

# Untangling the web



**ONLINE SAFETY AND SEXTING AMONG BC YOUTH**



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## ONLINE SAFETY AND SEXTING AMONG BC YOUTH

YOUTH HEALTH • YOUTH RESEARCH • YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Founded in 1977, McCreary Centre Society is a non-governmental not-for-profit organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, evaluation, and youth engagement projects.

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# Table of contents

Key findings .....	4
Introduction .....	6
Youth in BC .....	9
Cybersafety concerns .....	10
Cybersafety and health .....	14
Risk factors for cybersafety issues.....	17
Protective factors for cybersafety .....	26
Protective factors for youth who have been cyberbullied .....	31
Perpetrators of cyberbullying.....	33
Final word.....	37
Sharing the results .....	38

# Key findings

Nineteen percent of females and 9% of males had ever met someone through the Internet who made them feel unsafe. Similar percentages had been cyberbullied in the past year. On the day before taking the survey, 11% of males and 6% of females had sexted.

Seven percent of males and 6% of females reported they had used technology to bully or pick on someone in the past 12 months. Youth who had been cyberbullied themselves were about 10 times as likely to be perpetrators as those who had not been cyberbullied (29% vs. 3%).

Students who had met someone online who made them feel unsafe, had been bullied online, or who engaged in sexting were more likely to report poorer mental health ratings, fewer hours of sleep, extreme stress and despair, self-harm, and suicidal ideation and attempts compared to those who did not report any of these cyberactivities. For example, 42% of females and 13% of males who engaged in sexting reported self-harming in the past year compared to 21% of females and 7% of males who had not sexted.

Online safety problems affected youth's participation in school and community life. For example, victims of cyberbullying were three times as likely as those who had not been cyberbullied to plan to leave high school before graduating. They were also more likely to skip school and to report that they did not participate in extracurricular activities (18% vs. 3% who had not been cyberbullied) for fear of being bullied.

Some youth appeared to be at greater risk for experiencing cybersafety issues. These included youth with challenging living situations, minority youth, youth who had been exposed to violence, youth with poor self-image, youth who engaged in health risk behaviours, and youth who were online a lot.

Youth who reported receiving support from family, school, peers, or adults in their community were less likely to experience online safety problems or to experience negative consequences if they were victimized.



Youth who felt highly connected to their families (i.e., their family understood them, paid attention to them, and had fun together) were less likely to have met someone unsafe online, sexted, or been bullied online. For example, while 7% of those who were highly connected to their families reported meeting someone online who made them feel unsafe, 24% of those who were least connected did so. Youth whose parents knew what they were doing in their spare time and those who ate evening meals with their parents were also less likely to report risky online activities.

Students were half as likely to have met someone online who made them feel unsafe if they felt their teachers cared about them (12% vs. 24% who felt teachers did not care).

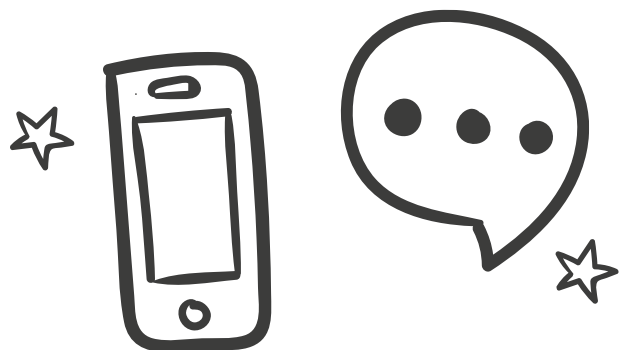
Among youth who had been cyberbullied, those who had turned to a teacher for help and found the experience positive were less likely to skip school due to fears about being bullied (11% vs. 26% who did not find their teacher helpful). Also, those who had a helpful school counsellor were less likely to report extreme stress in the past month (24% vs. 45% who did not find their counsellor helpful).

Students who had helpful sources of support in the community such as sports coaches and health professionals also had fewer online safety problems.

Similarly, youth who had turned to friends for support in the past year and found them helpful were less likely to have met someone unsafe online compared to those who did not find their friends helpful (15% vs. 26%).

The attitudes of youth's friends were also important. For example, youth with friends who would be upset with them if they were involved in a pregnancy were less likely to have sexted (8% vs. 13% who had friends who would not be upset).

Finally, being involved in activities where they felt listened to was protective for youth who had been bullied through technology. For example, 28% of those who felt listened to quite a bit or very much reported self-harming in the past year, compared to 39% who felt somewhat listened to, and 52% who felt they were listened to very little or not at all.



# Introduction

In 2013 McCreary Centre Society conducted the fifth BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS), a province-wide survey of youth aged 12-19. During the development of the questionnaire, youth and adults who work with youth asked us to include items about safe and unsafe Internet use.

Previous versions of the BC AHS had asked youth about whether they had contact with someone unsafe who they had met through the Internet and whether they had been a victim of cyberbullying. The 2013 BC AHS also included questions about the use of a cellphone for bullying and sexting, as well as about perpetrating cyberbullying.

In British Columbia, cyberbullying and the use of the Internet for sexual exploitation, particularly of girls and young women, has become a cause of major concern. This follows several high-profile cases which have resulted in the suicides of young women in BC and the criminalization of other youth.



On March 10th, 2015, a new law came into force that prohibits the non-consensual distribution of intimate images. This new offence is punishable by a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment. Using the Internet for the purpose of committing a sexual offence is also considered to be a crime and although British Columbia currently does not have any specific laws about cyberbullying, there are federal laws relating to defamation, harassment, and creating an unsafe environment which may be applied against perpetrators of cyberbullying.

This report was created using data from youth who completed the BC AHS. It also includes quotes from youth who participated in one of four workshops held in the Lower Mainland to discuss the data.

## BC AHS

Between February and June 2013, nearly 30,000 students in Grades 7 through 12 completed the pencil and paper survey. The 2013 BC AHS was administered by public health nurses in partnership with McCreary Centre Society in 56 of BC's 59 school districts, representing more than 98% of students enrolled in public schools.

The BC AHS has been conducted every five years since 1992. Some trends in online behaviours and experiences from the past ten years are included in this report, using data from the 2003, 2008, and 2013 surveys.

Comprehensive provincial and regional reports of the BC AHS results are available at [www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca).



## Limitations

The BC AHS is a health survey that covers a broad range of topics. Although the survey included items about cyberactivities, it was not a comprehensive assessment of this subject. For example, youth were asked whether they engaged in sexting. However, there is no way of knowing whether they were receiving, sending, or forwarding sexts, and whether this was done willingly or not.

The BC AHS was administered in English to students in mainstream public schools. Students who attended alternative education programs or private schools, who were absent on the day of the survey, who were not attending school, or who had limited English comprehension may not be represented in the results.

The discussion of risk and protective factors in this report is based on correlations. We cannot conclude anything about the causal nature of these relations. However, the views of youth who reviewed this data offer some possible explanations.

Youth who reviewed the data from this report pointed out some of the limitations in the BC AHS survey questions, most notably that the questions were not specific enough. For example, one youth said, *“When you ask about cyberbullying, one person might shrug off the drama that goes on and only think of the serious stuff, whereas someone else might be including it.”* Another said, *“If cyberbullying included nasty comments, the percentages in the report would be a lot higher.”* Others spoke of victimization, rude comments, and bullying being a regular part of their online experience, so not something they would think to report.

## Terms used in this report

**CYBERBULLYING** | Bullying through the Internet or other technology. The BC AHS asked youth about their experiences as a victim and perpetrator of cyberbullying in the past year. Although terms such as bullying can minimize victimization behaviours, it was used in the survey because piloting showed it to be better understood by youth than other terms such as online victimization.

**HEAVY TECHNOLOGY USE** | Using technology for multiple purposes (e.g., surfing, chatting, gaming) and/or at all times of the day (before, during, and after school) and night (after youth were supposed to be asleep).

**MEETING SOMEONE UNSAFE ONLINE** | The BC AHS asked youth if they had ever met someone through the Internet who made them feel unsafe.

**CYBER OR ONLINE** | Includes use of the Internet and electronic communication through computers and cell phones.

**PHONE** | A cellphone or other portable electronic device.

**SEXTING** | The BC AHS asked youth about sexting on the previous school day. Sexting is the sending of sexually explicit photographs or messages via cellphone or other portable electronic device. Canada’s anti-cyberbullying law (Bill C-13) makes it illegal to share “intimate images” of someone without their consent. Anyone under 18 who sends or receives sexts of another minor could be charged with child pornography.

## About the statistics

All comparisons and associations within the 2013 survey results are statistically significant at  $p < .01$ . This means there is up to a 1% likelihood that these results occurred by chance. Comparisons to previous years' BC AHS results are considered statistically significant at  $p < .05$ . This means there is up to a 5% likelihood that these results occurred by chance. Where it is not obvious, differences in tables or charts that are not statistically significant are noted.

A percentage noted with an asterisk (\*) should be interpreted with caution as the standard error was relatively high but still within the releasable range.

## Youth's response to the report

“Talking about the various statistics about cyberbullying makes you think about your own behaviour.”

Four workshops were conducted across the Lower Mainland with 55 diverse youth aged 13-18. The purpose of these workshops was to share the report findings, ask youth for their insights into the data, and create resources which could be used to engage other youth in a dialogue about online safety.



“I will remember to be compassionate online.”

As part of the workshop, youth were asked for their ideas about improving online safety and reducing sexual exploitation. They were also asked for their ideas about how to share the information in the report with other youth.

Older youth reported that they wished they had received this information earlier. Some of these youth worked together to create resources aimed at younger youth and at younger female youth in particular.

Students from the Digital Media Academy at Argyle Secondary School worked with some of the ideas generated at the workshops to create resources which could be shared with other youth.

Common feedback from youth who reviewed the data included enjoying the opportunity to talk about online safety and sexting, learning more about how to stay safe online, and how to support youth who may be experiencing victimization. When asked what they would do with what they learned through this project, most participants said they would share it with other youth. Many also felt that they would change their online behaviour as a result.

“I will be more aware of what constitutes as bullying and if I do it.”

