

PARENTING IN THE ONLINE WORLD



CANADIAN CENTRE *for* CHILD PROTECTION®
Helping families. Protecting children.



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ProtectChildren.ca

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The safety tips and other information are general in nature. They are based on our experiences in operating Cybertip.ca and we believe they are prudent and effective for the majority of situations. They do not constitute legal or other advice. Readers must continually assess all tips and information in light of their own circumstances, the age and maturity level of the child they wish to protect, advice they may receive from police (if any), and any other relevant factors.

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Why youth are vulnerable online

The harm facing children and youth online is amplified by ever-evolving digital platforms and emerging trends. With children and youth spending increasing time online, they have become more vulnerable to online exploitation and victimization. From the moment they begin watching adults around them use devices – including adults publicly posting pictures of and information about their children (known as sharenting) – there are risks that parents should consider for children and youth of all ages in order to increase their safety and privacy online.

Adolescence is marked by significant developmental changes and enormous growth. The brain is becoming more efficient, and it is an exciting time in youths' development. With this period of growth comes the hallmarks of adolescence where risk taking can become more appealing and decision making is increasingly impulsive.

Youth development includes:

- Dominating emotions
- Increased curiosity and impulsivity
- Sensation seeking behaviours
- Sexual curiosity and deepening relationships
- Increased sensitivity to embarrassment
- Increased independence from parents to explore their worlds

Youths' decisions are not always made with long-term consequences in mind but rather driven by their feelings in the moment. It is easy for youth to encounter risky or dangerous situations and there is often increased reluctance to tell anyone about something if it is embarrassing. This is especially true when it comes to toxic shame experienced from online sexual victimization and violence.



RESOURCES FOR YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Need Now.ca

NeedHelpNow.ca is a resource for youth (and their families) if they are being targeted by the non-consensual distribution of intimate images, or have experienced luring, sextortion, or other forms of online sexual violence.

cybertip!ca®

Cybertip.ca is Canada's tipline for reporting the sexual abuse and exploitation of children online. The tipline receives and processes reports from the public about potentially illegal material online, such as child sexual abuse material, child trafficking, shared intimate images, online luring, and other areas of child sexual exploitation. Cybertip.ca also offers education, prevention, and awareness material free-of-charge to families, schools, law enforcement, and other stakeholders to help keep Canadians safe.

cybertip!ca™ ALERTS

Cybertip.ca releases periodic Alerts that raise awareness around trends in online harm and emerging technology concerns they witness through the tipline.

Risks online

Phones and other devices allow teens to easily and regularly connect with others. The perception of anonymity and privacy online increases a young person's willingness to share personal information, leaving them vulnerable to victimization. The internet is not a regulated space and youth can get in over their head very quickly online. Online sexual violence is not something youth can reasonably manage on their own, and a growing proportion of youth are being aggressively targeted and harmed online. Parents are encouraged to talk with their youth about online risks and help identify safe adults that can support them if something concerning happens.



Reports to the Canadian Centre for Child Protection have shown an escalation in aggressive tactics being used to coerce and harm youth online. Youth being able to problem solve and knowing where to access help are important skills when trying to navigate online situations safely.



ONLINE SEXUAL VIOLENCE INCLUDES:

NON-CONSENSUAL DISTRIBUTION OF AN INTIMATE IMAGE (NCDII)

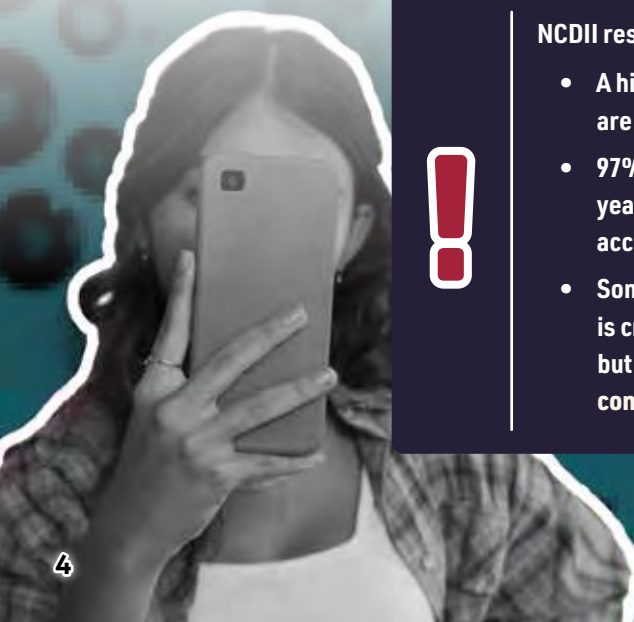
NCDII means an intimate image of another person is shared without their consent. Sharing could include:

- Posting the image online
- Sending the image to someone else
- Selling the image
- Making the image available
- Advertising the image
- Publishing the image

Under criminal law, an intimate image is a picture or video where the person is nude or exposing their genitals, buttocks, or breasts, or is engaged in explicit sexual activity. When the image or video was taken, the person had a reasonable expectation of privacy, and a reasonable expectation of privacy remained when the image or video was shared. Cybertip.ca and NeedHelpNow.ca can offer assistance when the image meets this definition and for other types of harmful imagery of youth.

