likely to be able to deal with them.

The second reason is that young people are frequent victims of hateful speech and actions while online. Hate mongers “troll” websites that are popular with youth, making offensive comments to get a rise from people or to see if they can get others to say similar things.¹⁰ Not all of the hate online, or even the majority of it, comes from members of hate groups: many online spaces, especially those popular with teenage boys, promote “cultures of hatred” where high levels of racism, sexism and homophobia are considered normal. For example, online gaming services like Xbox Live can be very unfriendly to players who are open about being members of a minority group.¹¹

Finally, young people are more at risk of being involved in hate crimes in their communities: in Canada the largest number of people involved in hate crimes is youth — mostly boys between the ages of 12 and 17.¹² Many hate groups have devoted themselves to targeting youth, singling out young people who are looking for groups or causes that will give them a sense of identity.¹³ Hate mongers are very skilled at identifying vulnerable youth and then tailoring their messaging to appeal to or actively recruit them.¹⁴

Hate groups have different ways of drawing people in. Some are aimed at getting people to agree with their beliefs, while others encourage youth who are already on the fringes of hate movements to become more deeply involved. On the Internet, hate groups will often post toned-down versions of their messages to make them seem more reasonable.¹⁵ They also tailor their messages to appeal to teens who may be insecure about their identity or position in society. For example, hate groups often push to recruit students who feel left out by efforts to respect diversity such as Black History Month, or young people who feel that they have lost jobs to minority groups.¹⁶ University students may be more hesitant to join hate groups than youth with less education,¹⁷ but they are still vulnerable.

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Once young people are on the fringes of a hate group, they are often “groomed” by a more senior mentor who gives them guidance and helps to develop their loyalty.¹⁸ When youth become involved in hate a number of small steps take place that make it easier for them to get more deeply involved and harder to get out of it. Each step is a bit more serious than the last, gradually building a new idea of what is normal or acceptable behaviour that makes next steps seem reasonable. Research has shown that people who commit hate crimes often start with small acts and move gradually to more serious ones.¹⁹

In the same way, young people grow increasingly committed to the group as they get more deeply involved. It becomes an important part of their social life, with loyalty to friends in the group becoming as important as devotion to the group’s ideals. To encourage this, hate groups will create the idea that they are facing threats from other groups and from the government. This sense of facing a common danger makes members more loyal to one another and to the group.²⁰

Not all of the hate that’s online is meant to recruit people into organized hate groups: anti-hate activists have suggested that a lot of it is also intended to inspire people to commit hate crimes on their own.²¹



TALKING ABOUT IT

X EDUCATING YOUTH

Many homes and schools use filtering software to protect youth, but Internet filters can miss a lot of hateful material, and some of it — like cloaked hate sites — is designed to get through filters. The best way to help young people deal with hate online is to prepare them for it before they encounter it. This means doing two things: helping them to *recognize* and *decode* hate and teaching them how to *confront* and *respond* to it. Young people need to understand that anyone can post material on the Internet: it's up to them to learn to tell the difference between biased content and fair, accurate information. This can be a difficult subject for adults to address, but it is better that young people learn about this from us — before they learn from someone else.

We need to teach youth to think critically about all the media they consume so that they can recognize hate in all its forms. Teaching young people about the ways that hate groups communicate their messages can help alert them to “red flags” that show that someone is trying to manipulate them.

Digital literacy — the ability to understand the nature, techniques and impact of media like the Internet — is one of the most important tools for fighting hate online.²² Because young people are so comfortable using computers and the Internet, we may think that they already have the digital literacy skills to understand and deal with offensive online content. In fact, even the most Web-savvy youth may have trouble recognizing the true messages of hate sites.²³

One of the most important digital literacy skills youth need is to know how to verify sources. Hate groups put a lot of effort into making their sites look legitimate²⁴ by including many of the markers that youth use to decide if a source is credible: a dot-org Web address, quotes and citations from other sources (even if they are distorted, misquoted, made up, or from other hate groups), claims of expertise (nearly every author on hate sites is a “doctor”, and many groups call themselves “institutes”), and an appealing and professional design.²⁵

