

Learning about Safe Online Communication, including Sexting

In all grades, the personal skills, thinking skills and communication skills that students are learning can be applied in face-to-face and online contexts. Opportunities to learn about safe online communication and in particular, sexting, has been strengthened. Language and terminology has been updated to reflect 21st century realities. As with all curriculum, learning about safe online communication is developmentally appropriate, beginning with guidelines, precautions and strategies for safe Internet use while acknowledging the benefits and ubiquitous nature of Internet use and social media. Students learn how to get help for themselves, or others, if online harassment or abuse occurs. Specific reference to the benefits of using technology and also the dangers of online sharing of sexual images or information, as well as cyber bullying is included beginning in grade 4. The specific term ‘sexting’ is referenced in various curriculum expectations beginning in Grade 7. In older grades, students continue to develop their understanding of the uses and benefits and potential risks and consequences of online communication, including legal implications and potential impact on relationships and future employment. Living Skills are integrated across all strands of the curriculum, reinforcing opportunities for students to develop self-awareness,

problem-solving, communication and critical thinking skills in a variety of contexts, including online and face-to-face situations.

Throughout the revised Gr. 1-12 curriculum there are comprehensive learning opportunities related to building skills for safe online communication including learning about:

- personal safety
- relationship and social skills
- recognizing and describing exploitive behaviours
- adaptive, management and coping skills such as demonstrating the ability to stand up for themselves and how to take action to get help

Focus of Learning

Gr. 1-3	Gr. 4-6	Gr. 7-8	Gr. 9-10	Gr. 11-12
<p>In primary grades, students learn knowledge and skills related to safety in general that can be applied to online safety as they get older.</p> <p>To reflect the new Canadian Guidelines for Sedentary Behaviour, learning about risks associated with excessive screen time and benefits of physical activity is introduced in early grades.</p> <p>At the primary level, the groundwork is laid for building an understanding of healthy relationships and respectful behaviour – both for face-to-face and online environments.</p> <p>Curriculum examples include cues for educators to consider online environments as they are planning instruction.</p> <p>As students are learning skills to make healthy choices, they learn about possible addictive behaviours associated with technology.</p> <p>Learning about impacts of violence in media is also introduced in the primary division and is significantly strengthened from the 1998 curriculum (no changes from the 2010 curriculum).</p> <p>Media literacy skills are reinforced in learning across the curriculum, especially in Language.</p>	<p>In addition to looking at the benefits of technology, students in junior grades learn in more detail about the benefits and potential risks when using online technology and social media, and strategies they can use to stay safe.</p> <p>A recent report indicates that over one quarter of students in Grade 4 now have their own phones. The numbers increase steadily with phone ownership hitting 85 percent in Grade 11. (Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Trends and Recommendations, 2014)</p> <p>Learning about healthy relationships is expanded to include online relationships and interactions.</p> <p>While students are learning about changes with puberty and possible associated stresses, an addition has been made to prompt teachers to include discussion about online environments and relationships.</p> <p>As students are developing skills for effective decision-making, examples and prompts are included to illustrate a variety of contexts.</p> <p>As students are learning skills for health relationships, an online context (ending a relationship via text) has been included to reflect the current youth context.</p>	<p>As students continue to learn skills for healthy relationships, learning about application of these skills in an online environment deepens.</p> <p>Specific details and examples are provided to help students understand the consequences of harassment and also learn ways to prevent it and respond to it.</p> <p>A recent study recommends that schools teach youth how to recognize and engage in healthy relationships and underline that putting pressure on a partner to send sexts is not acceptable. Instruction should address dealing with the ethical and emotional aspects of digital literacy as well as the essential habits of skepticism and security. (Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Trends and Recommendations, 2014)</p> <p>Positive aspects of use of technology – such as safety are included for balance and to reflect current realities.</p> <p>Research suggests that there is a correlation between sexting and other sexual activity, particularly sexual activity that involves possible risk of harm (Rice et al, 2012). This suggests that sexting, particularly when images are distributed broadly outside the confines of a healthy relationship, may be a marker for other behaviours that could lead to injury or harm. Effective interventions will keep the nuances in mind, and help youth and adults separate healthy sexual behaviours from risky practices that open up young people to shaming or ridicule.</p>	<p>Students in secondary school continue to build their skills for healthy relationships including communication, respect and knowing oneself. This learning is applied in face-to-face and online contexts.</p> <p>Expert review advised inclusion of more information about safe and anonymous reporting.</p> <p>Recent studies confirm that the Internet is an important source of information for young people on matters related to their physical and mental health, sexuality and relationships. (Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Trends and Recommendations, 2014)</p> <p>Expectations have been updated to reflect current youth practices.</p> <p>Building on learning in elementary grades, students continue to develop awareness of the impact of technology on their lives.</p> <p>Links are made to learning about mental health and well-being.</p>	<p>As learning about mental health and mental health problems deepens and gets more specific, social media and online environments are included to reflect the current environment for youth.</p> <p>In senior grades, there is an increasing emphasis on students learning about legal issues and global implications.</p> <p>It is crucial to help young people develop healthier relationships with each other and more productive responses to anger and inter-personal conflict. Education is needed to give young people the skills they need to navigate conflict in a pro-social and respectful way. In particular, students who witness online conflict need more nuanced advice than just to stand up and defend the person being attacked: instead, they need to be given a range of possible strategies to intervene without risking further harm. (Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Trends and Recommendations, 2014)</p>