NCDII research shows:

- A high percentage of youth are victimized by peers
- 97% of victims are 12-17 years old; 90% of the accused are 12-17 years old
- Sometimes the content is created consensually, but the sharing is not consensual



CASE EXAMPLE:

Raj's girlfriend Amelia sent him a photo of her in her underwear, posing in front of a mirror. Raj's friends had told him about receiving "nudes" from their partners, but this was the first one he'd ever gotten. His friends made it seem like a normal part of a relationship. Amelia asked him to send one back, so Raj took a photo in bed in his underwear and sent it to her. The next day at school, Raj's friends were laughing and told him that they saw his nude. Raj was embarrassed and felt panicked. He had only sent the photo to Amelia; how did his friends see it? He asked Amelia about it, and she admitted she had sent it to a group chat with a few of her friends. She made them promise not to show anyone else, but they must have sent it to others. Amelia apologized but said she didn't think it was a big deal.

Raj was afraid to tell his parents or another adult, so he reached out to NeedHelpNow.ca. He was connected to the support services team, who listened to Raj and gave him immediate steps to follow to help him manage his panic. The support team ensured Raj's image was uploaded to Project Arachnid, a tool designed to help detect if Raj's image is ever posted online and help remove it. Raj felt supported and more confident about returning to school, knowing that there were people by his side to help protect him.

Whether or not a scenario like this meets the criminal definition of NCDII, NeedHelpNow.ca and Cybertip.ca can offer assistance for youth who have had harmful imagery distributed, or fear this may happen.

A man with a beard, wearing a striped shirt and a jacket, is looking down at a smartphone in his hands. The image is in grayscale with a white outline around the man's figure. The background is a blurred cityscape.

ONLINE LURING (SEXUAL SOLICITATION OF YOUTH)

Online luring is when a person (typically an adult, but not always) communicates with a child or youth through technology, like texting, direct messaging, or chatting on an app, game, or website to make it easier to commit a specific sexual offence against them.

An example of a communication that may be reported as luring is if the person asks, hints at, or tries to convince the child or youth to create or send naked or semi-naked sexual pictures or videos.

Adults looking to exploit youth use several tactics to lure or “groom” teens online, such as

- sending sexually explicit material
- misrepresenting who they are (e.g., saying they are also a teen)
- attempting to establish a romantic relationship

Youth can be manipulated to either meet the offender in person or send sexually explicit material, which may then be used to blackmail or extort the teen for more sexual images or money (also known as sextortion).

Guise of a romantic relationship

It is understandable how youth can quickly get in over their heads online and need help. They may not even be aware that the conversation has become sexual or feel they are in a romantic exchange. The chat is often nuanced and gradually transgresses to normalize and desensitize youth to the conversation. This includes things such as "Send me your picture"; "Do you have a pic of you at the beach"; "Do you have a girlfriend or boyfriend – they are so lucky"; "You're hot"; etc.

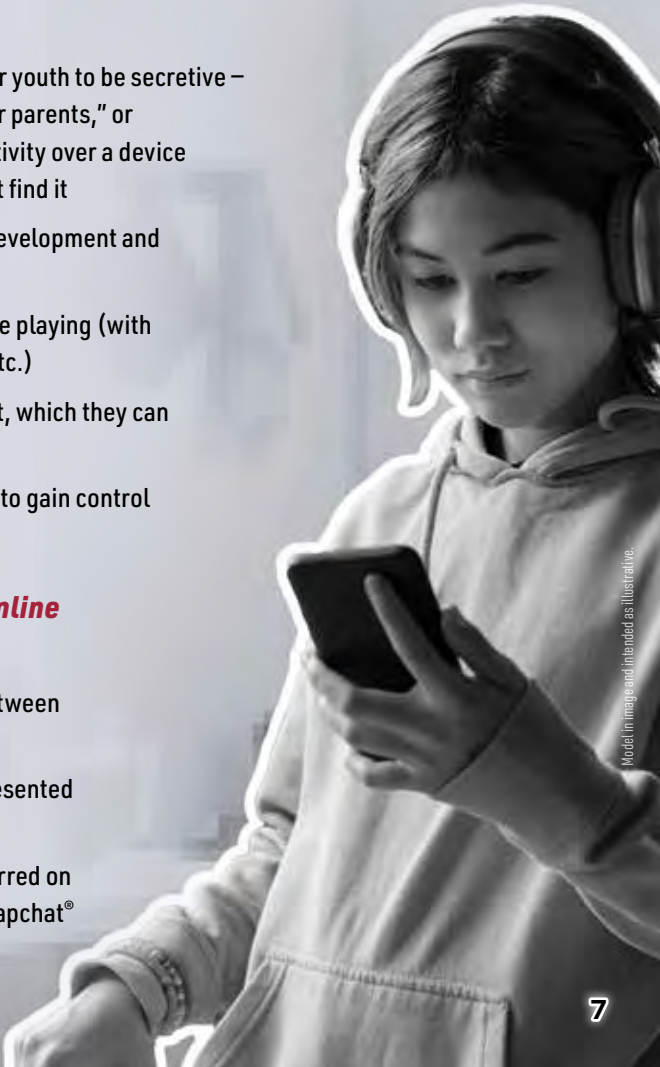
Some communication like those described above are criminal. Others may not meet a criminal threshold but are still concerning.