Young people need to learn ways to verify sources, such as doing a link search to find out who links to a site or a Whois search to show who owns a domain. For example, a Whois search will reveal that the website “Martinlutherking.org” — which claims to be an educational resource about Martin Luther King — is actually run by the White supremacist group Stormfront. Doing a Google search on a source can also reveal if it’s considered to be reliable: for instance, when you do a search for the cloaked hate site “National Policy Institute” the second hit after the site itself is the Southern Poverty Law Center, which identifies this organization as a leading source of “academic racism.”

As well as checking sources, youth need to be able to recognize hate when they see it. Although many hate sites try to hide their true nature,²⁶ the messages they use can still give them away. Here are some of the most common ideas found on hate sites:

- **THE OTHER:** The most basic element of hate is the idea of “the Other” — a group that is seen as being completely different from the author’s group, sometimes even portrayed as inhuman. The Other is presented as being both inferior (to show that the author’s group is superior) and threatening (to show that they are a danger to the author’s group).²⁷ Most hate groups are careful not to openly promote violence towards their targets.²⁸ Instead, they create distorted histories and interpretations of current events to make readers believe that violence against the Other is justified.
- **THE GLORIOUS PAST:** Another important element of hate is the idea that the group has fallen from its once-glorious past. This fall is shown as being the fault of the Other, and it is only by defeating and destroying the Other that this glorious past can be regained.
- **VICTIMHOOD:** Hate groups typically portray themselves, and the group they claim to represent, as victims of the Other. For example, White supremacist websites will claim that Whites lose jobs or school placements, and even their own heritage, as a result of “reverse racism.”²⁹

We need to teach youth to think critically about *all* the media they consume so that they can recognize hate in all its forms. Teaching young people about the ways that hate groups communicate their messages can help alert them to “red flags” that show that someone is trying to manipulate them.

Building empathy is another important way of preparing youth to confront online hate: for more on this, see the *Building an anti-hate environment* section.

DISCUSSING AN INCIDENT

It’s important for parents and teachers to keep open communication with youth about what they encounter online, and to encourage young people to talk to a trusted adult when they encounter anything disturbing.

The *Responding to Online Hate* section includes tips on how to report online hate. If hate material comes to light in a classroom or community setting, it’s important to address it publicly. Don’t address it until you’re ready to respond, though: it’s all right to say “No, that’s not true, and I’ll explain why tomorrow.” Find out what material was encountered and where, and take the time to prepare your response.³⁰ You can use online resources from Teaching Tolerance (www.teachingtolerance.org), Anti-Defamation League (www.adl.org), Canadian Race Relations Foundation (www.crr.ca) and Media Awareness Network (www.media-awareness.ca), which have programs to help classrooms and communities fight hate and promote diversity.³¹ This is also an opportunity to model critical thinking skills as you help young people understand *why* a message is hateful and reveal how it twists facts.

It's also important for youth to understand the ways that history has affected how we see ourselves and others. Without knowing the history of slavery and civil rights, or the long history of anti-Semitism, it's difficult for a young person to understand the difference between reasonable debates and hate material. Make sure, though, that they understand that the purpose of raising these issues isn't to blame or make them feel guilty, but to promote justice for everyone.

Police, teachers and other authorities must take all reports of online hate seriously. They must also be sensitive to the effects of encountering online hate. For example, if a youth was a specific target of harassment or slurs in an online gaming session, or belongs to a group or groups targeted by hate material, he or she may feel embarrassed, isolated or afraid to come forward.³²

COUNSELLING

In some cases, youth who have encountered online hate — especially harassment or slurs — will need counselling.

