GPEI YOUTH CYBERVIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGY

June 2026

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Background

The Government of Prince Edward Island (GPEI) mandated Justice and Public Safety to create a youth cyberbullying strategy using an inter-sectoral approach. In spring 2024, the Departments of Justice and Public Safety, Education and Early Years, Social Development and Seniors and the Interministerial Women's Secretariat began engagement with youth and community serving organizations, government departments and agencies who support youth.

Through this process, we heard common messages and insights. We learned the importance of understanding generational, cultural, and environmental differences and creating adaptable solutions. We began to build capacity for shared action to address this complex and quickly evolving problem, which deeply impacts youth and their healthy development.

A significant portion of young people's lives unfold in virtual spaces; this presents opportunities and challenges. Amongst the challenges, research indicates that 24.6% of Canadian youth (ages 12-17) experienced cyberbullying in the past year, with even higher rates reported by vulnerable and marginalized populations.[1] Statistics Canada data shows that about 1 in 5 young adults 18-29 years of age in PEI experienced cyberbullying, while the prevalence of cyberbullying among PEI youth aged 12-17 was approximately 26%. According to the 2024-25 COMPASS-PEI survey, 29% of PEI students reported being bullied and 7% reported being victims of cyberattacks in the last 30 days.[2] Despite these figures, we know the picture is incomplete because self reported data and inconsistent definitions limit a fuller understanding of the actual prevalence.

Cyberbullying can take many forms. For this strategy, cyberbullying is defined as the use of computers, smartphones, or other connected devices to embarrass, hurt, mock, threaten, or be mean to someone online[3]. Similarly, stakeholders saw cyberbullying as the use of digital technology, including social media, electronic communication devices, and online platforms to conduct overt and covert acts of aggression intended to hurt, harm, or use threatening content aimed at exerting power and control over individuals or groups.

Cyberbullying can be experienced as:

- General harassment online
- Verbal and emotional abuse online
- Threats and intimidation
- Use of images for personal attacks
- Exclusionary practices and social isolation

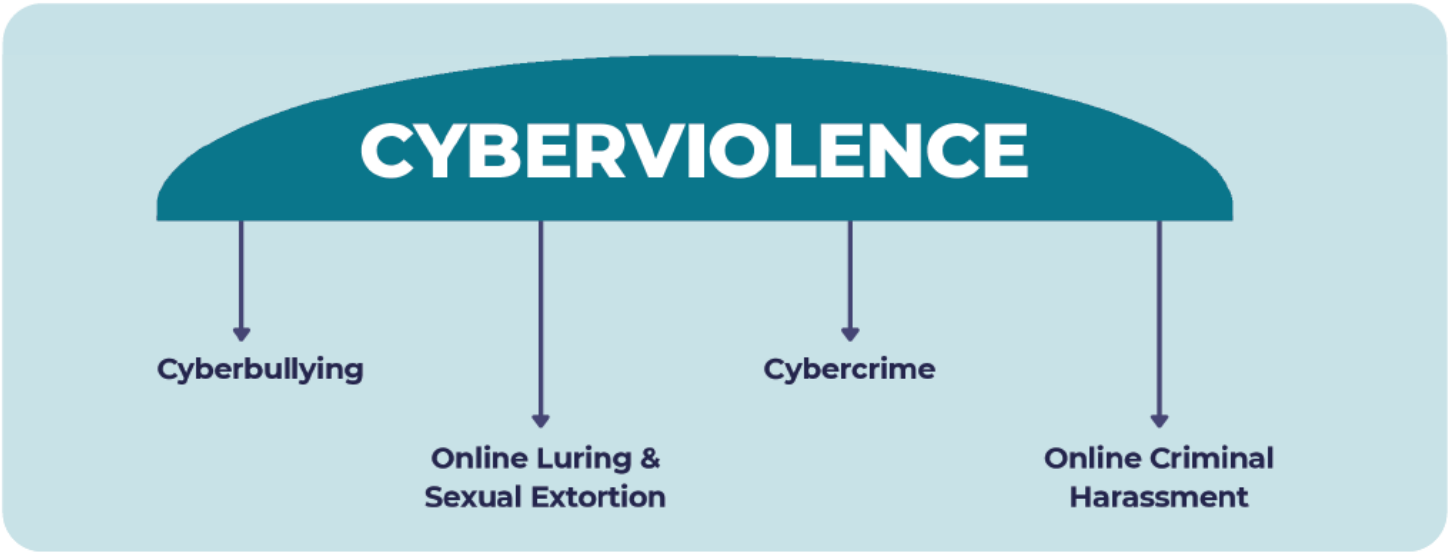
Numerous studies have established short-term and long-term adverse effects of bullying on physical and mental health.[4] Cybervictimization is associated with many negative outcomes, such as "poorer mental health, eating disorder symptoms, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts."[5] In addition, research identified negative school-related outcomes, including impacts on academic achievement, school attendance, and feelings of safety. Impacts on mental health and future relationships can persist in the long term.

