

MÉTIS CHILDREN

SAFE IN CYBERSPACE

A Guide for Parents & Guardians



National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO)
Organisation nationale de la santé autochtone (ONSA)
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Publication Design:

Chantelle Russell

Copies of this publication may be obtained by contacting:

Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization
220 Laurier Avenue West, Suite 1200
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5Z9
Phone: 613.237.9462
Toll-free: 1.877.602.4445
Fax: 613.237.8707
Email: metiscentre@naho.ca
Website: www.naho.ca/metiscentre

Under the *Canadian Constitution Act, 1982*, the term Aboriginal Peoples refers to First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in Canada. However, common use of the term is not always inclusive of all three distinct peoples, and much of the available research only focuses on particular segments of the Aboriginal population. NAHO makes every effort to ensure the term is used appropriately.

Métis Children Safe in Cyberspace:

A Guide for Parents & Guardians

The **Métis Centre** of the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO) recognizes that cyberspace and the Internet (“the net”) is starting to play an important part in the daily lives of Métis children, whether it is at home or at school. Teachers may use the Internet to engage students in various online activities such as making connections between peers from different parts of the country, or to conduct research assignments. Métis children and youth may also turn to the internet to investigate something overheard from adults, discussed with peers, in the classroom, or learned from watching television or listening to the radio.

In order to help Métis parents and guardians understand cyberspace, “Métis Children Safe in Cyberspace—A Guide for Parents & Guardians” was produced. The aim is to provide information about cyberspace, how it works and the ways in which Internet-based technologies benefit daily communication. The guide provides information about Instant Messaging (IM), lists and describes common social networking applications, and the language (acronyms) that children use when electronically communicating with peers.

Though there are numerous benefits to using the Internet (keeping in touch with family and friends, streaming movies, shows and music, and for research purposes), there are also some dangers in cyberspace. Potential hazards of cyberspace include computer viruses, Internet addiction, cyber bullying, and in chat rooms such as sexual predators and pedophiles. There are also potential consequences related to posting personal information online. Some families might find it important to establish rules for Internet use, therefore, two examples of Internet Agreements are included in the guide, one for children and one for parents.

It is hoped that the information provided in this guide is useful in helping to foster discussions about cyber safety amongst Métis children and their families.

What is Cyberspace, the Internet and the World Wide Web?

Cyberspace is the virtual world of computers allowing electronic communication to take place.

The *Internet* was created in 1969 by the U.S. military as “a ‘nuke proof’ communications network.” Today, the internet is made up of countless computer networks that allow millions of people to share information quickly over long distances.¹

The *World Wide Web* was created by Tim Berners Lee, a scientist at the Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire, or the European Organization for Nuclear Research in 1989. The World Wide Web reflects “one of many Internet-based communication services” founded on Lee’s proposal regarding hypertext. The World Wide Web allows internet users to access billions of web sites and information from all over the world within a matter of minutes.²



Métis Children Safe in Cyberspace

Family & Cultural Connections

Métis children are growing up with technologies that enable easy access to the Internet through the use of gaming consoles, mobile devices and home and school computers.

For many Métis children and youth in both urban and rural communities, the Internet is quickly becoming the preferred method of communication, and is a valuable tool that can be used to learn more about Métis culture and values. The Internet makes it possible for children and teens to establish and maintain connections to Métis aunts, uncles, grandparents and friends who can share cultural teachings and traditions.

Communication is an important part of Métis life and culture, so it is beneficial for children and youth to have access to their relatives without racking up large phone bills. Communicating with family can help develop a stronger sense of identity and kinship, and is a great way for kids to feel supported and loved.



What is social networking?

Social networking refers to the people, organizations, or groups connected through media-based websites and applications designed and dedicated to informal communication between users.

Users of social networking sites create personal profiles and can exchange public or privately sent messages similar to email, or communicate with other users with Instant Messaging (IM) chat applications. Users can publish content based on interests that can be viewed by friends, employers, employees and the general public.