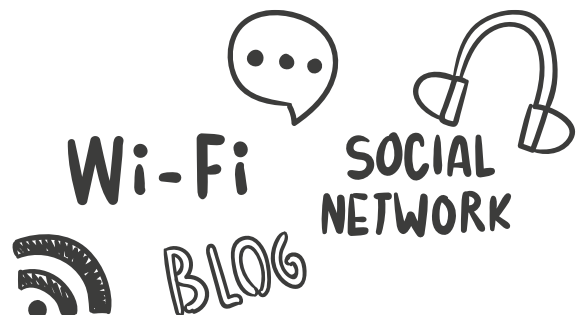
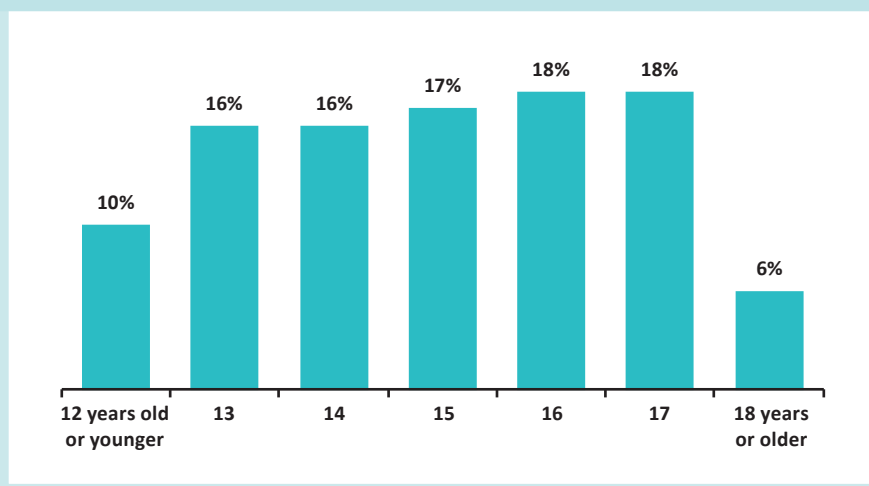
# Youth in BC

Youth who completed the 2013 BC AHS ranged in age from 12 to 19. Just over half of students were female, 49% were male, and less than 1% were transgender. Nine out of ten youth were from urban areas.

Ninety percent of youth reported having a cell-phone or other portable electronic device, and the majority of students (96%) had used their device the previous school day.

Youth used their phone for a variety of activities, most commonly for communicating with friends (89%); playing games, entertainment, or music (83%); communicating with parents or guardians (80%); chatting online or social networking (74%); and finding information (72%).

AGE OF STUDENTS WHO COMPLETED 2013 BC AHS



# Cybersafety concerns

## Met someone online who made youth feel unsafe

“ I met an adult online who convinced me to send inappropriate pictures to him.”

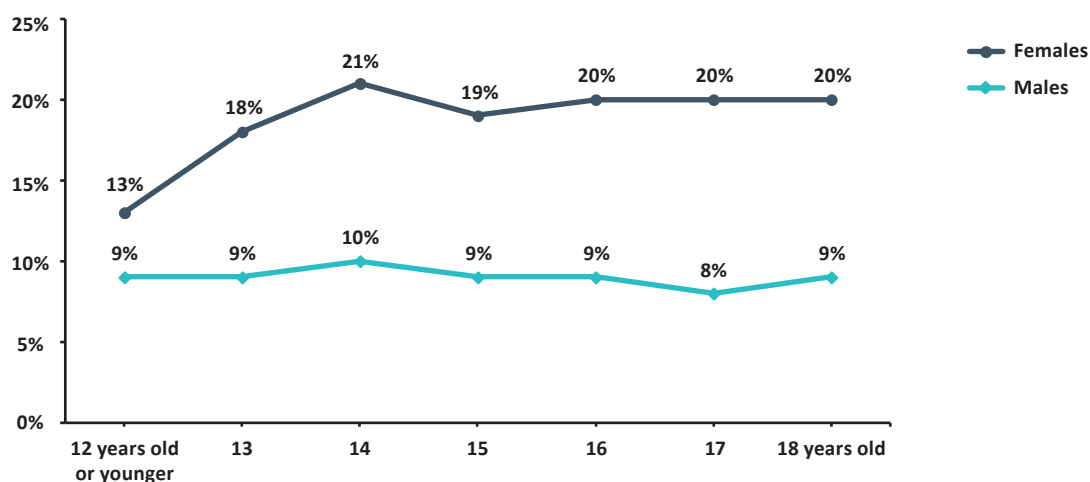
Overall, 14% of youth who completed the 2013 BC AHS had met someone through the Internet who made them feel unsafe. Reflecting the picture in 2003 and 2008, females in 2013 were more than twice as likely as males to have had this experience (19% vs. 9%).

The percentage of males reporting they had met someone unsafe online remained constant between 2003 and 2008 (at 7%) before rising in 2013 (to 9%). For females the rate dropped from 2003 (23%) to 2008 and stayed at a similar level in 2013 (19%).

While there was no age difference among males, the percentage of females who met someone online who made them feel unsafe was lowest among those aged 12 and younger (13%) and increased up to the age of 14, after which it remained consistent.

“ A girl’s name and images were leaked online by someone she met. He is being charged so now they are airing her name on the news and you can see her photos.”

AGE DIFFERENCES IN MEETING SOMEONE ONLINE WHO MADE STUDENTS FEEL UNSAFE



Note: Not all differences between data points were statistically significant.

## Victim of cyberbullying

“ I was bullied via texting, Facebook and in real life by people at my school.”

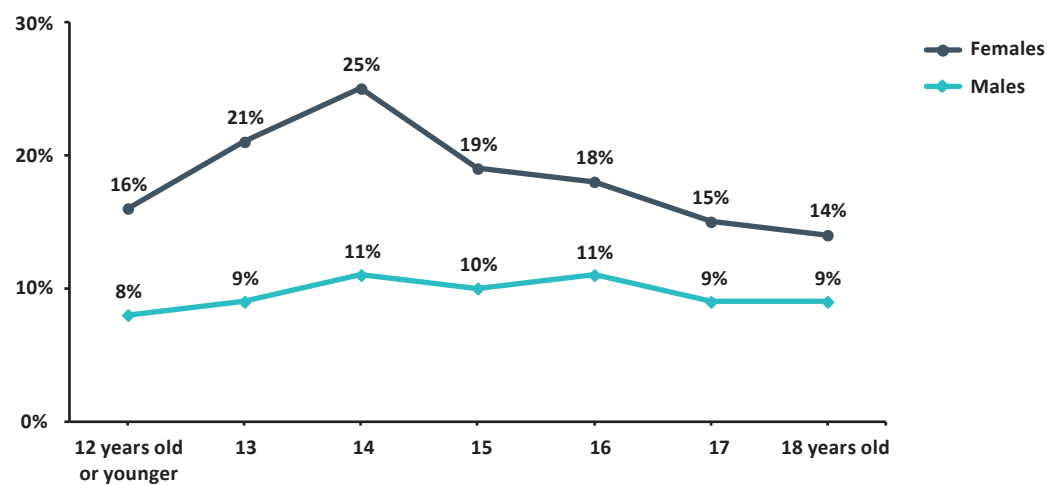
Fourteen percent of youth reported they had been cyberbullied in the past year. This was a decrease from 17% in 2008. Females were almost twice as likely as males to report this experience (19% vs. 10%).

“ Guys get cyberbullied but don't admit it out of shame.”

Almost all youth who participated in workshops to discuss these results felt that it was inevitable that they would be cyberbullied if they spent time online. Most felt there was little that could be done to reduce this. However, one common suggestion was to teach children, especially young girls, about online and cellphone safety and about the implications of posting pictures and information about themselves. Youth felt that if they had received this information at an earlier age, they would have made fewer mistakes and been better prepared to deal with incidents if they happened.

“I wish I had learned about the dangers before it was too late.”

AGE DIFFERENCES IN EXPERIENCING CYBERBULLYING VICTIMIZATION IN PAST YEAR



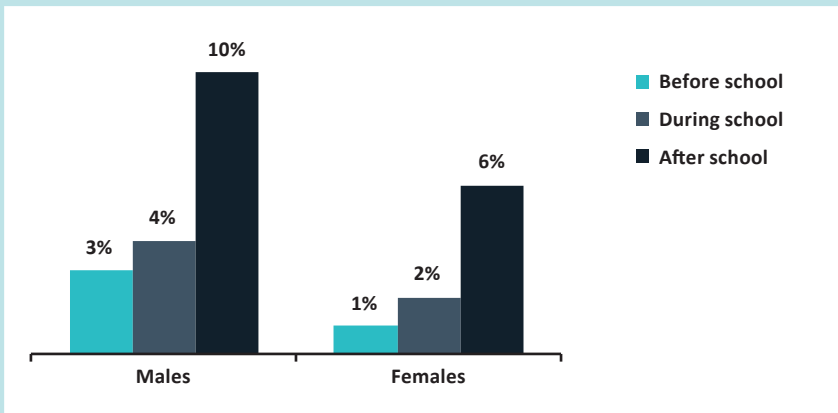
Note: Not all differences between data points were statistically significant.

## Sexting

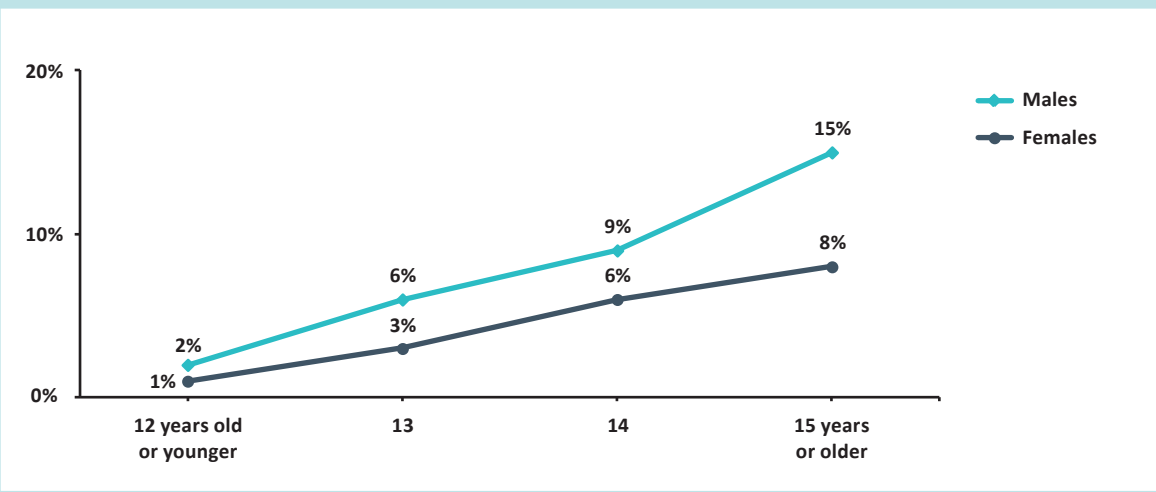
“ [I] have sent revealing pictures of myself to others.”

Nine percent of youth indicated they used their phone to engage in sexting on the previous school day (11% of males vs. 6% of females). Two percent had sexted before school, 3% during school, and 8% sexted after school. One percent of youth (2% of males vs. 1% of females) sexted at all three of these times.