Words Matter

Throughout the engagement process, a persistent source of confusion emerged. Cyberbullying is often used in mainstream media to refer to a broad set of harmful interactions such as cyberstalking, identity theft, doxxing (i.e. publishing private information), sexual extortion, and the sharing of images with the intent to intimidate or control. These interactions, which are better characterized as 'cyberviolence,' can be far more serious than the word 'bullying' suggests and include aggressive violations of personal safety, privacy and laws. These acts require strong interventions to address their severity and protect youth. Cyberviolence exists on a continuum of seriousness and harm. Cyberbullying is just one of four types of cyberviolence.

The focus of this strategy is preventing peer-to-peer cyberbullying through promotion of positive online behaviour. Recognizing the increased risk and experience of cyberviolence, the strategy also includes measures to equip parents, caregivers, and youth with tools to protect themselves from experiences – and the lasting effects - of cyberbullying and other forms of cyberviolence. Finally, the strategy recognizes the rights of children in PEI to live free of violence and to grow and develop to their full potential.

The strategy should be seen as a foundational step in promoting cyber safety and preventing cyberviolence.



Strategy Development

Child Rights Considerations

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is an international human rights treaty that sets out the rights and responsibilities of governments to ensure all children are protected, can survive and develop, and have their voices heard. Key principles of the convention include non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life and development, and respect for the child's views.

When the project was initiated, a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) was completed, which assisted in strategy development. A CRIA is used to systematically identify, assess, and record the anticipated impact of government decisions on policies, laws, and initiatives. The strategy was developed through a process that was evidence based, trauma informed, and youth focused. Direct and indirect methods of youth engagement were used to inform the strategy and its actions, which included consultation with adults who bear the duty to advance and protect child and youth rights, as well as youth as rights holders.

At the conclusion of strategy development, a CRIA was completed that reviewed the outputs of strategy development to determine their impact on child rights. Rights based impacts on the CRC basic principles identified through the assessment included:

- Article 2, Non-discrimination- taking a population-wide, upstream approach
- Article 3, Best interests of the child- extensive partner engagement centred on acting on cyberbullying with a focus on the best interest of the child
- Article 6, Life, survival and development- given the impact of cyberbullying on development, the strategy is intended to have a positive impact
- Article 12, Respect for children's opinions- engagement of youth who are directly impacted by the strategy to support their right to be heard and embed this right into actions

In addition to the CRC basic principles, other rights under the convention positively impacted by the strategy included: the right to health, education, and to play, and the right to be protected from violence. The CRIA also pointed to the positive impact of the strategy on the rights to freedom of expression and association, and the right to privacy but also the importance of recognizing potential negative impacts of measures that may limit these rights.

Engagement

Engagement throughout the strategy development was carried out using a strength based and trauma informed approach and leveraged other work underway. Engagement centred on the voices and experiences of youth, as well as those who work closely with them (teachers, community leaders, parents/ caregivers, etc.). This approach helped to inform understanding of the experience and context of cyberbullying, its impact on youth, initiatives that are working well, best or emerging practices, and what should be included in the strategy.

Early engagement identified a range of concerns about the impact of cyberbullying, which helped to frame further work. The common concerns identified included:

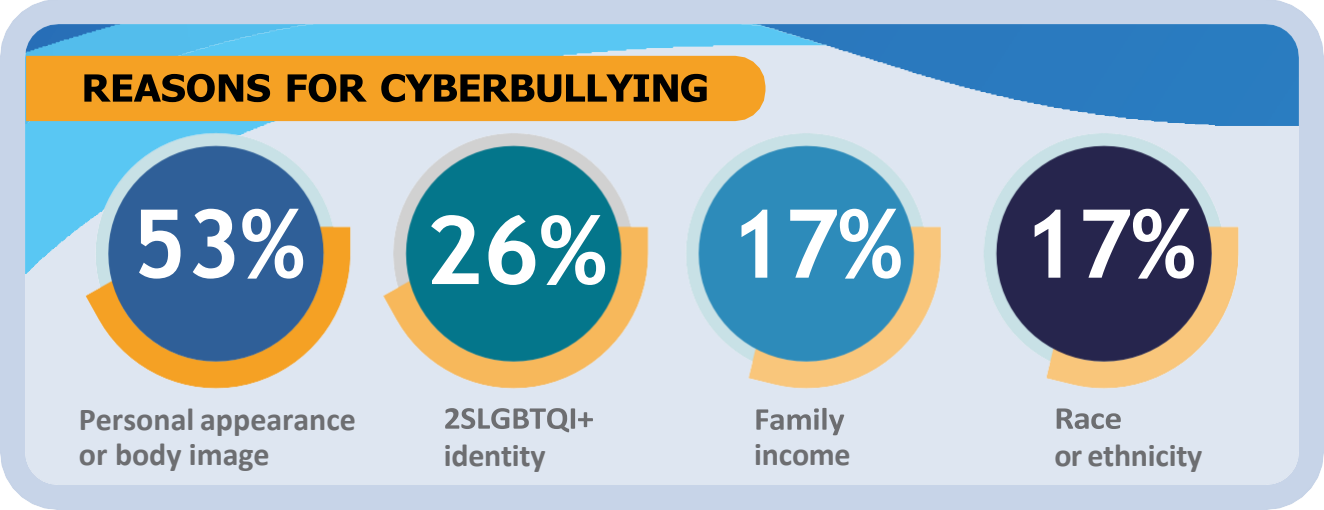
- Mental health and the psychological impact on youth in the form of depressed mood, anxiety, insomnia, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide.
- Technology and social media challenges due to the enduring nature of online content and the rapid evolution of digital platforms and apps.
- Social and behavioural concerns such as risky behaviour driven by a quest for social media likes, the impact on development of social skills and empathy in youth, and the minimal consequences that bullies often face.
- Legal and policy issues presented by emerging technology, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the need to strengthen and enforce regulations for social media platforms.
- The lack of media literacy, education, and awareness among youth and adults.

Opportunities for improvement were consistently identified in the following areas:

- **Education and Awareness**- the need for better integration of cyberviolence prevention and promotion of positive behaviours in online environments including cyberbullying awareness building for youth, caregivers, educators and service providers. Education and awareness should be trauma informed and guided by evidence.
- **Caregiver Involvement and Support**- education and resources on responsible technology use, the impacts of cyberbullying and promotion of the importance of adult modelling.
- **Support for Mental Wellbeing** - social, emotional learning that fosters skills and enhances supports for managing mental distress, building resilience, and ensuring access to robust mental health resources for youth.
- **Community Engagement and Support Networks** - the need for stronger community networks and initiatives that enhance the capacity of local groups, to provide support and foster healthy relationships among youth and improve protections for those most vulnerable to harm.
- **Legal and Policy**- addressing the gap between cyberbullying incidents and effective legal measures.

> *Caregiver involvement promotes responsible technology use.*

Parent and Caregiver Engagement



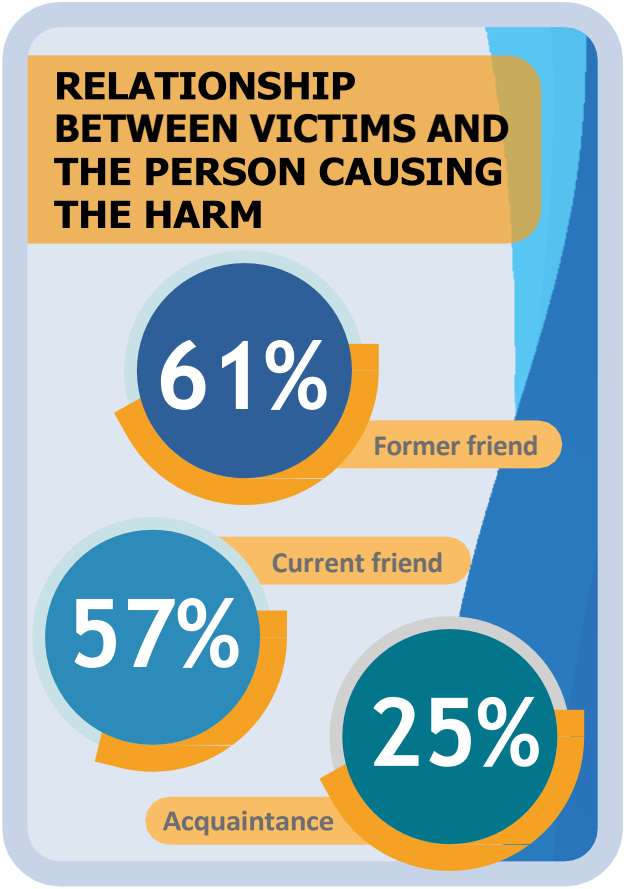
To hear the perspectives and experiences of parents and caregivers on Prince Edward Island, a 'Parent and Caregiver Survey' was conducted in late 2024 into 2025. The intent of the survey was to understand the experiences, impact, and adult caregiver responses to cyberbullying.