Typically, social networking sites allow members to adjust privacy settings to hide sections of their profiles from specified contacts. Social networkers can add friends or accept friend requests whether or not they know the user on the other end.

Métis families separated by long distances may find social networking sites useful for maintaining connections to relatives residing in other cities, provinces or countries. Additionally, memorable moments captured on camera or film, can also be shared quickly and easily with a user's online social

Instant Messaging & Acronyms

Instant Messaging (IM) is the exchange of text messages in real time between two people using internet applications that enable text communication such as MSN Chat, internet chat rooms and some social networking sites.⁴

Youth and children using text applications to chat, may use acronyms (phrases or words cropped down and represented by single letters or numbers) to save time and to send cryptic messages when parents are around. A list of acronyms is available on the Métis Centre's website to help parents and guardians get informed on the language kids use when communicating with electronic devices.⁵

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Social Networking Sites

Blogs: Blogs allows a writer or a group of writers to share their experiences, opinions or observations of events that interest them. Blogs may include photos and links related to the writer's contributions and are gaining popularity with youth as forums to share their views about the world around them. Popular bloggers can also earn advertising revenue from their sites.⁶

Chat Rooms: Chat rooms are online places where users can exchange messages in real time and where communications are not monitored. Chat rooms are considered the most dangerous locations for sexual predators.⁷

Chatroulette: A website that enables users to randomly engage in video and text chats online. Users may leave a chat at any time to engage with another random user.⁸

Facebook: Designed originally for college students, the site is accessible to anyone **13 years of age** and older. Users create profiles, can upload photos, videos and provide personal information.

Users can browse their friend's profiles, and can write messages on each other's "walls." Wall postings are public but private messages similar to e-mail can be sent to a user's inbox.⁹

Google+: Google's version of social networking is organized around users' social circles (called +Circles). Google users share can share with specific groups within specific circles (family, friends, work, etc), rather than sharing with all their social connections at once.¹⁰

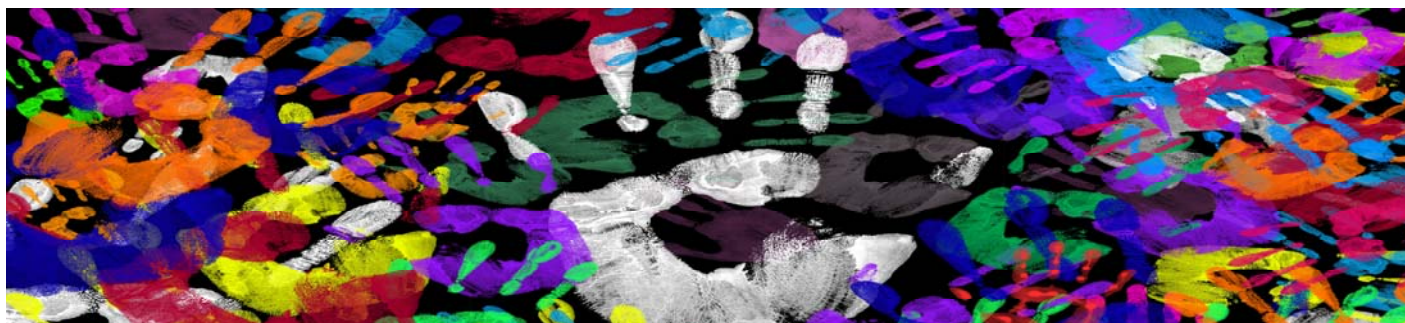
MSN: MicroSoft Network is a general web portal used for various internet activities such as news, sports, entertainment including MicroSoft's messenger service introduced in the mid-1990s. MSN users can create email addresses and add contacts to their network. MSN users have the option to chat using an audio visual web camera.¹¹

YouTube: A video sharing service that allows users to view videos posted by other users ranging from amateur footage to corporate advertising. The service was started as an independent website in 2005 and was acquired by Google in 2006.¹²

Videos that have been uploaded to YouTube may appear on the YouTube website and can also be posted on other websites, though the files are hosted on the YouTube server.

