

School of Graduate Studies Guide to Dealing with Online Harassment and Bullying

The fundamental principle is that
you have a right to exist safely in digital spaces.

Online harassment is often targeted at those who are already vulnerable and those whose research challenges the status quo. If you are being harassed you should know that we are there to support you. The School of Graduate Studies takes seriously the responsibility to protect students who are being targeted.

We are here for you.

Who gets harassed?

“As with other forms of harassment and hate crime, online harassment is often reflective of discriminatory attitudes and beliefs in wider society, including those based on gender, race, faith, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability. For example, girls and women report a higher incidence of online harassment and bullying than boys and men; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender, and/or non-binary people (LGBTQ+) are also more likely to experience online harassment.”¹

What does online harassment look like?

Online harassment (sometimes experienced as “cyberbullying”; “doxing”; or “revenge porn” among other things) is a pattern of unwanted behaviour involving electronic technology that is known, or ought reasonably to be known, to be unwelcome. Online harassment typically results in the creation of an intimidating, demeaning and/or hostile working, living or learning environment. It can involve communication tools such as:

- Social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube)
- Online discussion forums
- Anonymous posting forums
- Websites and blogs
- Text, photo, video, and audio messaging
- Email
- Online games

¹ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/tackling-online-harassment.pdf>

Online harassment uses language or images that humiliate, threaten, or violate the privacy of the targeted person(s). It may include, but is not limited to:

- Aggressive personal attacks
- Racist, sexist, homophobic put-downs or threats
- Stalking
- Rumour spreading
- Impersonation
- Shaming/ostracism
- Sharing of personal information/photos without consent

The first thing to remember is that it is not your fault.

Second, know that it will take a psychological toll and you can experience multiple symptoms from the experience. Do not hesitate to ask for help—you are not being weak or sensitive and these feelings are common among those who have been harassed.

You are important, and should be heard.

If you feel you are being harassed online, DO NOT IGNORE the harassing behavior. There are steps you can take:

1. Call Campus Security if you feel immediately threatened
2. Contact Dr. Surprenant (deansgs@mun.ca)
3. Save detailed records of incidents (dates, times, witnesses, etc.)
4. Take screenshots that best include dates and time stamps
5. Minimize contact with harasser and take steps to block calls and texts
6. Adjust privacy settings (links below show you best practices)
7. Speak to on-campus support staff who can offer further advice:
Wellness/Counseling; IT services; Campus Security; embedded counselor in SGS

If you see or hear of someone else being harassed online,

1. Offer them your support—be an ally
2. Report on their behalf
3. Discuss the steps above with the person being harassed

External resources:

DIY Feminist Cybersecurity: <https://hackblossom.org/cybersecurity/>

Speak up and Stay Safe(r): <https://onlinesafety.feministfrequency.com/en/>

Online communities of support: <https://iheartmob.org/>

Canadian Centre for Child Protection: <https://www.cybertip.ca/app/en/>