



CHILDREN FIRST
CANADA



The State of Childhood in Canada in the Digital Age

Online harms become the number
one threat facing children in Canada

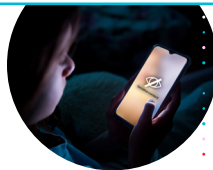
Since 2018, the *Raising Canada* report has examined the top 10 threats facing children each year. It helps leaders and people across Canada understand the challenges children face, centres young people's voices, and recommends changes to protect and strengthen children's rights. While some progress has been made, Canada still has important work to do to ensure every child can grow up safe and healthy.

TOP 10 Threats to Childhood in Canada

THREAT

1

Online Harms



Online harms are now the biggest threat facing kids and teens in Canada. Every month, **more than 100,000 reports are made about children being abused online in Canada.**¹ Reports to police about **people hurting children online increased by 347% between 2014 and 2024.**² Harmful online groups, such as 764, are also trying to reach kids through the apps and games they use.³ The tragedy in Tumbler Ridge showed how **AI chatbots and other online activity can lead to serious harm in real life.**⁴ It also showed the need for major technology companies to be held accountable and for strong safety systems to be put in place.

More than 80% of Canadian teenagers support a minimum age requirement for social media accounts and believe companies must do more to enforce them.⁵

THREAT

2

Unintentional and Preventable Injuries

Injuries that can be prevented are the number one cause of death for children and youth in Canada.⁶

Each year, kids under 10 have more than 180,000 hospital visits and over 4,500 hospital stays.^{7,8}

Caring for these injuries could cost about **\$6.1 billion in 2026.**^{7,8}

From 2020 to 2024, **2,068 children passed away because of preventable injuries.**⁹ Falls, road crashes, and sports injuries are the most common ways children and teens get hurt.^{7,10}



THREAT

3

Violence against Children/Child Abuse

Violence can happen in person, online, or at home. Two out of three Canadians have experienced abuse before their 15th birthday.¹¹ **Nearly 1 in 2 kids say someone has treated them in a way that made them feel afraid or bad about themselves.**¹² Almost **1 in 4 say someone has hurt their body on purpose**, and **1 in 20 say they have faced other types of violence.**¹²

Some groups of children face even greater risk because of unfair treatment and discrimination. Indigenous children **make up less than 8% of the Canadian child population, yet 1 in 2 children in foster care are Indigenous.**^{13,14} **Black children are twice as likely to be checked by welfare** than white children, even when situations are similar.¹⁵

The internet can also be used to trick and hurt children. Kids can be **bullied, pressured, contacted by strangers, and secretly watched.**¹⁶ This can happen in games, social media, and other online spaces that seem safe.¹⁶



THREAT

4

Poverty and Food Insecurity

More families are struggling to pay for food, shelter, and other basic needs. In 2023, **over 1.4 million children did not have enough money for the things they need.**^{17,18} In 2024, **2.5 million children in 10 provinces lived in homes where there was not always enough money for food.**¹⁸

Some kids are more likely to grow up without enough money. This includes Indigenous and Black children, and children new to Canada.^{19,20,21,22,23}

Some children who live in one-parent homes may also struggle to have money.²⁴ **Growing up without enough money can make it harder for children to learn, stay healthy, and feel their best.**²⁵



THREAT

5

Poor Mental Health

Most kids and teens struggle with their mental health. Pressure from social media, money troubles, and long waits to get help can make things even harder.

About 70% of youth under 18 experience signs of mental health challenges.²⁶ Getting help early can make a big difference, before problems become overwhelming. Suicide is also a serious concern for children and youth, with hundreds of lives lost each year.²⁷ Poor mental health can look different for every child, and each one deserves care and support.



THREAT

6

Vaccine-preventable Illnesses

Canada is seeing its largest measles outbreak in years.

More than 1,000 people have had measles this year.²⁸

Almost 1 in 2 parents with kids under 5 years old feel somewhat unsure about vaccines for their kids.²⁹

Some families also have a harder time getting access to vaccines.³⁰ About 95% of people in Canada need to have their vaccines to stop diseases like measles from spreading, but only 83% of children are fully vaccinated by age seven.³¹



THREAT

7

Bullying

Bullying can happen online or in person and is a serious problem affecting most kids and teens.