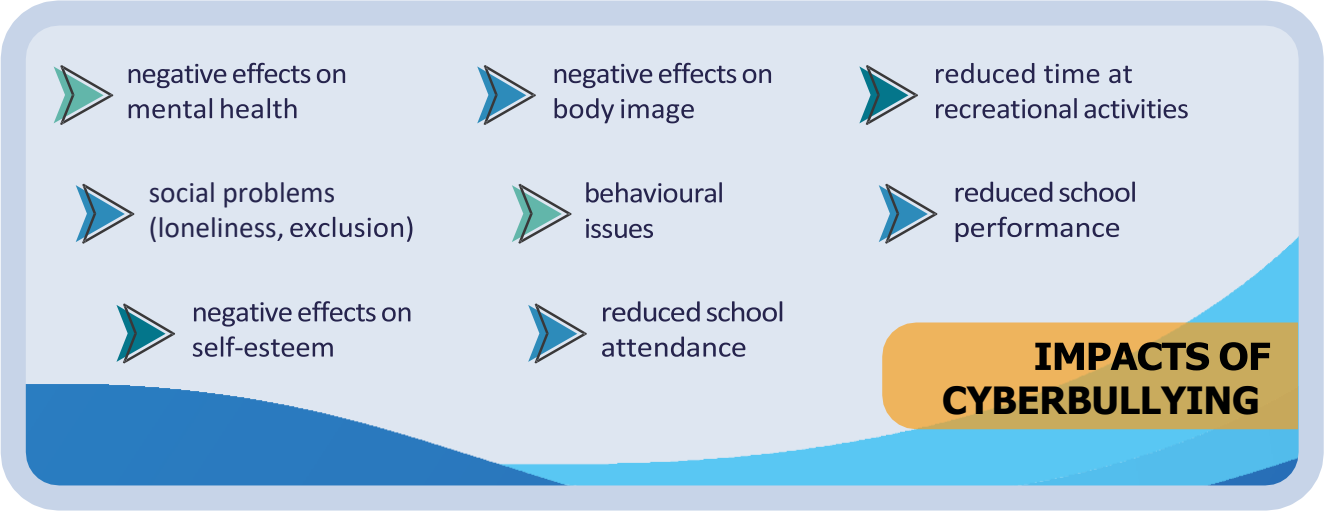
There were 399 completed survey responses out of 508 eligible responses - a completion rate of 78%. While the final survey data could not be used to determine youth prevalence rates[6], the findings provided some important insights that have shaped the strategy and the implementation actions.

Some of the key findings of the survey were that 55% of all respondents reported that youth in their care experienced some form of cyberviolence, with 52% specifically reporting incidents of cyberbullying. As it relates to cyberbullying, the most common platforms for cyberbullying included social media (74%), messaging apps (60%), and text messages (53%), with Snapchat being the most frequently mentioned app (69%).

Survey respondents reported that when cyberbullying incidents were shared with them, 91% of affected youth were victims and 39% participated in incidents of bullying. In 93% of the reported incidents, those who caused harm were other students at the youth's school.

Parents and caregivers shared that they observed a negative impact on the youth's mental health (92%), a decline in self-esteem (91%), and increased social issues (86%). When parents and caregivers responded to incidents of cyberbullying, they more often talked directly to affected youth (80%), discussed the issue with family and friends (51%), and contacted the school (46%). A significant proportion of parents and caregivers (79%) believed more resources should be developed.





Multi-sectoral Working Groups

To ensure a broad range of perspectives and expertise, multi-sectoral working groups were formed to review, discuss, and provide input into potential actions of the strategy. Working group members came from community organizations, government departments and agencies, and police organizations. Efforts were made to engage teachers and Home and School Associations. In all forms of engagement, we heard that parents, caregivers, and school staff are overwhelmed by the prevalence of the problem and struggle to know how to deal with cyberbullying effectively.

> *Members included community organizations, government agencies, and police representatives.*