Twitter: An online service that allows users to share updates with other users. Once you have signed up and created your own Twitter account, updates can be posted and viewed by others.

Your "tweets" (twitter updates) are limited to 140 characters and will appear on the home pagers of those users who are following you and vice versa. Tweets can be easily updated via your mobile device, such as cell phone¹³



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Cyberspace Dangers

Computer Viruses, Worms & Trojan Horse

Computer viruses are small programs that require permission to access your computer. A virus will replicate (make copies of) itself and attack, create, corrupt or erase files. Viruses can consume memory and travel through networks, one of the easiest ways to catch a virus is to open an infected email attachment.¹⁴

A worm is a virus that tunnels unnoticed through a computer's memory or hard drive without damaging files and will replicate itself until all available memory is consumed. If a worm accesses your hard disk space, your computer will slow down or crash and it will take a long time to access files. A worm will render it impossible to create new files or save data. Worms can move from one system to another by traveling through network connections.¹⁵

Trojan horse (most commonly referred to as a "Trojan") is a malicious software program disguised to look like a regular program (such as a game, music file or an antivirus program), if given permission to run can cause major damage to your computer. It is difficult to tell if a program is a Trojan horse and once you double click on it, it will begin to write over parts of your hard drive and corrupt your data. A Trojan horse does not replicate itself, but can be attached to virus files that spread easily from computer to computer. Most antivirus programs are designed to catch Trojans before they can cause damage, but it is recommended that software be updated with the latest virus definitions and that email attachments be scanned before opening. Never double click on "free" pop-up antivirus programs as these are likely Trojans.¹⁶

If your computer catches a virus, place it off limits until the problem is resolved. Inform your family that a discussion on internet use will take place soon (give a specific date and time).



Internet Addiction

Though not officially diagnosed, Internet addiction is on the rise amongst adolescents and teenagers. Just because your child is online often, however, does not mean they are addicted to the Internet.

Remember, teachers will assign online research which can take several hours a week. It is behaviour and attitude changes along with the amount of time spent online that should be a cause for concern. Children should be encouraged to balance online activities by taking time to interact with family and friends, to pursue sports, attend cultural activities or do some volunteer work within the community they are a part of.



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Internet Addiction & Cyber Bullying

What are some signs of Internet addiction?

- Excessive/obsessive time spent using the Internet and fantasizing about being online when away from the computer.
- Neglecting activities or time spent with family and friends.
- Changes in attitude, clothing choices and falling grades.
- Depression or moodiness when not online.
- A change in sleeping patterns or habits.
- Drastic changes in diet including weight loss or weight gain.
- Denying or lying about the amount of time spent using the Internet.

Parents may choose to limit the amount of time their children spend in cyberspace, including the websites and applications that are being visited or used. Allowing a long period of time to go by before addressing concerns about internet usage could have some consequences. It is better to ask your child about their behaviour and activities as soon as you notice a significant change.

Internet addicts can also experience physical symptoms such as dry eyes, backaches, migraine headaches and carpal tunnel syndrome.¹⁷



Cyber Bullying & the Repercussions

Bullying is aggressive behaviour or actions carried out by an individual or a group over time against a victim unable to defend him or herself. Bullying is not new, but what is fairly new and on the rise is cyber bullying - the use of the internet, or other electronic devices to inflict repeated harm on another child.¹⁸

Cyber bullying can include name calling in chat rooms, creating false profiles, posting hateful messages on various internet forums and social networking sites, or the sending of mean or cruel email messages.

No longer restricted to school grounds, a bully has access to various technologies (such as cell phones and the Internet) to project harmful attacks on victims at any time of the day or night.

Children and teens may not realize that malicious electronic actions are in fact bullying, or that there can be repercussions for both the victim and the cyber bully. Bullies caught in the act may deal with no tolerance policies in their schools which can lead to suspension or expulsion as well as legal consequences. In the worst case scenarios, some victims commit suicide because they feel there is no escape from their tormentors.