Being exposed to bigotry and hate anywhere can have much more serious effects than just making people feel uncomfortable or unwelcome. Experiencing discrimination online can cause stress, anxiety and depression.³³ Victims of hate crimes are more likely to see the world and people around them as being dangerous, as well as to feel less in control of their own lives.³⁴ They also find it harder to get over the incident than victims of other forms of crime, are more likely to have disturbing thoughts about the incident, to report health problems and to feel like they don't want to live any longer.³⁵

What kind of counselling works best depends on the victims' relationship with their community, as well as with the dominant culture. Victims who identify strongly with their community should be encouraged to use resources within that community, such as PFLAG Canada (www.pflagcanada.ca) and the Canadian Jewish Congress (www.cjc.ca). Victims who do not closely identify with their communities, or who are members of more than one minority group, may be less comfortable drawing on those resources.³⁶ All victims need to be given tools for taking action (see the *How to report an incident* section) and access to professional counselling if they need it. Information about victim support services across Canada can be found at the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (www.crcvc.ca/en/services.php) and Victims Matter (www.victimsmatter.gc.ca/vsd-rsv.html).

It may also be appropriate to provide some kind of support to the communities the person belongs to — schools, neighbourhoods and minority communities — since the effects of hate crimes often spread outwards from the victims in a “ripple effect”.³⁷ See the *Building an anti-hate environment* section for more details on how to address an incident that affects a whole community.

X INTERVENING

Parents, teachers and community leaders must sometimes deal with youth who have created or spread online hate, or who have become involved with hate groups. Fortunately, many of the same tools that we use to prepare youth for encountering online hate are effective in helping them get out of the “hate trap” as well. The most important thing is to teach them critical thinking and help them understand how racism and prejudice are illogical. Critically examining the assumptions that go into bigotry and hate speech can show how unfounded they are.³⁸

There are several programs around the world aimed at intervening with youth who have been involved in hate in different ways, such as Northern Ireland’s *Challenge Hate Crime Project* (www.niacro.co.uk/challenge-hate-crime) and *Exit Sweden* (www.fryshuset.se/fryshuset/Fryshuset_social_projects.aspx). At the moment, there are no similar programs in Canada, but research has found some common characteristics in successful programs:

- accepting and understanding youth who participate;
- teaching anger management methods;
- making youth aware of the effects of prejudice and bias;
- having youth participate in community service;
- teaching youth to reflect on their thoughts and actions;
- making youth aware of the laws applying to hate speech and hate crimes where they live; and
- encouraging or requiring youth to apologize and make up for their actions.³⁹

Intervention programs are particularly important in cases where youth would otherwise be placed in correctional facilities, because these are where racist groups have the most success in recruiting new members.⁴⁰ Even in less serious cases, though, it’s important to intervene as soon as possible when youth become involved in hate.

A top-down view of a person with long brown hair typing on a silver laptop. The laptop is open and sits on a wooden surface. A bright yellow banner with a torn edge effect is positioned horizontally across the middle of the image, partially covering the laptop keyboard and the person's hands. The text on the banner is in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

RESPONDING TO ONLINE HATE

X HOW TO REPORT AN INCIDENT

It is vitally important that we don't let online hate speech go unanswered. Because online content is fluid, it is always good to be as specific as possible. When reporting an incident, include as much of the following as you can:

- When did this happen? Noting the time and date is important because some online content, such as discussion threads in chatrooms, can quickly disappear.
- How was the content delivered? Were you sent something directly through email, SMS, text message, instant message, or private messaging? Did you come across something while browsing the Web?
- If the message was sent directly to you:
 - keep the original email or save your chat/text log, should you need to give them to law enforcement officials.
 - if possible, save the username or email address of the person sending you the hateful message.
- If you encountered the content on a website:
 - copy and paste the address of the site by clicking your Web browser's address bar, highlighting the full Web address and copying and then pasting it into a word processor.
 - take a screenshot of the content in question to give to police. (On *Windows* computers, hit the "Print Screen" key, then go to a graphic or word processing program and select "Paste" from the "Edit" menu; on a Mac, hitting Command-Shift-3 will save the current screen image as a graphic file on your desktop.)