Youth Engagement

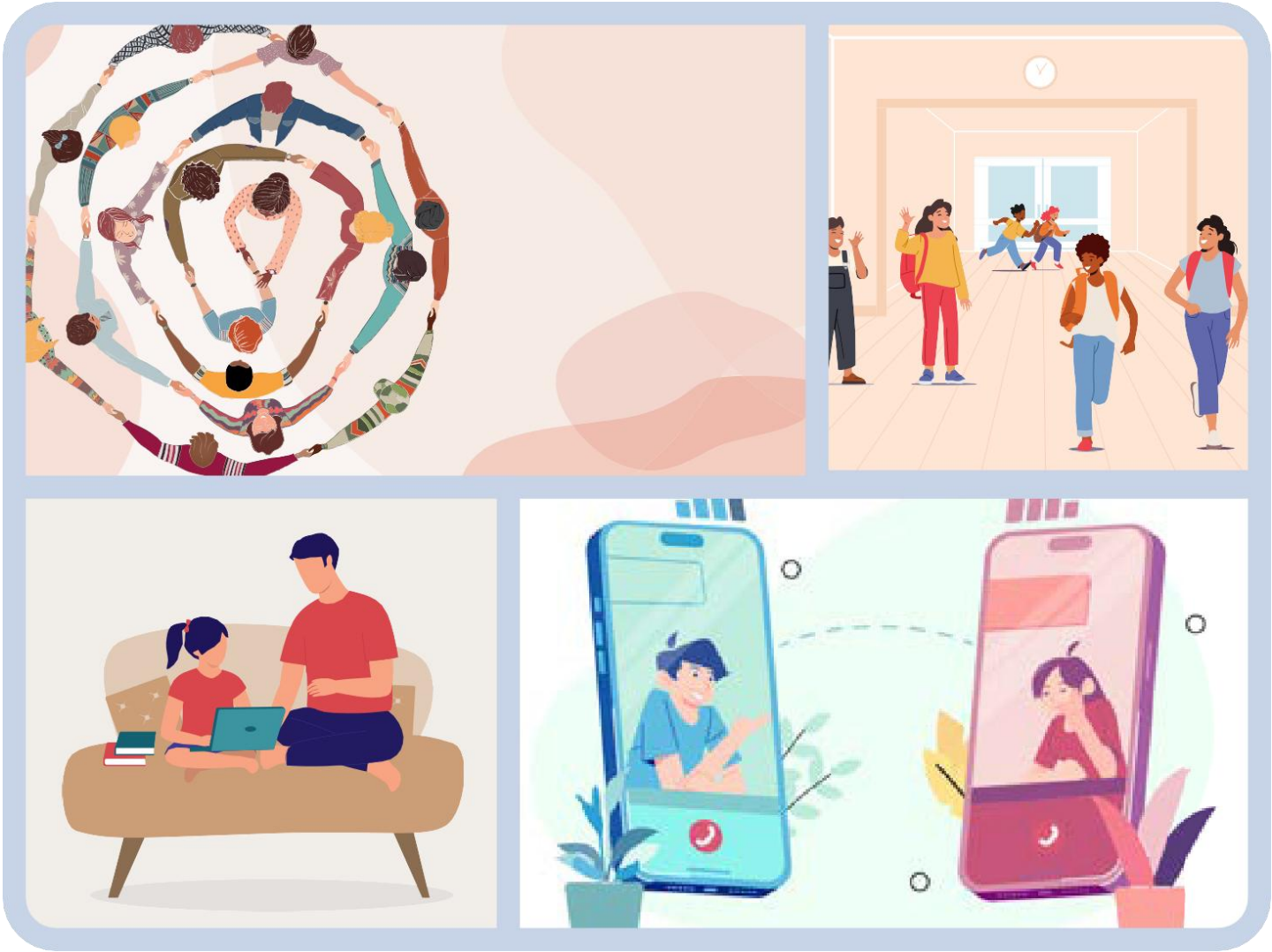
Youth were engaged in different ways, including focus groups with youth connected to established programs for youth (e.g. Alternative Education, PEI Youth in Care Network), and the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, Child and Youth Advisory Committee. In addition to informing and validating the strategy, valuable insights were provided for the implementation phase. Some of the key insights provided by youth can be themed as:

- Digital literacy and safety for all ages: teach children and youth how to recognize harm early on; teach parents and caregivers how to recognize harm and intervene
- Accountability without shame: create environments to learn from mistakes instead of being punished and silenced
- Consistency, trust and follow-through are essential: youth do not trust systems that make commitments and do not act on those commitments
- Authenticity over authority: real stories, relatable teaching and peer involvement make a bigger impact than adult lectures

Guiding Principles

The strategy development was guided by the following principles which are consistent with the foundational child rights of non-discrimination, best interests of the child, and participation rights. These principles are also intended to guide implementation.

- Be trauma informed: make a purposeful effort to not cause unintended harm in what we do, recognizing the impacts of past and present harms.
- Carry out activities in an evidence-based and evidence-informed way.
- Ensure youth voices and perspectives are considered and incorporated throughout the process.
- Consider regional, cultural, and demographic needs and interests.
- Consider the unique needs and experiences of equity seeking and deserving groups.
- Solutions need to be flexible, focused on consistent outcomes, and able to evolve over time.