Cyber bullying hurts everyone involved, be mindful of your words and be a respectful Internet user.

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False Information & Predators

Sexual Predators & Pedophiles

Just as we encourage children and youth to create email addresses and instant messaging names that do not reveal personal information, sexual predators and pedophiles can easily create profiles and provide false information about themselves. Users can copy bogus images from other sites and post them as profile pictures, they can lie about their age, interests, hobbies and activities in order to create likable profiles that will enable sexual predators and pedophiles to “groom” (earn the trust) of potential victims.

“Grooming”¹⁹ refers to the time a sexual predator or pedophile spends preparing victims for sexual assault. During the grooming period, the predator will play the role of a kind and caring person, someone who understands and listens to everything the child is dealing with at school, with friends, or at home. The grooming process can take days, weeks or months, during which time the predator or pedophile will test the victim to gauge their reaction to subjects of a sexual nature.

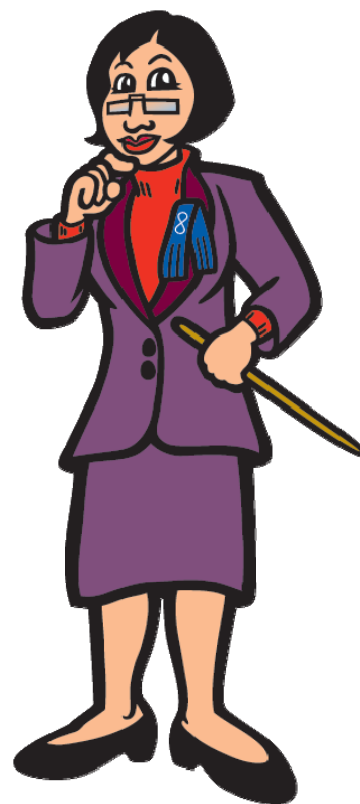
Chat rooms are common forums used by pedophiles or sexual predators to communicate with children while remaining anonymous or posing as someone the child would easily trust. A child’s address or school name may be acquired through online communications and once a predator has earned a child’s trust, they may convince them to participate in webcam dialogues. Webcams allow the user on the other end to take and save photos of the user they are communicating with, and can be used to locate a child by what is visible in the background—a school poster or flag for example. Children who are made aware of these potential dangers are less likely to be victimized and more inclined to tell authority figures when an online interaction feels wrong.

In Canada, 1 in 5 children is sexually solicited online.²⁰

Teaching Cyber Safety

Some parents browse the Internet with their baby on their laps while viewing baby friendly websites or to stream music, watch various shows, videos or movies. With children being exposed to cyberspace at an early age, discussions about Internet use and safety can start the first time your child asks to have their own email account or social networking profile.

Teaching cyber safety is not much different from reminding children to brush their teeth, do their homework, clean their rooms, or advising them about your stance on talking to strangers. It simply requires you to care about your child’s safety and well being, and a few minutes to ask them why and how they intend to use the Internet. You might also decide to ask them what they know about Internet safety and privacy. The important thing is that a discussion takes place and that children know who they can turn to if they need help with situations related to their Internet browsing experience.



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What to Do if Things Go Wrong Online

1. Inform your children that if things go wrong while they are using the Internet, you will help them.
2. If your child does ask for help regarding an online situation, remain calm, supportive and helpful.
3. Be clear about the procedures to resolve the issue and once things have been settled, inform your child that a discussion about the situation will take place.

Discussing the details of an online incident with your child will enable you to better understand what went wrong and how to proceed.



Take the Lead—Protect, Educate and Support

It is possible that someone online may attempt to lure your child into participating in conversations that are not appropriate. Children can understand that the Internet is a great place to find a lot of information, chat and share pictures with family and friends, but caution about what they post, which websites they browse, and who they interact with in cyberspace is very important. It is a parent's responsibility to protect, educate and support their child as they learn and discover things around them, and that includes the ways in which the Internet is being used.

