



## AMHERST POLICE DEPARTMENT

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Internet safety is a growing concern as more and more youths are getting connected to the online world. Children as young as toddlers are now proficient in the use of internet connected devices such as ipads and computers and parents are coming to the realization that their children are outpacing them in embracing new technology. With new messaging platforms, social media sites and mobile devices, the dangers of youths falling victim to online predators is increasing. Our youth are more connected than ever before in history. With this connectivity, the potential for lethality in bullying incidents in our communities has increased: -victims are no longer able to easily escape their tormentors.

The Province of Nova Scotia has recently taken steps to help enhance their ability to deal with bullying in the digital age. Recent tragedies like the Rehtaeh Parsons incident has shown that further steps need to be taken to assist victims in cyberbullying incidents. The Cyber-safety Act, which is the first legislation of its kind in Canada, has been created to protect victims and hold cyberbullies accountable under the law. The Act also provides civil remedies to victims who are bullied on the internet.

First, we have defined exactly what cyberbullying means and what it encompasses under the new law. The Cyber Safety Act defines cyberbullying as “*any electronic communication through the use of technology including, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, computers, other electronic devices, social networks, text messaging, instant messaging, websites and electronic mail, typically repeated or with continuing effect, that is intended or ought reasonably be expected to cause fear, intimidation, humiliation, distress or other damage or harm to another person’s health, emotional wellbeing, self-esteem or reputation, and includes assisting or encouraging such communication in any way.*” Therefore under the act, anyone, child or adult, can be a victim of cyberbullying. The Cyber Safety Act has also created a new Provincial CyberSCAN unit which will work with victims, families, schools, and police on complaints of cyberbullying. These investigators may help to resolve cyberbullying issues informally or assist victims in applying for protection orders. The protection orders can prohibit the bully from contact with the victim, prohibit the use of any electronic communications, and/or prohibit internet access. Victims are now able to sue cyberbullies for damages. The CyberSCAN unit does not replace police investigations and any criminal complaints will be referred to the host police agency when criminal charges are warranted.

This Act is a step in the right direction when dealing with the Cyberbullying culture on the internet but it doesn’t replace the good old fashioned monitoring of children’s activities by parents. The internet is a powerful educational tool and parents must learn what is out there in order to protect their children. Parents should always know what types of websites, chat rooms or emails that their child is involved with. Computers should be placed in well travelled areas such as the family room so that parents can keep an eye on computer usage.

While filtering programs may be able to block or filter out unwanted websites, parents should not rely solely on computer software. All children should be educated that meeting a stranger from the internet is dangerous and that people on the internet will often portray themselves differently online than what they are in real life. Children should be aware to not give out any personal information online and that downloading files can cause viruses and spyware to be installed on a computer.

Police agencies also have seen an increase in “sexting” incidents in Canada over the last few years. Sexting can be defined as young person’s creating and sending sexual images to their peers via social media or other electronic devices. Sometimes these images may meet the definition of child pornography in the Criminal Code. Child pornography is any photographic, film, or video that shows a person under the age of 18 years engaged in an explicit sexual activity or the dominant characteristic of the depiction, for the sexual purpose is a sexual organ of a person under the age of 18 years. Youths should be warned that they may face criminal charges by possessing, posting or sharing sexting images.

Education is the key to keep our children safe. Parents have to take an active part in their child’s life.

If you or someone you know is being cyberbullied, please contact your local police department. The CyberSCAN unit can also be contacted at (855)702-8324