WHEN YOUTH ENGAGED IN SEXTING ON LAST SCHOOL DAY

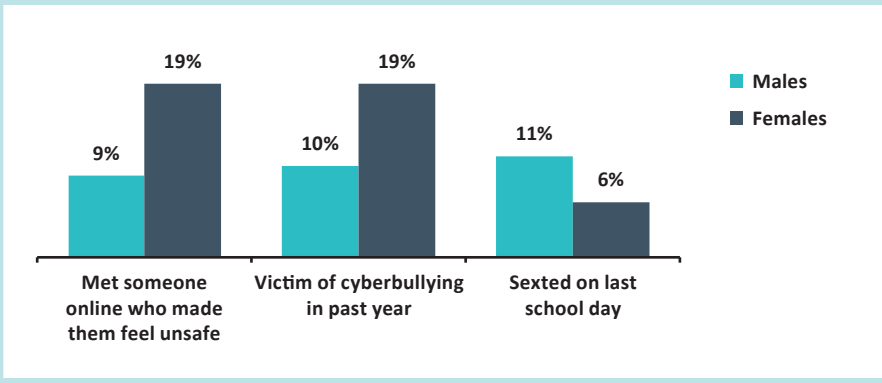


AGE DIFFERENCES IN SEXTING ON LAST SCHOOL DAY



Note: The difference between males and females aged 12 years old or younger was not statistically significant.

#### GENDER DIFFERENCES IN ONLINE SAFETY



Males were more likely than females to sext at each time of day. Males and females were more likely to sext after school than at other times of the day.

Younger youth were generally less likely to sext. Sexting among males increased up to age 15 and then remained constant. Females aged 14 and older were more likely to sext than their younger peers.

“Females don’t feel like they can protect themselves online.”

## Multiple cybersafety experiences

The majority of youth (72%) had not been cyberbullied, met someone unsafe, or engaged in sexting. However, 21% reported one of these experiences, 6% had two, and 1% had all three experiences. Females were more likely than males to report multiple experiences.

If youth reported multiple cybersafety experiences, they most commonly reported both meeting someone online who made them feel unsafe and being cyberbullied (4%). More than a third (38%) of youth who had met someone online who made them feel unsafe had also been cyberbullied.

“I cover up my webcam but most other girls I know don’t do things like this.”

## Regional differences

Youth living in the Northern and Interior regions were generally more likely than those in other regions to have experienced cyberbullying in the past 12 months and to have engaged in sexting on the previous school day. For example, 17% of youth in the North had been a victim of cyberbullying compared to 13% in Vancouver Coastal, and 12% of Interior youth had sexted compared to 8% in the Fraser.

Also, youth living in rural areas were more likely than those in urban areas to have been cyberbullied (17% vs. 14%) and to have sexted (11% vs. 9%).

# Cybersafety and health

“When you have trouble online sometimes it makes you want to isolate yourself. That makes you feel stressed and despair.”

## Missing out on activities

The BC AHS showed that youth who were victimized in person (teased, socially excluded, or physically assaulted) were more likely than those who had not had this experience to have missed out on extracurricular activities because they were worried about being bullied there as well. This was also the case for youth who had been victimized online. For example, youth who had been cyberbullied were six times more likely to report missing out on extracurricular activities in the past year for fear of being bullied (18% vs. 3% who had not been cyberbullied).

Victims of cyberbullying were also more likely to have missed school for fear of bullying. In the past month, 11% had missed classes on one or two days (vs. 1% who had not been cyberbullied), and 4% had missed on three or more days (vs. <1%).

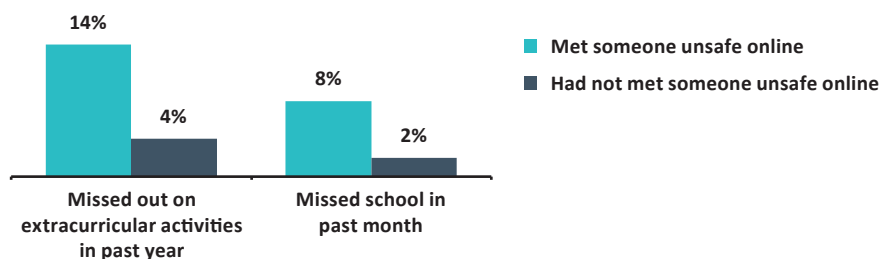
Youth who experienced both in-person and online victimization in the past year were more likely to have missed school recently because they were afraid of being bullied than those who experienced one type (17% vs. 2% who experienced either in-person or online bullying).

In addition, victims of cyberbullying were three times as likely as those who had not been cyberbullied to plan to leave high school before graduating, and they were less likely to expect to continue to post-secondary education (82% vs. 87%).

There were similar findings for missing out on school and extracurricular activities for youth who had met someone unsafe online as well as for youth who engaged in sexting. For example, 10% of females who had met someone unsafe online had missed school in the past month because they were afraid of being bullied, compared to 3% of their peers who had not met someone unsafe. Among males, it was 5% vs. 1%.

“When you are cyberbullied you think about it all the time. It consumes you and you withdraw from things.”

### MISSED OUT ON ACTIVITIES DUE TO FEAR OF BULLYING





## Mental health

“ Last year some people were bullying me online and they wrote ‘LOL’ like they didn’t even care that I was in my room crying and cutting myself.”

Cybersafety issues were associated with poorer mental health. Students who had met someone online who made them feel unsafe, had been bullied online, or who engaged in sexting were more likely to report poorer mental health ratings, fewer hours of sleep, extreme stress and despair, self-harm, and suicidal ideation and attempts compared to those who did not report any of these cyberactivities.

For example, 13% of male youth who engaged in sexting reported self-harming in the past year compared to 7% of males who had not sexted.

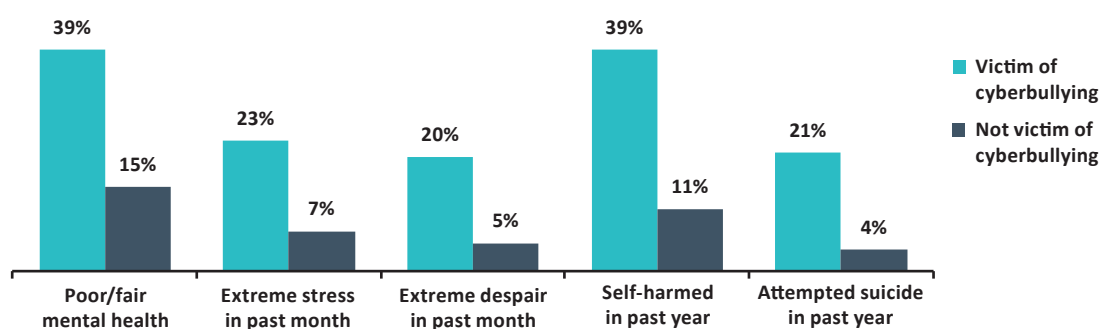
Youth in the workshops talked about how they would often joke over the Internet or when texting and then later realized that their “joke” had caused someone distress.

“If it feels like an insult to you, you might think everyone thinks that and then withdraw, even if it was only a joke.”

Among females 42% of those who had sexted reported self-harming behaviour compared to 21% who had not engaged in sexting.

Likewise, victims of cyberbullying were more than twice as likely to rate their mental health as poor or fair and four times as likely to report extreme despair in the past month compared to youth who had not been cyberbullied.

MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUTH WHO WERE CYBERBULLIED IN PAST YEAR



## Sexual health

“ They go together—early exposure goes hand in hand with doing things that happen in the adult world.”

Other studies have shown that youth who engage in sexting are more likely to engage in sexual activity and in risky sexual behaviour. This appeared to be the case among youth who completed the BC AHS. For example, 36% of 13-year-olds who had sexted had also had oral sex, compared to 3% of those who had not sexted. Among 17-year-olds, 82% who had sexted had engaged in oral sex compared to 38% who had not sexted. There was also a link between sexting and sexual intercourse.

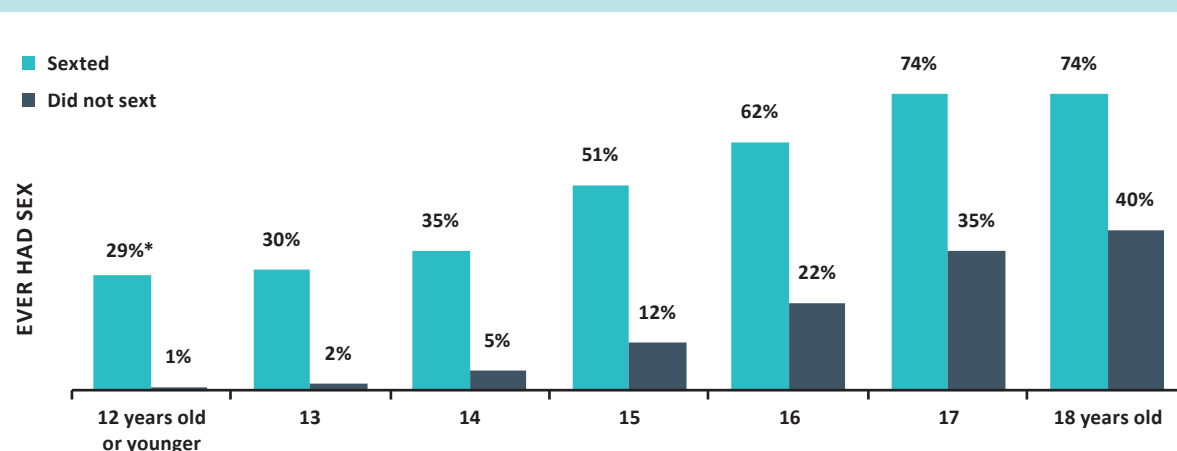
Youth who met someone online who made them feel unsafe, were cyberbullied, or engaged in sexting also reported risks to their sexual health. For example, 15% of youth who had sexted reported that they had been forced into sexual activity by another youth and/or adult. In comparison, 5% of youth who had not engaged in sexting reported this type of victimization.

## Other risk-taking

In addition to risk-taking related to sexual health, involvement in potentially unsafe online activities was also linked to other risky behaviours. For example, youth who had sexted were more likely than those who had not to have driven under the influence (17% vs. 4%), or been a passenger in a vehicle with someone who had been using substances (49% vs. 23%). They were also less likely to always wear a seat belt: 62% of youth who had sexted always wore a seat belt compared to 76% who had not sexted.

“ Everything is linked. What you do online, on your phone and in real life.”

### YOUTH WHO HAD EVER HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE AND ENGAGED IN SEXTING ON LAST SCHOOL DAY



Note: Not all differences between ages were statistically significant.

\* Standard error was relatively high but still within the releasable range.