Know Your Child's Friends

Let your children know that you will check up on their Internet activities by asking about new friends added to social networking sites—how they met and know certain people is relevant to helping ensure cyber safety. Your child should be able to provide specific information about their personal connection to the people on their contact lists. Monitoring browsing histories and asking questions about websites can become part of your family's dialogue.

Role-playing

Role-playing is an activity in which two or more people deliberately adopt behaviours and act out scenarios in fictitious settings. Role-playing is generally used as a theatrical or educational practice and can be used to teach cyber safety to children and teenagers alike. Role-playing different situations that may arise while your child is using the Internet is a great way to provide guidance on how to react. Encouraging your child to adopt the parental role will give both of you the confidence to respond to various situations.

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Start a Discussion With Your Children

To start a discussion regarding a child's change in behaviour or attitude as a result of the amount of time they are spending online, approach them in a way that will bring about a positive response, such as:

"I have noticed some changes in your (social) activities lately and I am interested in hearing your opinion. Do you think we can have a discussion about these changes later today or sometime tomorrow?"

Keeping a light tone in your voice will reassure your child that you are not angry. Setting specific time aside to discuss their changes in a non-judgmental manner will prove more successful than demanding to know why they are spending so much time online, or grounding them and taking away their privileges.

Before the Discussion

Giving yourself time to gather your thoughts about the direction of the discussion will allow you to lead the conversation without coming across as angry or alarmed.

Before starting a dialogue with your child about their use of the Internet, let him or her know that they are **not** in any kind of trouble. Calmly inform your child that you have noticed a decrease in their social or recreational activities, their choice of attire, or their attitude towards school and friends seem to have shifted and you would like to know why they feel these changes have occurred, or why such changes are necessary.

Remember, the Internet is a Public Place!

All Instant Messaging, including cell phone text messages can go viral, meaning messages sent to a recipient can be forwarded to their contacts, posted to blogs, social networking site, or websites created specifically to humiliate an individual.

Taking care not to IM potentially harmful or humiliating pictures and/or messages is vital to ensuring overall enjoyment of the Internet.



When it's Your Turn to Speak

Begin by summing up what your child shared to make sure you understand their point of view. Ask if they are open to hearing your thoughts without interruption. If so, proceed with careful consideration of your words. Children will learn to communicate effectively by example.

Thanking and praising your child's maturity and patience for talking to you will make them feel respected, valued and cared for. A hug at the end of a dialogue will assure your child that what they have shared with you was well received and appreciated.

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Communication is like walking in hand sewn moccasins—one treads carefully and lightly, determined to reach their goal with patience, knowledge, appreciation and focus.



Age-Appropriate Talks



Talks that are kept age-appropriate will not overwhelm a child.

Children who feel that their parents or guardians value and listen to their ideas and opinions are more likely to ask for advice and share their concerns about other issues they may be dealing with.

Listen closely to what your child has to say and keep a neutral facial expression. These actions will help your child feel relaxed and open to sharing their opinions with you.

Test Your Knowledge

1. If your child is using an Internet chat room and another user starts asking them personal questions, such as their name, age, address or where they go to school, what should they do?

- A. Answer all their questions
- B. Do nothing
- C. Tell their friends
- D. Stop the chat (save the conversation) and tell their parents, or a trusted adult.

2. If your child receives an Instant Message from someone who threatens or calls them foul names, what is this called?

- A. A joke
- B. Cyber bullying
- C. Chatting
- D. Social Networking

3. If your computer starts slowing down or stops working, it might have:

- A. Anti-virus software
- B. Hard drive
- C. A virus
- D. Acronyms

Answers on page 12



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Computer Settings & Safety Tips

Become familiar with the parental settings on your computer.

In Windows:

On your windows desktop: double click on My Computer.

In the My Computer window: double click on the Control Panel.