The following are places you can report online hate to:

Site Administrators

Sites and services which allow people to post content, such as Facebook, YouTube and Xbox Live, have policies about what is acceptable. You can generally complain about content on these sites through a "Contact Us" link somewhere on the home page. Some sites also have tools that have been designed specifically for this purpose:

- Facebook allows people to report different types of offensive content. For more information see <https://www.facebook.com/help/?page=247013378662696>.
- YouTube allows visitors to "flag" offensive videos (you need to have a YouTube account to do this). For more information see <http://support.google.com/youtube/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=95403>.

- Xbox Live users can file complaints about all forms of harassment. For more information see http://forums.xbox.com/xbox_forums/xbox_support/f/26/t/19139.aspx.
- World of Warcraft has a policy that forbids harassment based on race, ethnicity, national origin or sexual orientation. It can be seen at <http://us.battle.net/support/en/article/previous/20455>. To complain about harassment you must contact a Game Master and “Open a Ticket.” For more information see <http://us.battle.net/support/en/article/previous/19775>.

Internet Service Providers (ISPs)

Many ISPs will remove hate content that is hosted on their servers once they are made aware of it. To find out the host of a particular site, visit www.uwhois.com or www.easywhois.com.

Canadian Human Rights Tribunal

You can bring a complaint about online hate to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal by contacting the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

Canadian Human Rights Commission
 344 Slater Street, 8th Floor, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1E1, Canada
 Telephone: (613) 995-1151
 Toll Free: 1-888-214-1090
 TTY: 1-888-643-3304
 Fax: (613) 996-9661

The Commission can also be contacted online at the following address: www.chrc-ccdp.ca/contact/default-eng.aspx.

Non-Governmental Organizations

There are also non-governmental organizations which collect reports of both offline and online hate. They include:

- B’nai Brith Canada (www.bnaibrith.ca/contactus.html)
- Friends of the Simon Wiesenthal Center (www.wiesenthal.com/site/pp.asp?c=IsKWLbPJLnF&h=4441269)
- Canadian Anti-racism Education and Research Society (www.stopracism.ca/reportfrm.php)

A more complete list of anti-hate organizations can be found in the *Who to Contact About Online Hate* section.

Law Enforcement

Many police forces have special *hate crimes units* to deal with hate incidents. If you live in one of the following municipalities, ask specifically for the hate crimes unit when you call to report an incident:

- Calgary
- Edmonton
- Hamilton
- Orillia
- Ottawa
- Toronto
- Vancouver
- Winnipeg

Local police services that don't have specific hate crime units may still have specialists who handle hate crimes. Ask to speak to someone who specializes in handling hate crimes when calling to report an incident.

If you live in Ontario or British Columbia you also have access to a provincial hate crimes unit:

- Ontario Hate Crime Extremism Investigative Team (www.hceit.ca)
- B.C. Hate Crime Team (604-543-4903 or 604-598-4243)

BUILDING AN ANTI-HATE ENVIRONMENT

The *Talking About It* section gives you information on how to respond to a specific incident of online hate. It's just as important, however, to build a community where hate is not tolerated.

Building empathy

The best antidote for hate is *empathy*, the ability to understand how other people are feeling. *Roots of Empathy* (www.rootsofempathy.org) is one example of a program that can help to develop empathy in youth and build lifetime habits of tolerance and compassion. The program is considered one of the most effective ways of fighting bullying in schools⁴¹ and its lessons can be applied to fighting hate as well.