# Risk factors for cybersafety issues



Some youth may be at greater risk for experiencing cybersafety issues. This may be due to their life experiences, social or economic conditions, or because of a lack of available supports or resources.

By raising awareness about who may be vulnerable to experiencing problems as a result of their technology use, it is hoped these youth can be supported through any challenges they have and can make informed choices about their online behaviour.

In general, the identified factors were risks for each of the cyberactivities and for both males and females. However, a few factors had different associations for males and females. For example, male youth who had lived in Canada less than five years were at greater risk of meeting someone unsafe online than those who had lived in Canada longer (12% vs. 9%). No such relation was found for females.

## RISK FACTORS FOR CYBERSAFETY ISSUES

### LIVING SITUATION/ HOME ENVIRONMENT

- Been in government care
- Live in poverty
- Ran away from home
- Moved house

### MINORITY YOUTH

- Lesbian, gay, bisexual
- Refugee
- Have a health condition or disability

### VIOLENCE EXPOSURE

- History of abuse
- Victim of in-person bullying
- Been discriminated against
- Victim of dating violence

### UNSUPERVISED OR HEAVY TECHNOLOGY USE

- Technology use after they were supposed to be asleep
- Technology use throughout the day
- Doing multiple cyberactivities

### HEALTH AND RISK BEHAVIOURS

- Ever tried alcohol, marijuana, or other substances
- First tried alcohol or marijuana at earlier age
- Risky use of alcohol or marijuana
- Gambled

### SELF-IMAGE

- Low self-confidence
- Body image issues

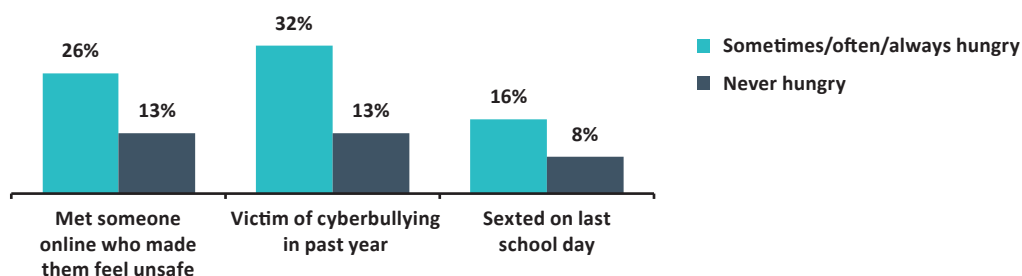
## Living situation/ Home environment

Youth who had been in a foster home, group home, or on a Youth Agreement in the past year were about twice as likely as their peers without this experience to have been a victim of cyberbullying, to have met someone online who made them feel unsafe, and to have sexted.

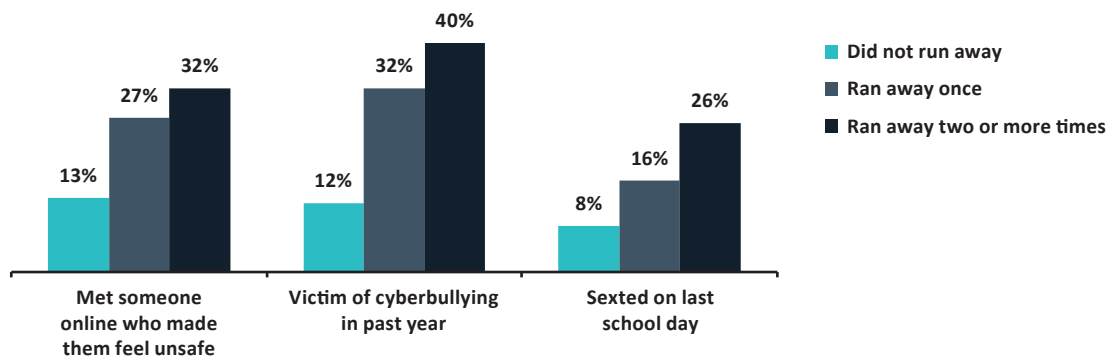
In addition, youth who lived in such extreme poverty that they went to bed hungry because there was not enough money for food at home were at least twice as likely as those who did not have this experience to report cybersafety issues.

Youth who had moved multiple times or had run away from home on multiple occasions in the past year were also at greater risk for sexting and negative online experiences.

### WENT TO BED HUNGRY BECAUSE THERE WAS INSUFFICIENT MONEY FOR FOOD AS RISK FOR CYBERSAFETY



### RAN AWAY IN PAST YEAR AS RISK FOR CYBERSAFETY



## Minority youth

“Cyberbullying someone because they are LGB is just an excuse to bully them and be mean. If they weren’t LGB they’d find another reason to be mean, like if they are a person of colour or trans or disabled.”

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students were at least twice as likely as their straight peers to report being cyberbullied or to sext. Also, 21% of lesbian and gay youth, and 32% of bisexual youth had met someone online who made them feel unsafe compared to 12% of straight youth.

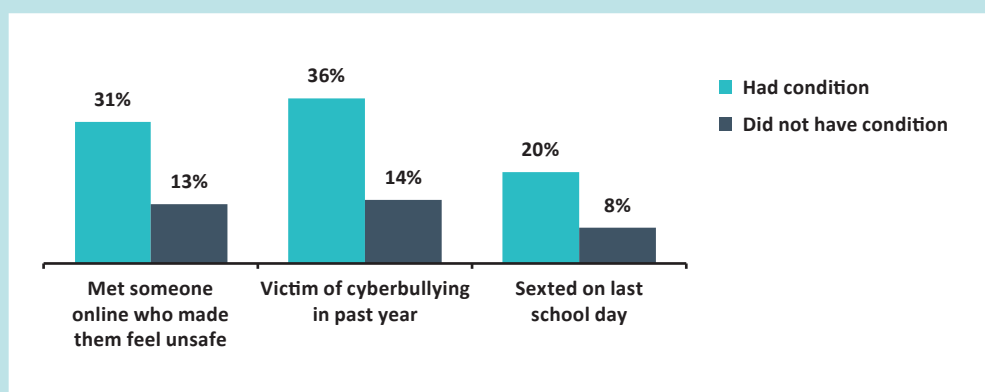
Gender identity was also related to cyber-safety. For example, 41% of transgender youth engaged in sexting compared to 9% of cisgender youth, and 42% had been victims of cyberbullying (compared to 15% of cisgender youth).

Similar results were found among Aboriginal youth who identified as Two-Spirit. For example, 33% of these youth had met someone online who made them feel unsafe compared to 16% of their Aboriginal peers who did not identify this way.

Youth who were immigrants to Canada and particularly those who arrived as refugees appeared to be at increased risk around their technology use. For example, youth who were refugees were more likely than their Canadian-born peers to have met someone online who made them feel unsafe (24% vs. 14%) and to have sexted (20% vs. 9%). Male refugees were also more likely to have been victims of cyberbullying (19% vs. 10% of males born in Canada).

Youth who indicated having a health condition or disability were also more likely than their peers to report cybersafety issues. For example, youth who had a mental health condition were more likely to have been the victim of cyberbullying (38% vs. 12% of youth without a mental health condition) and to have met someone online who made them feel unsafe (31% vs. 12%). Similar results were found for youth with a behavioural condition (e.g., conduct disorder, problems with anger, etc.).

### HAVING A BEHAVIOURAL CONDITION AS RISK FOR CYBERSAFETY



Note: Behavioural condition includes anger management problems and conduct disorder, etc.

## Violence exposure

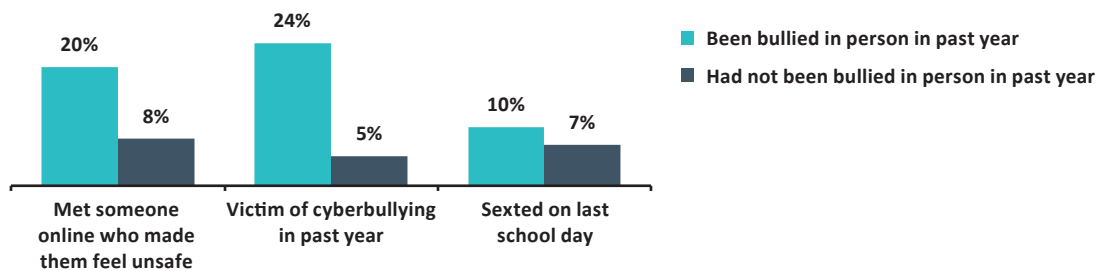
“In-person bullying is often physical and online isn’t but that doesn’t make it any easier to deal with. You can’t escape it [online] like you can in person.”

Youth with a history of violence exposure were at greater risk of experiencing cybersafety issues. This included youth who had been sexually harassed, sexually abused, or physically abused as well as those who experienced dating violence, discrimination, and were victims of in-person bullying. For example, youth with a

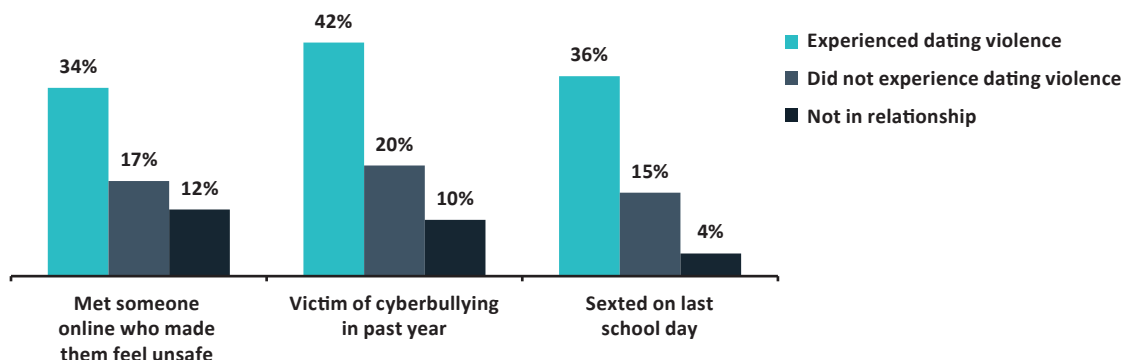
history of sexual abuse were more than twice as likely to have met someone online who made them feel unsafe compared to those who had not been abused (28% vs. 8% for males; 39% vs. 16% for females). Youth who had been victims of in-person bullying in the past year (teased, excluded, or physically assaulted) were almost five times more likely to also be victimized through technology.

Being involved in a dating relationship, particularly a violent one, increased youth’s risk of experiencing cybersafety issues.