In the Control Panel window: double click on the Internet Options button.

In the Internet Options window: click on Content tab.

Under the Content Advisor: click on the Enable button. *Click on the Language key, and slide the adjustable ruler over to the right hand side of the screen (there are four different levels to choose from). Click on Apply at the bottom of the screen.*

Next, click on the Nudity key: *Slide the adjustable ruler towards the right hand side of the screen to make your selection of levels. Click Apply at the bottom of the screen.*

Next, click on the Sex key: *Slide the adjustable ruler towards the right hand side of the screen to make your selection of levels. Click on Apply at the bottom of the screen.*

Next, select the Violence key: *Slide the adjustable ruler towards the right hand side of the screen to make your selection of levels. Click on the Apply button at the bottom of the screen.*

Click on the General tab at the top of the screen and place a check mark in the box next to "Users can see sites that have no rating". *Click Apply and then OK. You will then be asked to type in a password to save the controls you just created. In the Internet Properties screen, click OK.*

Your Parental Controls are now set. Please remember to keep your Password in a safe place!

Cancel remaining windows in the Control Panel and My Computer screens.²¹

Tips for making Internet activity safer for your family

1. Place your home computer or laptop in a high traffic area of your home so you can more easily monitor your child's online activities.
2. Create a guideline or an agreement outlining family Internet rules that include regular check-ins. Help children create an email address, or Instant Messaging name that does not reveal age, name, gender or location.
3. Sit with your children when they register for various Internet sites or online games. Inform them that permission is required before registering for accounts, and they should not answer surveys or enter online contests.
4. With social networking sites, ensure privacy settings allow only friends to access profiles.
5. Discuss signs of unhealthy friendships such as: threats, rejection, put-downs and insults, violence, ignoring, rumors, guilt, bossiness and bullying.
6. Be open to having your own Internet usage and friend lists monitored.
7. Children can learn how to handle stressful situations online. Role-playing is a great tool that can be used to help children learn how to respond to inappropriate messages or computer-related problems.

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Internet Agreements

CHILDREN'S INTERNET AGREEMENT

1. I will respect myself and my family and will not give out my home address, telephone number or name and location of my school without my parents' permission.
2. I will never get together with someone I "meet" online unless my parents agree and accompany me.
3. I will never send pictures of myself or my family to anyone I meet online without first checking with my parents.
4. I will not post or tag pictures of myself, or my family members online without their permission.
5. I will not respond to messages that are mean or make me feel uncomfortable. I will tell my parents right away so they can report it.
6. I will talk with my parents about establishing rules for going online. We will determine appropriate sites for me to visit and I will not access other areas.
7. I will not give out my Internet password to anyone other than my parents.
8. I will check with my parents before downloading or installing software or doing anything that could damage our computer or jeopardize my family's privacy.
9. I will respect social networking sites and will not post mean comments or use foul language on mine or other peoples' pages.
10. I will not do anything that hurts other people or is against the law.
11. I will respect our rules. If I break the terms of this agreement, we will discuss the consequences of my actions as a family.²²

I agree to the above:

Child(ren) sign here

Parent(s) sign here

PARENT'S INTERNET AGREEMENT

1. I will respect myself and my family and will not give out my home address or phone number to strangers online.
2. I will never get together with someone I "meet" online, unless my family knows about it.
3. I will never send pictures of myself or my family to people I meet online without first checking with my family.
4. I will not post or tag pictures of my children online without their permission.
5. I will not respond to message that are mean or make me feel uncomfortable. I will report it to the proper authorities and share the information with my family.
6. We will talk about family rules for using the computer and Internet and I will not access areas considered inappropriate.
7. I will remain calm if my child comes to me about a problem on the computer, such as a virus or computer failure, or something that went wrong in cyberspace.
8. I will not log my child out of the computer without making sure their files are saved first.
9. I will respect my child's activity on social networking sites and will not reprimand them online, instead I will speak to them in person about any comments or conversations I feel are inappropriate.
10. I will not do anything that hurts other Internet users or is against the law like harassing anyone, or saying mean things about people.
11. I will respect our rules. If I break the terms of this agreement, we will discuss the consequences of my actions as a family.²³