Coercion tactics:

- instructing the child or youth to be secretive – saying, "Don't tell your parents," or engaging in sexual activity over a device where parents will not find it
- asking about sexual development and sexual activity
- engaging in sexual role playing (with characters, avatars, etc.)
- engaging in video chat, which they can then secretly record
- threatening the youth to gain control and compliance

Research involving online luring shows:

- victims are usually between 12 to 17 years of age
- females are overrepresented as victims
- 70% of incidents occurred on Instagram® and/or Snapchat®



Model in image and intended as illustrative.

CASE EXAMPLE:

Nat joined a chat room online that talked about one of her favourite games. In the chat room, people posted updates about the game, things that could be improved, and some of their favourite plays. People who had joined the chat room and were online at the same time could talk in group chats. Nat was talking in the group chat one day about a challenging part of the game when someone messaged her privately. She recognized the username from the group chat she was in, Ali_plays29. Ali said she wanted to be Nat's friend and talk more about the game. She asked for Nat's social media username, so they could chat on a different app. Nat and Ali chatted on the app together for a few days. They had a lot in common. They were both 12, loved the same actors, and played the guitar. Ali asked Nat to send a video of her playing the guitar. Nat recorded a video of her practicing a new song then sent it to Ali. Ali said Nat was really pretty and really good at playing and said she'd send a video back. Nat opened the video and quickly closed it. The video was of a naked man doing something weird. Nat asked Ali why she sent her that video. Ali apologized and said she thought it was funny. Ali said that if Nat wasn't so immature she could watch the video and see why it was funny. Nat felt uncomfortable but she liked talking to Ali.

Nat reached out to Cybertip.ca for information on what to do about Ali. The team helped Nat understand that her feelings were valid – Ali did something weird. Cybertip.ca staff walked Nat through how to tell her parents about the situation and they worked together to create a safety plan so Nat wouldn't have contact with Ali online again.

Whether or not a scenario like this meets the criminal definition of luring, NeedHelpNow.ca and Cybertip.ca can offer assistance to youth faced with concerning interactions online.

SEXTORTION

Sextortion may involve individuals coercing youth into sending sexual images or engaging in sexual acts via livestreaming. These individuals then blackmail the youth by threatening to distribute the sexual images or videos if the youth does not provide more or pay them.

How does sextortion happen?

Demands for money vs. Sexual content

- Sextorters convince their victims to exchange sexual content, and often are the first to share a sexual photo. The targeted youth then sends a sexual photo or video, or are tricked into exposing themselves or engaging in a sexual act over a livestream and being unknowingly recorded.
- Immediately after receiving the sexual content, the sextorter makes their demands. If a young girl is victimized, the sextorter typically demands additional sexual photos and videos. If the sextorter targets a boy, they almost always demand money instead.
- The sextorter will try to intimidate their victim by threatening to leak the content online or share it directly with the youth's friends or family if they do not comply. It is common for the offender to share screenshots of the youth's contacts or other identifying information (school, home address) to terrify the youth into sending sexual content or money.
 - If the youth gives in, the sextorter will demand more sexual content or money.
 - In financial sextortion scenarios, the exchange between youth and the sextorter can last several hours, or, in some cases, as little as 20 minutes.
 - In sextortion cases targeting girls, communication typically takes place over longer periods of time.

What are other tactics used by sextorters?

- Targeting siblings or friends connected to the youth
- Increasing the level of aggression if a youth does not quickly comply – for example, threatening to ruin the victim's life or hurt their family or pets
- Creating several accounts to make it seem like more than one person is targeting the youth
- Threatening to share the sexual image or video with a school or many schools
- Threatening to share the sexual image or video with family, friends, newspapers, news outlets, and TV stations



What should youth do if they are being sextorted?