### BULLIED IN PERSON AS RISK FOR CYBERSAFETY CONCERNS



### DATING VIOLENCE IN PAST YEAR AS RISK FOR CYBERSAFETY



## Unsupervised or heavy technology use

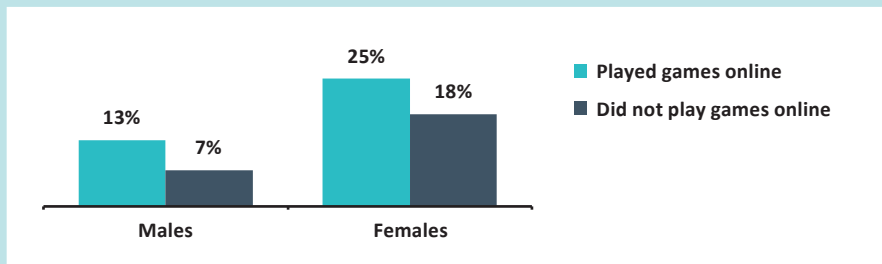
“ I stay off the Internet to avoid [being bullied].”

Students who engaged in cyberactivities such as chatting on social media and online gaming after their expected bedtime were at greater risk. For instance, if males used their phone to chat or text after bedtime, 19% had also engaged in sexting, compared to 3% of males who did not do this after bedtime. A similar result was found for females (9% vs. 2%).

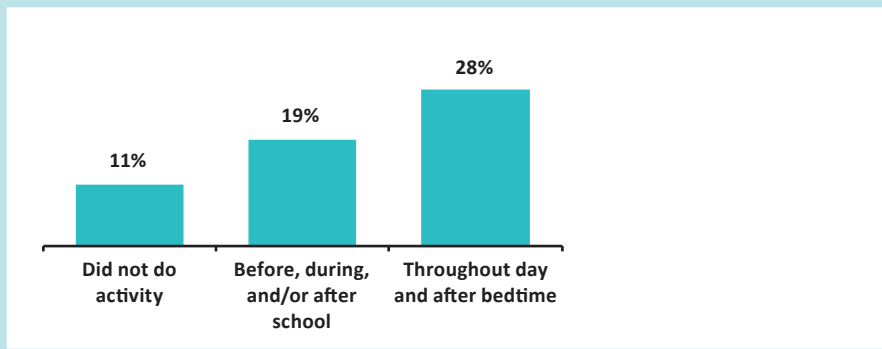
Males who chatted online or social networked throughout the day and after bedtime were more likely to have met someone unsafe online than those who were online or on their phone less often. A similar pattern was seen for females.

“ I am expected to leave my phone in the living room when I go to bed.”

### ONLINE GAMING AFTER BEDTIME AS RISK FOR BEING CYBERBULLIED



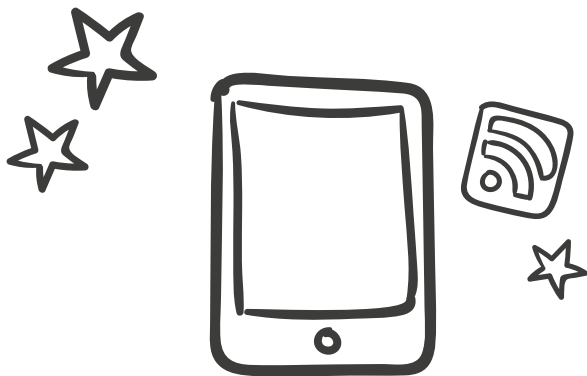
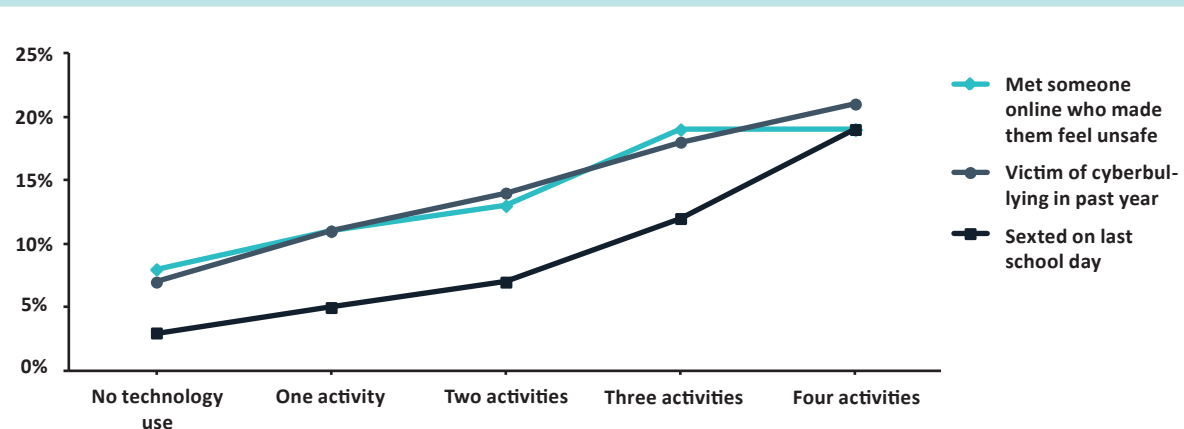
### CHATTING OR SOCIAL NETWORKING AT MULTIPLE TIMES OF DAY AS RISK FOR FEMALES MEETING SOMEONE ONLINE WHO MADE THEM FEEL UNSAFE



The more online activities youth participated in at all times of the day or night, the more likely they were to report cybersafety issues. For example, females who engaged in three or more different technology activities (such as gaming, chatting online, and social networking) before, during, and after school were more likely than those who engaged in only one activity this often to have been cyberbullied (28% vs. 18%). This relation was also seen for males (15% vs. 10%).

In addition, for both males and females, engaging in more activities after they were supposed to be asleep was associated with greater risk. For example, 11% of youth who engaged in one online activity after their expected bedtime reported being a victim of cyberbullying, compared to 21% of those who engaged in four online activities after bedtime.

NUMBER OF TECHNOLOGY ACTIVITIES AFTER BEDTIME AS RISK FOR CYBERSAFETY





# Health risk behaviours

## SUBSTANCE USE

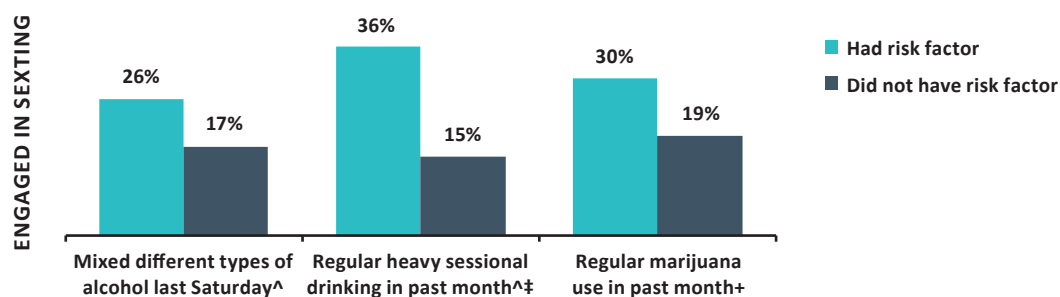
Substance use can affect decision-making and reduce safety awareness. Youth who had not used alcohol or marijuana were generally less likely to report cybersafety issues, and those who first started using these substances at an earlier age were more likely. For example, 5% of those who had never used marijuana reported sexting, compared to 18% of those who first used at 15 or older and 24% of youth who first used marijuana at age 14 or younger.

Among youth who had tried alcohol, those who mixed different types of alcohol on the Saturday before taking the survey were more likely to be cyberbullied (24% vs. 19% who did not mix), as were those who drank five or more drinks within a couple of hours on six or more days in the past month (25% vs. 19%). Also, females who had tried marijuana and reported marijuana use on six or more days in the past month were more likely to be cyberbullied (40% vs. 31% who did not use marijuana this frequently). Risky substance use was also related to sexting behaviour.

Students who had tried substances other than alcohol and marijuana, such as cocaine or hallucinogens, were more likely to report meeting someone online who made them feel unsafe (23% vs. 12%), being cyberbullied (24% vs. 12%), and sexting (20% vs. 6%).



SUBSTANCE USE AS RISK FOR ENGAGING IN SEXTING ON LAST SCHOOL DAY



<sup>^</sup>Among those who had ever tried alcohol.

<sup>‡</sup>Regular heavy sessional drinking refers to having five or more drinks of alcohol within a couple of hours on six or more days.

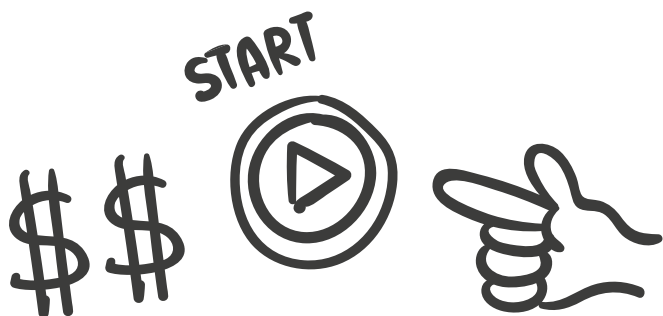
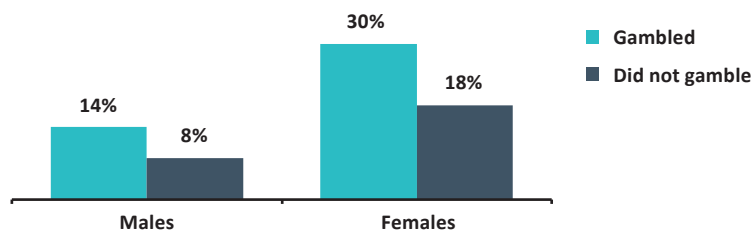
<sup>+</sup>Regular marijuana use refers to using marijuana on six or more days, among those who had ever tried marijuana.

## GAMBLING

Gambling was also associated with each cyber-safety issue. For example, 16% of males who had gambled in the past year reported they had been victimized through technology during that period compared to 8% who had not gambled. A similar relation was seen for females (29% vs. 18%).

Although the question was not asked in 2013, the 2008 BC AHS asked youth specifically about online gambling. Youth who engaged in this type of gambling in the past year were more likely to report meeting someone unsafe online and to have been cyberbullied. For example, 35% of youth who gambled this way on a weekly basis reported being cyberbullied during that year, compared to 16% of those who did not participate in online gambling and 23% who participated only a few times.