Introduction to the Strategy

Social Ecological Model[7]

The Social Ecological Model (SEM) is a conceptual model that helps us understand individuals in their social environment. SEM informs the strategy design through inclusion of interventions engaging different levels of social systems; SEM can be used to understand unsafe behaviours or conditions from a public health and safety perspective, identifying intervention points for change.

Overview

This strategic framework sets out a course for change and improvement over the next five years. It seeks to leverage work underway that relates and aligns with the problem of cyberbullying and the need for improved cyberviolence prevention. The strategy addresses digital well-being and cyberbullying through a multi-faceted approach, emphasizing education, prevention, support, and systemic change. When resources are mentioned, every effort will be made to ensure resources are available in English and French.

The strategic framework that follows includes six Pillars, which set the broad strategic direction, followed by the Priority Areas, which are areas of focused action. The strategic framework will be accompanied by a Youth Cyberviolence Prevention Action Plan. The Action Plan sets out activities and the critical path to success. Wherever possible, the Action Plan also leverages other initiatives to create synergies, maximize impact, and reduce duplication of efforts.

The six pillars of the strategy, including key enablers to support the implementation

1. **Prevention, Education and Skill Development-** set a foundation with skills and knowledge
2. **Promotion of Positive Online Environments**- contribute to safety, belonging, and meaningful inclusion
3. **Supports and Interventions**- improving systems of support
4. **Policy Development and Implementation**- create and implement trusted and responsive solutions
5. **Public Policy and Advocacy**- working across sectors, including levels of government
6. **Enablers for Change** - inputs that form the backbone to collective outcomes

Pillars and Priority Actions

Pillar 1:

Prevention, Education and Skill Development (PESD)

This strategic direction focuses on actions to empower youth, parents, and communities with the resources necessary to navigate the digital world safely, responsibly, and ethically. It emphasizes the importance of building digital and media literacy skills from an early age through structured, age-appropriate education and community engagement. This strategic direction and its priority areas also focus on raising public awareness and building community capacity to recognize, prevent, and respond to cyberbullying and other forms of cyberviolence.

To carry out these priorities, GPEI will seek to partner with child and youth serving organizations, relevant government agencies, and community-based organizations to develop and deliver activities for youth, parents, and caregivers about the impacts of cyberbullying and cyberviolence.

Priority Areas in this pillar include:

A - Digital Literacy and Media Literacy
B - Recognize and Respond to Cyberbullying Behaviour
C - Professional Development and Staff Training

Priority Area A: Digital Literacy & Media Literacy

PESD.1 Enhance and continue implementation of Department of Education and Early Years' (DEEY) digital skills framework starting at the primary level, with content to suit all developmental stages.

PESD.2 Enhance and continue the implementation of digital and media literacy through Department of Education Early Years' (DEEY) language arts curriculum starting at the primary level, with differentiated content to suit all developmental stages.

PESD.3 Educate and promote "Digital Citizenship," "Digital Literacy," and "Cyber Safety" with activities promoting positive online interactions to targeted audiences, involving youth voices.

Priority Area B: Recognize & Respond to Cyberbullying Behaviour

PESD.4 Develop a common language resource guide for organizations to use when making presentations about cyberbullying, ensuring that it is focused on youth voice and aligned with DEEY's Code of Conduct policy.

PESD.5 Lead accessible public awareness efforts focused on recognizing and responding effectively to cyberbullying and promoting strategies and resources to prevent and reduce the harmful effects of cyberbullying.

PESD.6 Establish partnerships with law enforcement for educational workshops that are based on best practices and will promote safety and sensitivity when communicating risks and legal consequences.

Priority Area C: Professional Development and Staff Training

PESD.7 Provide regular professional development to educational and treatment/ counselling staff in all public schools on cyberbullying prevention, appropriate responses, and resources with a goal of leveraging capacity building under the Inclusive Education plan.

PESD.8 Link and connect the curriculum outcomes connected to cyberbullying and highlight instructional practices and the resources to meet these curriculum targets.

PESD.9 Provide staff and volunteers of non-government organizations with the resources and training to recognize indicators of cyberbullying and implement appropriate interventions.

Pillar 2:

Promotion of Positive Online Environments (PPOE)

This strategic direction emphasizes proactive measures that are intended to foster positive social interactions online and offline and to promote responsible digital habits. This strategic direction focuses on individual action for all ages to contribute towards a more positive online environment, including recognizing that some families may wish to delay access to non-school-based technology.

PPOE.1 Increase knowledge and awareness of how to be inclusive, empathetic, kind, and respectful when interacting online and encourage a sense of belonging.

PPOE.2 Engage youth, parents and caregivers to explore innovative approaches to promote positive online behaviour.

PPOE.3 Expand the promotion and use of screentime guidelines and cell phone policy for schools to support effective and consistent implementation of the guidelines.