Promoting tolerance and diversity

There are also many resources which schools and community groups can use to promote tolerance. Research has shown that programs are most effective when they stress cooperation, problem solving, open communication, conflict resolution and mediation, in addition to making youth aware of the issues around bias and prejudice.⁴²

For example:

- The organization Partners Against Hate (www.partnersagainsthate.org) publishes activity guides titled *Helping Children Resist Bias and Hate* and *Helping Youth Resist Bias and Hate* that include a wide variety of strategies and tools for creating a hate-free community.
- Anti-racism groups such as Teaching Tolerance (www.tolerance.org) and the Anti-Racism Resource Centre (www.anti-racism.ca) also have valuable resources to encourage promoting diversity and empathy in the community, such as the *Anti-Racism Resource Kit* (www.aclrc.com/pdf/Anti_Racism_Resource_Kit.pdf).
- The Ontario Human Rights Commission provides a number of publications and guides (www.ohrc.on.ca/en/resources/Guides).
- FAST (Fighting Anti-Semitism Together) (www.fightingantisemitism.com) offers a classroom unit titled *Choose Your Voice* that helps students learn about the harm done by hatred and stereotypes.
- Media Awareness Network has produced *The Diversity and Media Toolbox*, for schools and community groups, which includes workshops, lesson plans and classroom modules, that explore the spectrum of issues from images of diversity in media to online hate (www.media-awareness.ca).

One final way to build a tolerant community is to make people aware of how rare hateful behaviour really is. Research has shown that people are more likely to engage in activities like bullying when they believe that many people act this way, and are less likely if they believe that fewer people do. Making people aware that this sort of behaviour is not the norm not only changes people's views, it also changes their behaviours.⁴³



WHO TO CONTACT ABOUT ONLINE HATE

✘ POLICE-BASED SERVICES

- Alberta Hate Crimes Committee: www.albertahatecrimes.ca
- B.C. Hate Crime Team: can be contacted by phone, 604-543-4903 or 604-598-4243, bc_hate_crime_team.sc.ediv_lmd@rcmp-grc.gc.ca
- Ontario Hate Crime Extremism Investigation Team: www.hceit.ca/HCEIT/Welcome.html
- Sûreté du Québec Cybercrime Portal (French only): www.suretequebec.gouv.qc.ca/cybercriminalite/cybercriminalite-surete-du-quebec.jsp

✘ GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Victims Services and Reporting

- Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime: www.crcvc.ca/for-victims
- Canadian Human Rights Commission: www.chrc-ccdp.ca
- Alberta Police-Based Victim Services Association: www.apbvsa.com

- Alberta Human Rights Commission: www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca
- Manitoba Human Rights Commission: www.manitobahumanrights.ca
- New Brunswick Human Rights Commission: www.gnb.ca/hrc-cdp/index-e.asp
- Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Commission: www.justice.gov.nl.ca/hrc/index.html
- Northwest Territories Human Rights Commission: www.nwthumanrights.ca
- Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission: www.humanrights.gov.ns.ca
- Nunavut Human Rights Tribunal: www.nhrt.ca
- Ontario Human Rights Commission: www.ohrc.on.ca
- Prince Edward Island Human Rights Commission:
www.gov.pe.ca/humanrights/index.php3?number=72187&lang=E
- Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse (Québec):
www2.cdpcj.qc.ca/en/pages/default.aspx
- Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission: www.shrc.gov.sk.ca
- Yukon Human Rights Commission: www.yhrc.yk.ca

Counselling and Support Services

- Ontario Victim Support Line: 1-888-579-2888 or 416-314-2447 (in the Greater Toronto Area)

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Counselling and Support Services

- Kids Help Phone: www.kidshelpphone.ca
- Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays: www.pflagcanada.ca

Direct Action and Reporting Services

- Center for Research-Action on Race Relations (CRARR): <http://www.crarr.org>
- Anti-Racist Canada: www.anti-racistcanada.blogspot.com
- Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere: www.egale.ca
- Hatewatch: www.splcenter.org/blog/?source=redirect&url=hatewatch
- International Network Against CyberHate (INACH): www.inach.net
- The Nizkor Project: www.nizkor.org
- Simon Wiesenthal Center: www.wiesenthal.com
- Stand Up to Hate: www.standuptohate.blogspot.com
- Stop Racism and Hate Collective: www.stopracism.ca

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