I agree to the above:

Parent(s) sign here

Child(ren) sign here

Métis Children Safe in Cyberspace

Glossary

Acronyms: Abbreviations often used to save time when composing text messages on chat applications and cell phones. Acronyms are cryptic and can be used to provide details about situations without being obvious.⁴

Blog: An online forum or web site that hosts a writer's, or group of writers' personal experiences, thoughts or comments on topics of self interest. Blogs are becoming increasingly popular with youth and can be a source of advertising revenue for popular bloggers. They can also be used as a place where humiliating or harmful dialogues or images of others can be posted.²⁵

Cyber Bullying: Hostile behaviour between youth involving the use of communication technologies to deliberately torment, threaten, harass, humiliate, embarrass or target and harm another child. Cyber bullying can lead to a youth being suspended or expelled from school and in some cases there are legal repercussions.²⁶

Grooming: This is the process sexual predators use to prepare children into accepting sexual abuse. Once the predator has gained the child's confidence and trust, they will begin testing the child in subtle ways, such as telling inappropriate jokes to gauge their reaction and receptiveness, eventually the predator will ask to meet face to face. Grooming can take days, weeks, or months and the internet makes it feasible for predators to groom more than one victim at a time.²⁷

Instant Messaging (IM): The exchange of text messages in real time between two people using an instant messaging service. IMs are more interactive than e-mail because messages are sent and received within seconds or minutes.²⁸

Netiquette: Internet etiquette ("netiquette") is being mindful and respectful of what you publish, post or how you communicate with others on the internet. Practicing netiquette will help ensure a pleasant experience for everyone with access to personal websites, social networking sites or any chat applications being used.²⁹

Sexting: The sending of sexually suggestive, nude or semi-nude Instant Messages to another person via cell phone, Internet chat rooms or other chat software applications.³⁰

SKYPE: Software that allows users to make free calls worldwide to anyone else with a SKYPE account. SKYPE enables multiple users to make free video calls, conference calls and send files over the internet.³¹

Trojan Horse: A malicious software program disguised to look like a regular program (such as a game, music file or an antivirus program), and if it is operated or used it can cause major damage to your computer. It is difficult to tell if a program is a Trojan and once you double click on it, it begins to write over parts of your hard drive and will corrupt your data. Unlike computer viruses or worms, however, Trojans do not replicate themselves, but can be attached to virus files that spread just as easily between computers.³²

Virus: A virus is a small program that requires permission to access your computer. It will replicate itself and attack, create, corrupt or erase files. Viruses can consume memory and can travel through networks. One of the easiest ways to catch a virus is to open an infected email attachment.³³

Worm: A worm tunnels unnoticed through a computer's memory or hard drive without damaging files. It will replicate itself until all available memory is consumed. If a worm accesses your hard disk space, your computer will slow down or crash and it will take a long time to access files. A worm will make it impossible to create new files or save data. A worm can move from one system to another by traveling through network connections—it is a good idea to install antivirus software on your computer.³⁴

* *Test Your Knowledge—Answers: 1.D; 2. B; 3. C*

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Resources:

Canadian Centre for Child Protection
www.cybertip.ca

Ispayin: Métis Youth Express Yourself
www.metisyouthexpressions.ca/about-e.php

Manitoba Metis Federation
www.mmf.mb.ca

Métis Nation Alberta
www.albertametis.ca

Métis Nation British Columbia
www.mpcbc.bc.ca

Métis National Council
www.metisnation.ca

Métis Nation of Ontario
www.metisnation.org/

Métis Nation — Saskatchewan
www.mn-s.ca

National Aboriginal Health Organization
www.naho.ca

**National Aboriginal Health Organization
—Métis Centre**
www.naho.ca/metiscentre

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