Pillar 3:

Supports and Interventions (SI)

This strategic direction focuses on establishing improved systems to support individuals impacted by cyberbullying, providing avenues for reporting, and supporting expanded use of restorative practices.

Priority Areas in this Pillar include:

A- Reporting and Support Mechanisms
B- Restorative Practices

Priority Area A: Reporting and Support Mechanisms

SI.1 Enhance existing reporting mechanisms for youth to report incidents and seek help discreetly. Ensure systems are widely promoted to maximize awareness and usage

"We need to start talking about cyberbullying and stop normalizing it"
- a PEI Youth

and are seen as a trusted and responsive tool through continuous improvement efforts.

SI.2 Provide enhanced support services for youth impacted by cyberbullying by coordinating school counsellors, mental health therapists, and youth workers to align messaging, resources, and use of best practice interventions.

Priority Area B: Restorative Practices

SI.3 Make restorative processes available to youth involved in and affected by cyberbullying in school, community and sport settings. These practices aim to encourage accountability and promote understanding of the harms of cyberviolence activity.

Pillar 4:

Policy Development and Implementation (PDI)

This strategic direction addresses the important role of clear policies and procedures in promoting consistency, trust, and accountability to create safer digital environments for youth.

PDI.1 Using input provided by youth, draft and communicate clear cyberbullying harm prevention and response policies in public schools that reflect the rights of all children to education, good health and participation while being protected from harm.

PDI.2 Support the drafting and communication of clear cyberbullying harm prevention and response policies for youth serving community organizations that reflect the rights of all children to good health and participation while being protected from harm.

PDI.3 Develop and implement systems for effective implementation and monitoring of the use of policies.

Pillar 5:

Public Policy and Advocacy (PPA)

This strategic direction emphasizes the importance of partnerships across various sectors and advocacy for legislative and policy changes to address cyberbullying and emerging online harms.

Priority Areas in this Pillar include:

A- Youth Voice and Advocacy
B- Legislative and Policy Advocacy

Priority Area A: Youth Voice and Advocacy

PPA.1 Engage established youth-led advocacy groups to elevate youth voices in implementing strategy activities.

PPA.2 Continue focused engagement with youth to inform creation of policy, guidelines, and training, incorporating first person experiences in a trauma informed manner.

"We were all introduced to social media etc. in such an abrupt way and we don't have the resources to learn any of this stuff" - a PEI Youth

Priority Area B: Legislative and Policy Advocacy

PPA.3 Work with other levels of government to improve legal measures and enforcement to combat cyberbullying and other forms of cyberviolence; strengthen protections for victims and improve accountability for perpetrators.

PPA.4 Identify opportunities to incorporate cyberbullying references into provincial statutes impacting adults, youth, and children.

Pillar 6:

Enablers for Change (EC)

Underpinning the pillars, priorities and actions are structures, resources, and methods needed to realize change.

EC.1 Shared Governance: Establish an interdepartmental/interagency strategy governance model; identify lead departments and clarify roles and responsibilities to ensure strategy moves forward effectively.

EC.2 Establish a backbone position to achieve strategy outcomes: Create a project management position and structure that can employ project management tools and act as a coordinating position to ensure a shared governance approach is effective.

EC.3 Support community capacity: Increase investments in the Anti-Racism and Violence Against Women grant programs to support targeted actions and support strategies related to community conversations and social norms.

EC.4 Support community development: Establish a community development lead position to support and coordinate community-based actions within the strategy, central to an effective inter-sectoral approach.

EC.5 Technology Curriculum Leader: Create a Technology Curriculum Leader position in DEEY to support the school sector to implement actions and better address the growing and evolving use of technology in our learning environments.

EC.6 Measurement and monitoring: Develop a measurement and evaluation plan as an early action of the strategy to identify key performance indicators.

EC.7 Establish Partnerships: Establish inter-sectoral partnerships focused on child and youth serving organizations, government and its agencies, to develop and deliver learning opportunities for youth and parents/caregivers affected by the impacts of cyberbullying and cyberviolence.

Conclusion

Peer-to-peer cyberbullying and other forms of cyberviolence are complex, quickly evolving and common experiences for PEI youth. The harm caused can be short and long term, impacting physical and mental health and infringing on individual human rights. The Youth Cyberviolence Prevention Strategy focuses on creating consistency while allowing pathways to adapt. It also centres youth voices in efforts to encourage positive online behaviour and improve access to interventions and supports. Through collaboration, coordinated development, and enhancing capacity, we aim to improve safety for PEI youth.