**GAMBLING IN PAST YEAR AS RISK FOR MEETING SOMEONE ONLINE WHO MADE STUDENTS FEEL UNSAFE**



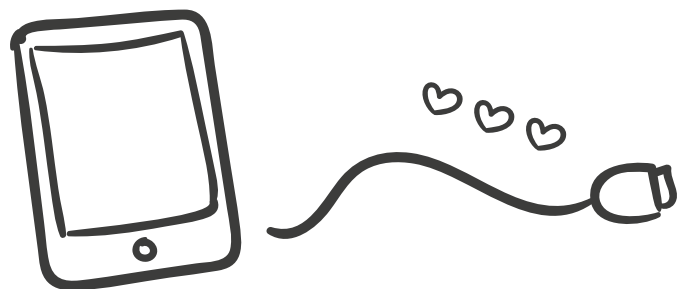
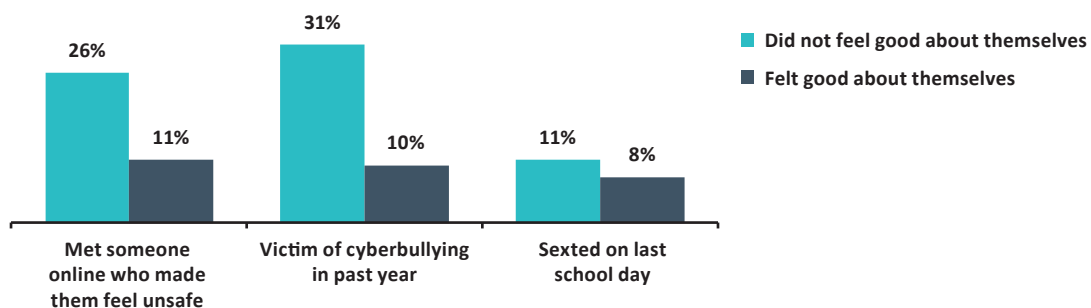
## Self-image

Risky online activity was an issue for youth with lower self-confidence. For example, youth who did not feel good about themselves were more than twice as likely as those who did to have met someone unsafe online.

Body image was also a factor. Males and females who felt that they were underweight or overweight were more likely to report that they had met someone online who made them feel unsafe and to be cyberbullied compared to students who felt they were the right weight. Feeling overweight was also a risk factor for sexting for female youth.

Youth who reported binge eating on a weekly basis were more than twice as likely to have been bullied online, to have sexted, or to have met someone unsafe online compared to youth who never binge-ate or did so less than once a week. Also, 38%\* of males who vomited on purpose after eating (purged) on a weekly basis were the victims of cyberbullying, compared to 10% of males who never purged or did so less than weekly. A similar finding was seen for females (47% vs. 18%).

LOW SELF-CONFIDENCE AS RISK FOR CYBERSAFETY



# Protective factors for cybersafety

Having outlined the risks associated with online safety issues and seen who might be vulnerable to experiencing these challenges, it is also important to explore the role that positive relationships and other supports can have in reducing the risks of online victimization or of engaging with technology in ways that can put youth at risk.

## Family

Youth who felt highly connected to their families (i.e., their family understood them, paid attention to them, and had fun together) were less likely to have met someone unsafe online, sexted, or been bullied online. For example, while 7% of those who were highly connected to their family reported meeting someone online who made them feel unsafe, 24% of those who were least connected did so (5% vs. 13% for males; 9% vs. 32% for females).

Youth who participated in the workshops felt that parents and guardians could support them better by controlling or limiting their technology use, and by learning about technology and the dangers so they could have informed conversations with their children. They felt parents should also take it seriously if a youth told them they were having problems online or through their cellphone.

*"If your family won't take it seriously, it is hard to know where to get help."*

### PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR CYBERSAFETY

#### FAMILY

- Connected to family
- Have adult in family to turn to for support
- Have family who provide helpful support
- Parental monitoring of free time
- Parent present at meal time

#### SCHOOL

- Connected to school
- Have school staff who provide helpful support
- Feel safe at school

#### COMMUNITY

- Connected to community
- Have professionals who provide helpful support
- Feel safe in neighbourhood
- Feel listened to in extracurricular activities

#### PEERS

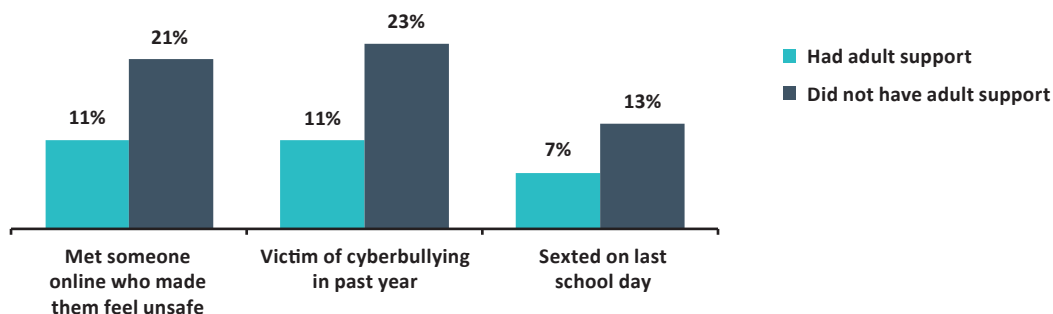
- Have a circle of friends
- Have friends with prosocial attitudes
- Have friends who provide helpful support

Students who had an adult in their family they could turn to if they had a problem were also less likely to report cybersafety issues. For example, 10% of males who had an adult family member they could turn to reported sexting compared to 16% who did not have this support. Females with an adult support in their family were half as likely to engage in sexting (5% vs. 10%).

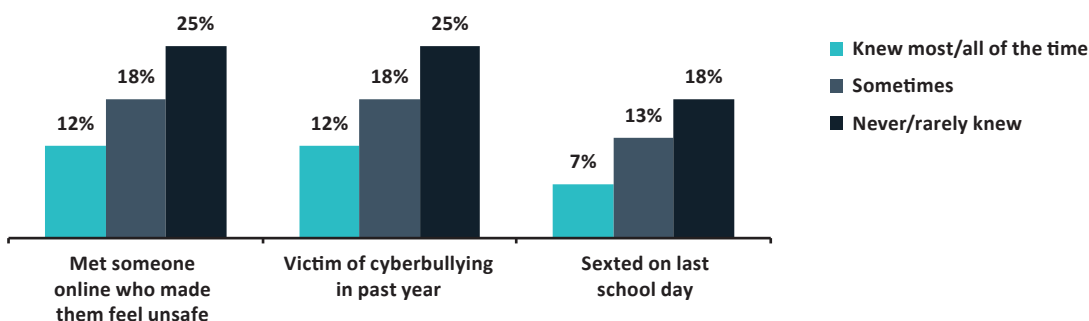
Students who had approached a family member for support and found that person helpful were about half as likely to report being a victim of cyberbullying than those who had family members whom they had approached but had not found helpful (9% vs. 20% for males; 16% vs. 34% for females).

Parental presence was associated with cybersafety. Youth whose parents knew what they were doing in their spare time and those who ate evening meals with their parents were less likely to report risky online activities. For example, 12% of youth who ate dinner with their parents most or all the time had met someone unsafe online compared to 21% of those who never or rarely ate dinner with their parents (males: 8% vs. 12%; females: 17% vs. 28%).

#### HAVING AN ADULT SUPPORT IN FAMILY AS PROTECTIVE FOR CYBERSAFETY



#### PARENTS KNEW WHAT YOUTH WERE DOING IN FREE TIME AS PROTECTIVE FOR CYBERSAFETY



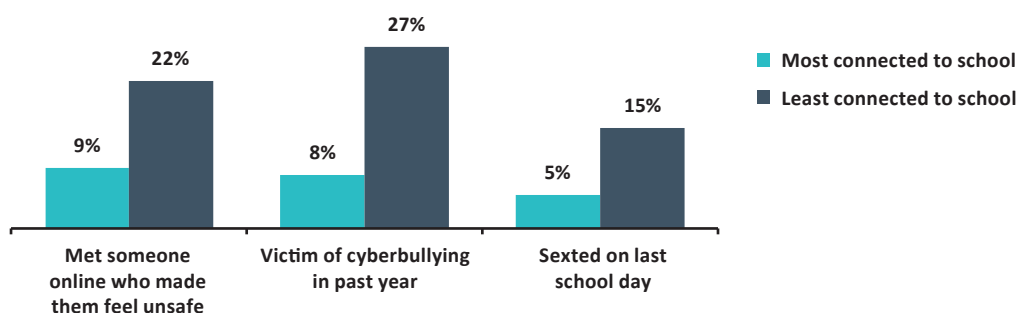
## School

Youth who felt connected to school and safe in school were less likely to be involved in risky online behaviours. For example, students were half as likely to have met someone online who made them feel unsafe if they felt their teachers cared about them (12% vs. 24% who felt teachers did not care). Furthermore, if youth found the support they received from teachers to be helpful as opposed to unhelpful, they were less likely to be the victims of cyberbullying (males: 9% vs. 24%; females: 15% vs. 34%; among those who asked for help in the past year). Similar findings were seen for having helpful school counsellors and helpful school staff other than teachers.

Students who felt safer at school were less likely to be bullied online or to meet someone unsafe there. For example, 8% of those who felt safest had been the victim of cyberbullying compared to 23% who felt least safe. Also, 4% of males who felt safest had met someone unsafe online compared to 16% of males who felt least safe (11% vs. 28% for females). Sexting did not seem to be related to how safe youth felt at school.

Youth who were able to regularly attend school were at lower risk of reporting safety concerns. For example, 7% of males who did not miss any school in the past month had been cyberbullied compared to 12% who had missed school (e.g., because of illness, work, or family responsibilities). Females who did not miss school were half as likely as their peers who did to have been cyberbullied (12% vs. 24%).

SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS AS PROTECTIVE FOR CYBERSAFETY



## Community

Being connected to community reduced the risk that youth would have problems through technology. For example, 13% of female youth who felt very much a part of their community had met someone unsafe online compared to 26% of those who did not feel connected. A similar finding was observed for males (7% vs. 15%).

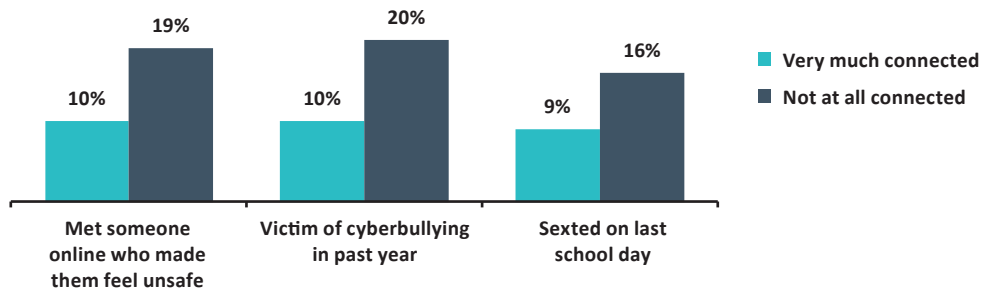
Students who had helpful sources of support in the community such as sports coaches and health professionals also had fewer cybersafety concerns. For example, youth who had found a mental health counsellor helpful were less likely to have been cyberbullied than youth who had found this source unhelpful (26% vs. 35%, among those who asked for help in the past year).