In the last year, about **7 in 10 youth aged 12-17 were bullied at least once.** About **1 in 6 said they have been bullied online.**^{32,33,34} Bullying can leave

kids feeling sad, worried, or stressed and can lead to more serious mental health struggles, including suicide.³⁵



THREAT

8

Systemic Racism and Discrimination

Racism and hate crimes are on the rise and harm children and communities across Canada. Hate crimes happen when someone hurts another person through words or actions because of their race, religion, or other aspects of who they are. **Hate crimes against Muslim people have increased by 173% between 2022 and 2024.**³⁷ **Hate crimes against Jewish people have increased by 145% since 2022.**³⁶ In one study, **40% of Black youth aged 14- 24 in Canada said they faced racism at school.**³⁸ Racism in schools can make kids feel unsafe, worried, and sad. This can really affect how children feel and learn.^{38,39}



THREAT

9

Limited Physical Activity and Play

Less than half (37%) of kids and teens get enough physical activity.^{40,41}

One reason is that many children spend too much time on screens. **More than 70% spend more time on screens than they should.**^{40,41} This can affect how kids think, feel, and grow, making it harder to stay healthy.^{40,41} Too much screen time can leave less time for active play, time outdoors, and time with friends.^{40, 42} Other reasons for kids not getting enough activity include busy schedules, cost, safety concerns, fewer places to play, less time outdoors, and extreme weather.



10 Climate Change

Canada is warming twice as fast as the rest of the world.^{43,44} **Children are more affected by climate change than adults.** This includes things like really hot weather, wildfires, and floods.⁴⁵

Climate change can also make it harder to find enough food, clean water, and other basic needs.⁴⁵

About 8 in 10 youth say that climate change has affected their mental health. This can make many youth feel stressed, worried, or sad, and make it harder to focus.^{46,47}



The School Crisis



Schools in Canada are seeing more kids miss school, and more violence is happening. Many children are also having a hard time learning. **Canadian students from kindergarten to grade 12 miss about one day of school each week.**⁴⁸ The reasons parents gave for missing school have changed over time. In 2022, parents often reported that their children missed school because of COVID-19.⁴⁸ In 2023, more parents said their children were avoiding going to school or did not want to go.⁴⁸

Many teachers are worried about using AI and other new devices in the classroom. They worry that children are relying too much on technology to think for them.⁴⁸ This can make it harder for children to focus, think, and learn on their own.^{49,50}

In Ontario, **reports of school violence have more than doubled** between 2017 and 2023.⁵¹ **Three out of every four teachers in Ontario say school violence has increased since they started teaching.**⁵² Bullying and feeling unsafe at school can make it harder for children to attend school. When children see violence, or feel unsafe at school, it can be harder for them to keep attending.^{53,54} These experiences may also make it harder for them to finish school, keep a job, or stay safe later in life.^{53,54}

Calls to Action

- 1 Strengthen and Pass Bill C-34 to Enact the Safe Social Media Act: Strengthen and Pass Bill C-34, the Safe Social Media Act.** Social media bans and age limits are being discussed, but young people need other protections too. Online platforms need clear safety rules. Companies also need to prove they are keeping young people safe. If they cannot do that, their products shouldn't be available to young people. These rules need to cover social media, messaging, gaming, AI, and other online spaces. The government also needs to help. It can give children, caregivers, teachers, and health workers simple information and tools. These tools can help people understand and use online spaces safely.
- 2 Pass Bill S-212, the National Strategy for Children and Youth Act.** The government should work with families, youth and other groups across Canada to make a plan to protect children's rights and support their well-being. National and provincial governments should work together with children and youth, parents and educators, and others who support young people to design the plan and put it into action. That plan should help improve the lives of children as they grow, from babies to young adults.
- 3 Help children by all levels of government working together.** Governments, health care systems, schools, and communities should work together to protect children and invest money in solutions that will make their lives better. The top 10 threats to children are all inter-connected, so we need to work on them together, not one at a time. More support should also go to children and communities that need it most.
- 4 Join the Movement to Put Children First.** We all have a role in keeping children safe. Governments need to put laws in place to protect children. Technology companies need to design safety products and take responsibility when they fail. Parents, teachers, and healthcare workers can help too. Children and youth have the right to be heard and should have a voice in decisions that affect their lives.



Canada's future starts with kids.

Let's put kids first and make Canada a place where every child is safe, healthy, heard, and able to thrive.



Go to www.childrenfirstcanada.org to sign the Raising Canada pledge and take action today.



Scan the QR code to view references