The six pillars - Prevention, Education, and Skill Development; Promotion of Positive Online Environments; Supports and Interventions; Policy Development and Implementation; Public Policy and Advocacy; and Enablers for Change – call for greater coordination and knowledge, as well as increased space for youth voices. Through this strategy we will reduce harm experienced by PEI youth by supporting their online engagement in a positive way and offering support in a way that resonates with PEI youth.

The implementation of this strategy will help reduce the harms PEI youth experience from cyberviolence, particularly peer-to-peer cyberbullying, by creating safer online spaces, equipping youth with skills to protect themselves from both its occurrence and lasting impacts, and providing support that truly reflects their needs.

Summary of Recommendations

Pillar #1

Prevention, Education and Skill Development

Digital Literacy & Media Literacy

- PESD.1 Enhance and continue implementation of DEEY Digital Skills Framework.
- PESD.2 Enhance and continue the implementation of digital and media literacy through DEEY's language arts curriculum.
- PESD.3 Educate and promote "Digital Citizenship," "Digital Literacy," and "Cyber Safety".

Recognize & Respond to Harmful Cyberbullying Behaviour

- PESD.4 Develop a common language and resource guide for organizations.
- PESD.5 Lead accessible public awareness efforts.
- PESD.6 Establish partnerships with law enforcement for educational workshops.

Professional Development and Staff Training

- PESD.7 Provide regular professional development to educational and treatment/counselling staff in all public schools.
- PESD.8 Link and connect the curriculum outcomes connected to cyberbullying.
- PESD.9 Provide staff and volunteers of non-government organizations with resources and training.

Pillar #2

Promotion of Positive Online Environments

- PPOE.1 Increase knowledge and awareness of how to be inclusive, empathetic, kind, and respectful when interacting online.
- PPOE.2 Explore innovative approaches to promote positive online behaviour.
- PPOE.3 Expand the promotion and use of screentime guidelines and cell phone policy for schools.

Pillar #3

Supports and Interventions

Reporting and Support Mechanisms

- SI.1 Enhance existing reporting mechanisms.
- SI.2 Provide enhanced support services.

Restorative Practices

- SI.3 Make restorative processes available.

Pillar #4

Policy Development and Implementation

- PDI.1 Draft and communicate clear cyberbullying harm prevention and response policies in public schools.
- PDI.2 Support the drafting and communication of clear cyberbullying policies for youth serving community organizations.
- PDI.3 Develop and implement systems for effective implementation and monitoring of the use of policies.

Pillar #5

Public Policy and Advocacy

Youth Voice and Advocacy

- PPA.1 Engage established youth-led advocacy groups to elevate youth voices in implementing strategy activities.
- PPA.2 Continue focused engagement with youth to inform creation of policy, guidelines and training.

Legislative and Policy Advocacy

- PPA.3 Work with other levels of government to improve legal measures and enforcement.
- PPA.4 Identify opportunities to incorporate cyberbullying references into provincial statutes.

Pillar #6

Enablers for Change

Shared Governance

- EC.1 Establish an interdepartmental/interagency strategy governance model.
- EC.2 Create a project management position and structure.

Support community capacity

- EC.3 Increase investments in the Anti-Racism and Violence Against Women grant programs.

Support community development

- EC.4 Establish a community development lead position.

Technology Curriculum Leader

- EC.5 Create a Technology Curriculum Leader position in DEEY.

Measurement and monitoring

- EC.6 Develop a measurement and evaluation plan.

Partnerships

- EC.7 Establish inter-sectoral partnerships.

1. Statistics Canada (2023). Online harms faced by youth and young adults: The prevalence and nature of cybervictimization. Retrieved from https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/.

2. https://www.livewellpei.ca/sites/test.livewellpei.ca/files/2025-05/2024-25%20Provincial%20COMPASS%20Report%20%28English%20Version%29.pdf

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4. David Farrington et al (2023). Cyberbullying research in Canada: A systematic review of the first 100 empirical studies. Retrieved from https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/ S1359178922000921

5. Statistics Canada (2023). Cybervictimization and mental health among Canadian youth. Retrieved from https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-003-x/2023009/article/00001-eng.htm

6. Limitations of Parent and Caregiver Survey results:

   - Survey respondents are a convenience sample and do not represent the full population (strong response bias towards women and Islanders with higher education)
   - Some subgroups are under-represented in the survey sample such as those with lower education levels and certain equity deserving groups who are a smaller proportion of the population of adults that have, work with, or volunteer with children.
   - Results were examined through a GBA Plus lens at a high level, due to low response rates from key sub-groups.
   - Cannot use parental perceptions as a proxy for youth cyberviolence prevalence.

7. Adapted from Urie Bronfenbrenner, Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research, Cornell University College of Human Ecology, www.bctr.cornell.edu/about-us/urie-bronfenbrenner

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