Youth were asked how often they felt safe in their neighbourhood during the day and at night, inside their home, and on public transit. Those

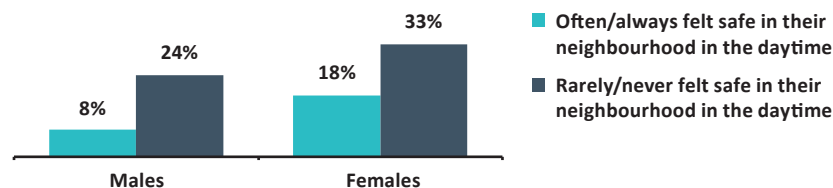
who felt safer were generally less likely to be a victim of cyberbullying, to report meeting someone online who made them feel unsafe, and to engage in sexting. For instance, 13% of youth who often or always felt safe in their neighbourhood during the day reported meeting someone unsafe online compared to 29% who never or rarely felt safe. Also, 8% of youth who often or always felt safe at home sexted after school compared to 14% who never or rarely felt safe.

Finally, when youth took part in activities in their communities, those who felt engaged reported fewer online issues. For example, 10% of youth who felt very much listened to in the activities in which they were involved reported they had met someone unsafe online, compared to 20% of youth who did not feel listened to at all.

COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS AS PROTECTIVE FOR CYBERSAFETY



NEIGHBOURHOOD SAFETY AS PROTECTIVE AGAINST MEETING SOMEONE ONLINE WHO MADE THEM FEEL UNSAFE



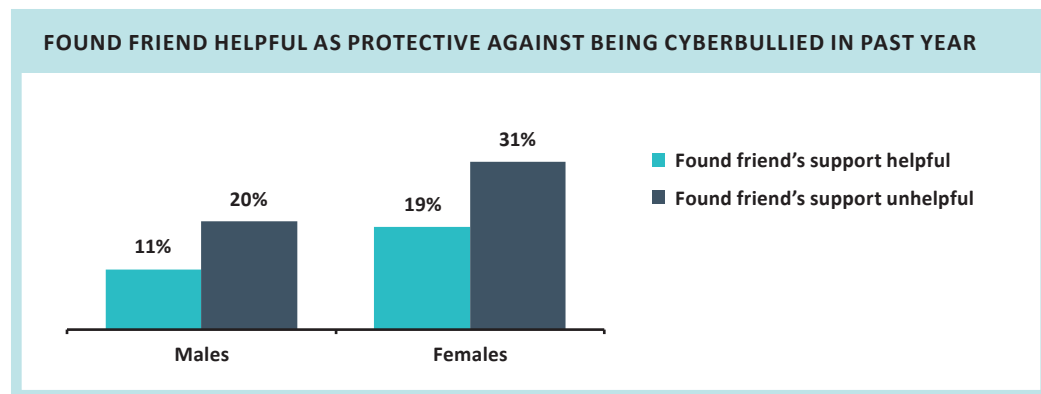
## Peers

Males and females who had at least three close friends in their neighbourhood or school had a lower likelihood of meeting someone unsafe and being a victim of cyberbullying. For example, 13% of youth with three or more friends had been cyberbullied compared to 19% of youth with fewer close friends. There was no link between number of friends and sexting behaviour.

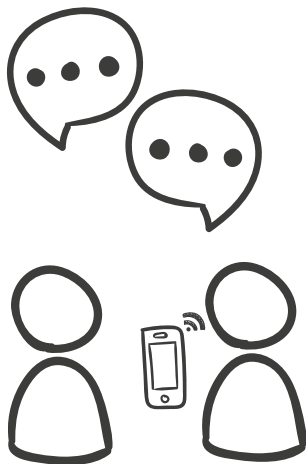
Youth who had friends with healthy attitudes about risk behaviours were less likely than their peers to have experienced cybersafety issues.

For example, youth who felt that their friends would be upset with them if they were involved in a pregnancy were less likely to have sexted compared to youth who felt that their friends would not be upset (8% vs. 13%).

Having friends who were helpful sources of support was also protective. For example, youth who had turned to friends for support in the past year and found them helpful were less likely to have met someone unsafe online compared to those who found their friends' support to be unhelpful (15% vs. 26%).



Note: Among students who approached a friend for help in the past year.





# Protective factors for youth who have been cyberbullied

As mentioned earlier, cyberbullying has become a cause of major concern in BC as a number of victims have taken their own life. Findings from the BC AHS indicate that over a fifth of youth who had been cyberbullied in the past year had attempted suicide during the same time frame.

When youth who had been cyberbullied were supported, they were less likely to report mental health concerns and to miss school or extracurricular activities for fear of bullying.

Family can be an important source of support for young people. For example, 20% of youth who had been victimized and had an adult in their family to talk to about their problems had seriously considered suicide in the past year. This compared to 50% who did not have this type of support.

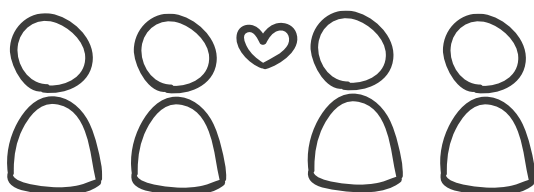
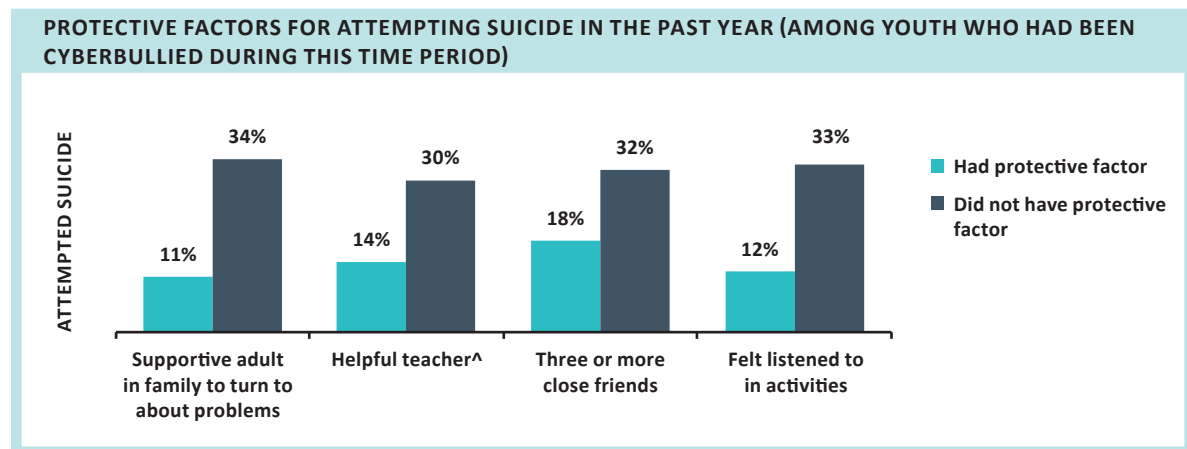
A similar picture was found with youth who had approached a family member for help in the past year and found them helpful. For example, 12% who had a helpful family member reported extreme despair in the past month compared to 40% who had a family member they did not find helpful.

Support outside the home can also be protective. For example, youth who had been cyberbullied who had approached a teacher for help and found the experience helpful were less likely to skip school in the past month due to fears about bullying (11% vs. 26% who found their teacher's support to be unhelpful). In addition, those who had a helpful school counsellor were less likely to report extreme stress in the past month (24% vs. 45% who did not find their counsellor helpful, among those who asked for help in the past year).



Friends are also an important source of support. Among youth who had been cyberbullied, those who had three or more close friends were less likely to miss school (12% vs. 23% who had fewer friends) or extracurricular activities (14% vs. 30%) because they were concerned about being bullied. Also, youth who had found the support of a friend to be helpful were less likely to have considered suicide in the past year (31% vs. 51% of those who did not find their friend helpful, among those who asked for help).

Being involved in activities where they felt their ideas were listened to was also protective for youth who had been bullied through technology. For example, 28% of those who felt listened to quite a bit or very much reported self-harm behaviour in the past year, compared to 39% who felt somewhat listened to, and 52% who felt they were listened to very little or not at all.



# Perpetrators of cyberbullying

“You get angry. It builds up inside and causes you to become desensitized.”

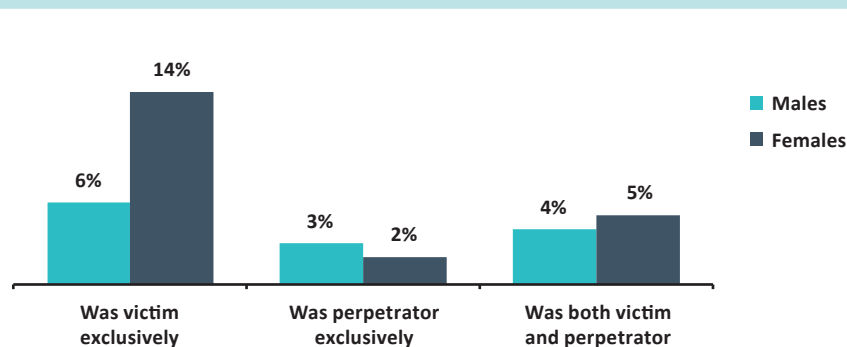
Previous McCreary research has shown that many youth who were victims of in-person bullying were also the perpetrators of that same type of bullying behaviour. This pattern was also seen for online victimization. Seven percent of males and 6% of females reported they had used technology to bully or pick on someone in the past 12 months, with 2% having been exclusively a perpetrator and the remainder being both victims and perpetrators.

When asked about the different activities they had used a cellphone for on the day before taking the survey, 2% of youth who completed the BC AHS indicated they had used it to bully someone. Not all of these youth also reported that they had cyberbullied someone in the past year, which suggests that the percentage who reported cyberbullying perpetration was an underestimate.



“It is easier to bully someone [online] because it is hard to believe there is an actual human life sitting behind that little icon.”

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN CYBERBULLYING IN PAST YEAR



Note: The difference between males and females in being both a victim and perpetrator was not statistically significant.

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“There is no direct confrontation, so there is no emotion. You don’t know how the other person is feeling.”

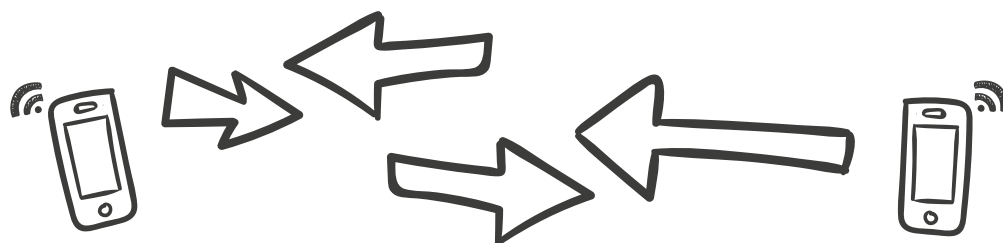
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There were no differences between students going to school in rural versus urban communities in the percentage of youth who had cyberbullied others.

Being a perpetrator of cyberbullying was associated with poorer mental health, although not as strongly as was seen for victims. For example, 9% of youth who were exclusively perpetrators (those who had bullied others through the Internet or other technology but who had not been bullied themselves in this way) had attempted suicide in the past year compared to 4% of those who had not been involved in cyberbullying. However, 21% of youth who had been victims exclusively reported attempting suicide, which was comparable to those who had been both victims and perpetrators.

In the workshops a number of youth admitted that they had used technology to victimize or bully someone else. Some also said they had not realized that this was what they were doing until they had attended the workshop and talked openly about their behaviour. They said that the Internet felt so impersonal and anonymous that they behaved differently to how they would behave in person.

“If that person is on the other side of the world, you will never see them, never have to deal with them.”



## Risk and protective factors

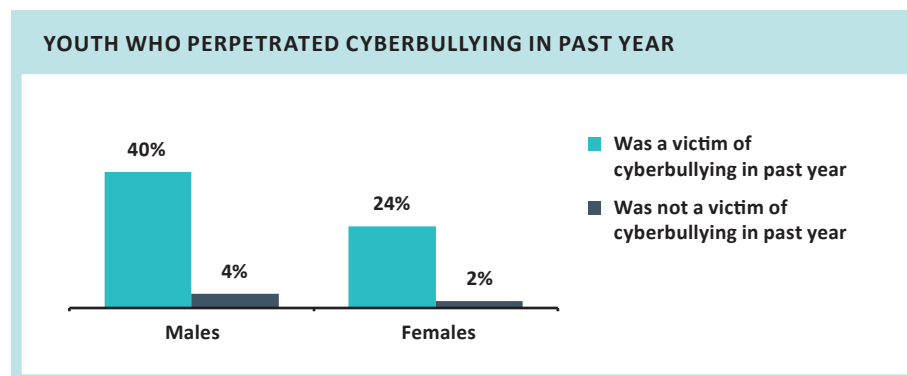
As mentioned earlier, one of the strongest factors associated with being a perpetrator of cyberbullying was being a victim of cyberbullying. Youth who had been cyberbullied themselves were about 10 times as likely to be perpetrators as those who had not been cyberbullied (29% vs. 3%).

Youth who had perpetrated in-person bullying were also more likely to be cyberbullying perpetrators (18% vs. 3%) including being exclusively perpetrators (9% vs. 2% for males; 4% vs. 1% for females).

As nearly two thirds of cyberbullying perpetrators (55% of males and 75% of females) had been victims, there was a lot of overlap in risk and protective factors.

Risk factors associated with perpetration included:

- Having a history of victimization, including being discriminated against in the past year (3% were exclusively perpetrators vs. 2% who did not experience discrimination).
- Engaging in risky substance use such as regular heavy sessional drinking or using substances other than alcohol or marijuana.
- Sexting (7% of youth who sexted had been exclusively perpetrators compared to 2% of those who had not sexted).
- Surfing the Internet, chatting online or social networking, chatting or texting on the phone, or online gaming after bedtime. Also, the more of these activities youth engaged in after they were supposed to be asleep, the more likely they were to bully someone online. For example, 5% of youth who did all four activities were perpetrators exclusively compared to 1% who did a single activity.



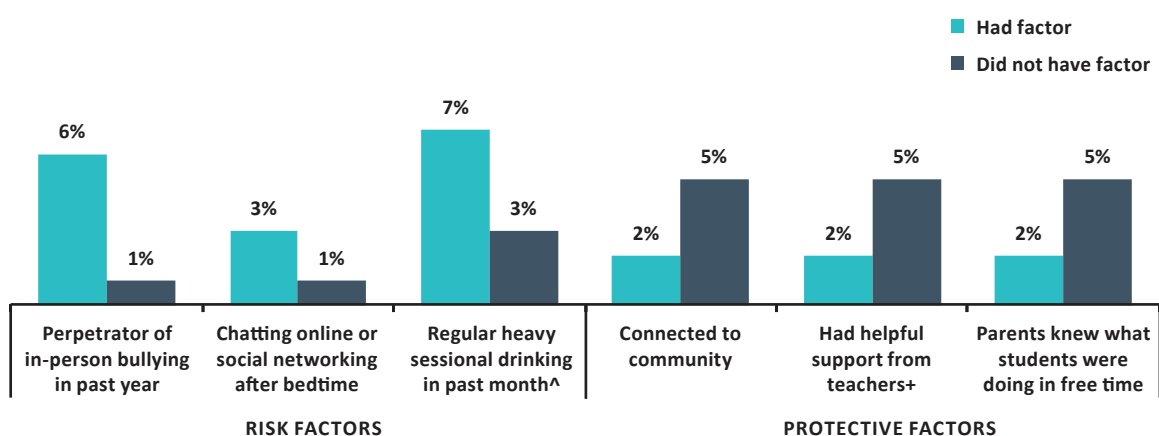
Being connected to family, school, and community was protective. For example, when youth had an adult in their family to turn to for support, they were less likely to be perpetrators than those who did not have this support. Also, students who had helpful teachers and other school staff were less likely to have been perpetrators exclusively compared to those who had unhelpful support.

Although there were many similarities in the profile of youth who were involved in cyberbullying as a victim or as a perpetrator, there were also some important differences. For example, while youth with experience of government care were more likely to be victims of cyberbullying, they were as likely as their peers without this

experience to have been exclusively perpetrators. Similarly, while self-confidence and body image were risk factors for being victimized, they were not risks for being exclusively a perpetrator of cyberbullying. Being a refugee, identifying as LGB, or having a mental health condition were also not related to being exclusively a perpetrator of cyberbullying.

Some of the protective factors for reducing the risk of being a victim of cyberbullying were not protective against being exclusively a perpetrator. Specifically, having three or more close friends and feeling safe at school and in their neighbourhood were not related to whether or not youth were perpetrators exclusively.

#### SOME FACTORS RELATED TO BEING EXCLUSIVELY A PERPETRATOR OF CYBERBULLYING



<sup>^</sup>Regular heavy sessional drinking refers to having five or more drinks of alcohol within a couple of hours on six or more days (among those who had tried alcohol).

<sup>+</sup>Among students who approached a teacher for help in the past year.

# Final word

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**“ I have been taught to put my phone on silent so the alarm still works in the morning but I get some sleep.”**

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The results of this report signify the need to increase public awareness about cybersafety as well as awareness of which youth may be more vulnerable and need additional or targeted support.

This report also highlights some important protective factors. Youth who feel safe, supported, and connected are less vulnerable to risky online behaviour; and if they are victimized, are less likely to consider or attempt suicide. It is therefore important to find ways to connect young people with family, peers, school, and community.

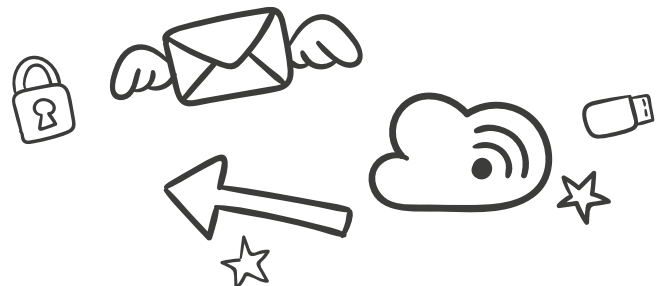
The results show the value of participating in school and community activities, and of feeling engaged in those activities. Parents can also help protect youth by spending time with them, being aware of their children’s activities, and by creating an open dialogue about Internet safety and cyberbullying.

For both males and females, engaging in multiple online activities after bedtime was associated with cybersafety concerns. Youth who participated in workshops to discuss the results spoke of the need to disengage from technology at bedtime and spoke of the need for support to do this.

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**“ When my parents turned my computer off at 10pm I was able to sleep better.”**

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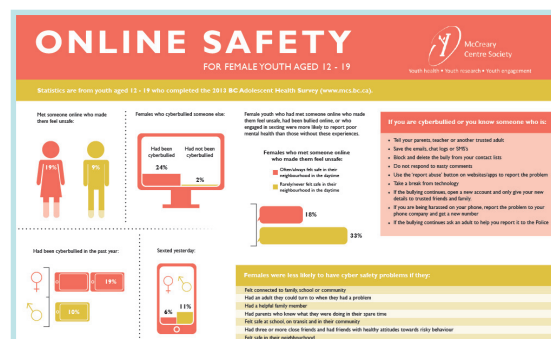
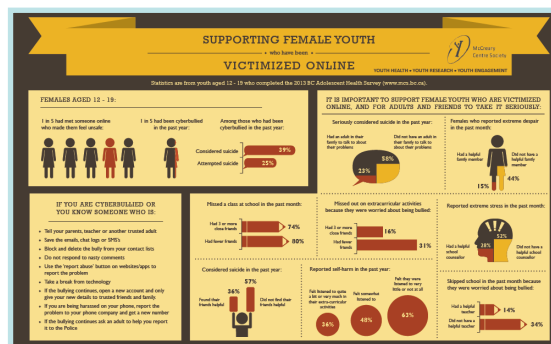
# Sharing the results

Young people who have participated in this project are continuing to share the data with their peers. All resources created by youth can be found on the McCreary website [www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca).

A workshop toolkit and accompanying PowerPoint presentation are available to download for anyone wishing to facilitate a discussion with youth about findings from this report.

The workshop was created in partnership with SafeOnline Education Associates. For more information about their programs and resources, visit [www.safeonlineoutreach.com](http://www.safeonlineoutreach.com).

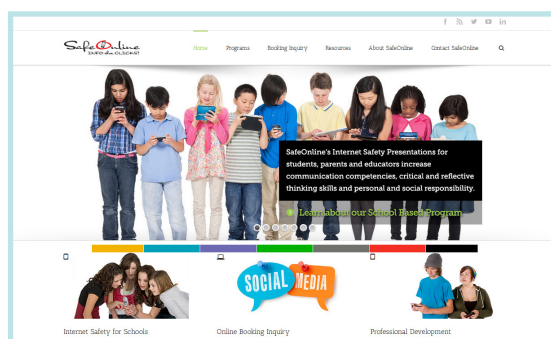
A PowerPoint presentation is available to share the results of this report with an adult audience and can be downloaded at [www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca).



online



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