- Immediately stop talking to the sextorter
- Never pay money or send additional sexual photos. Do NOT give in to threats. In the many reports Cybertip.ca has seen, responding makes the harassment continue
- Screenshot all the messages with the sextorter
- Block the sextorter
 - ▶ **Note** – youth may be extremely afraid of blocking the sextorter because they believe this will trigger their images being leaked online, or sent to people they know. Support them and reassure them that, in the majority of cases, the sextorter does not release the images, and in the rare case that they do, there are services like Cybertip.ca and NeedHelpNow.ca that can assist with image removal online.
- Speak to a safe adult for support
- Go to **NeedHelpNow.ca** for support
- Report to **Cybertip.ca**. Concerns about sextortion are also forwarded to police

How Cybertip.ca can help

In many cases, Cybertip.ca reaches out to services like Instagram and Snapchat to intervene in the moment to help get the account of the sextorter disabled.

Cybertip.ca staff work closely with the Support Services team to assist youth in crisis and help youth get through the incident.

CASE EXAMPLE

Gabriel received a follow request on Instagram from a girl named Julia. She had mutual followers to him and looked pretty in her profile picture. Gabriel accepted her request and followed her back. Julia messaged him and said she thought Gabriel was cute and wanted to get to know him. Julia asked Gabriel if he had ever had sex. Gabriel said no. Julia then sent Gabriel a nude photo and asked him to send one back. Gabriel did and moments after Julia started sending Gabriel weird messages. She said that she was going to leak his nude, send it to his whole family, his school, and everyone he knows if he didn't pay her immediately. Julia sent Gabriel screenshots of his followers on Instagram. Gabriel pleaded with Julia saying he didn't have any money to send her and begged her not to send his photo. Julia continued to threaten him, sending him screenshots of her about to send his photo to his friends on Instagram. Gabriel sent her \$100 through e-transfer and said that was all the money he had and continued to beg her not to send the photo. Julia said that wasn't enough and continued messaging him.

Gabriel submitted a report to Cybertip.ca. Through their assessment, Cybertip.ca found this was not a female youth that lived in Gabriel's community, but an organized group from Nigeria. Gabriel's report was forwarded to police, and Gabriel received support and help with safety planning from the Support Services team.

DEEPPAKES

Deepfakes involve videos, images, or audio recordings that look or sound completely realistic, but have been altered using artificial intelligence. Faces can be super-imposed, expressions can be manipulated, and separate elements can be combined to produce something entirely new. These are all hoaxes that are commonly used to show someone doing or saying something they did not say or do.

CASE EXAMPLE

Danny found an app he thinks is funny online. If you upload a photo of a person, the app can remove their clothes and make them appear naked. Danny used the app to create fake images of his friends and sent the photos to them in a group chat. They found it funny but his friends who were in the photos weren't happy. The photos were sent around their class at school and later sent to other classes. Danny never meant for other people outside of his friend group to see the images.

Danny's principal found out about the images and told his parents. Danny's parents connected with Cybertip.ca and explained the situation. Danny felt really badly that people were misusing the images of his friends and wanted to do anything he could to help take them down. Cybertip.ca supported Danny, his family, and his friends who were in the images, and assisted with image removal online.



IMPACTS FROM SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION ONLINE

The impacts of online sexual violence can be as serious as child sexual victimization offline. The knowledge of sexual pictures existing, and/or knowledge of them having been distributed potentially complicates the impact of sexual victimization even further. This can lead to increased feelings of self-blame and higher levels of post-traumatic stress symptoms.

IMPACTS CAN INCLUDE:

- psychological distress (worry, stress, anxiety, self-blame)
- self-harming or suicidal behaviour
- sleeping problems
- trust issues
- impaired relationships
- difficulties at school

SOME COPING STRATEGIES MAY INCLUDE:

- confiding in a trusted friend or someone trustworthy
- staying offline
- seeking professional mental health care
- reporting to [Cybertip.ca](https://www.cybertip.ca) or seeking out support through [NeedHelpNow.ca](https://www.needhelpnow.ca)

What parents need to know

HAVE CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUR CHILDREN EARLY AND OFTEN

Approach conversations openly with an interest to understand what they are encountering online. It is important to engage in conversations about online behaviours without judgement, blame, or an overreaction. Responses such as “I thought you knew better” or “why would you do that?” are less helpful as they could add to shame and reduce the likelihood the youth will come to you in the future should something happen to them.

TALK ABOUT RIGHTS

Explain they have a right to be safe, to privacy, to bodily autonomy, and sexual integrity. Share with them that you want to know if someone violates these rights so you can help them. Let them know you are in their corner and will be there to walk with them through tough situations.

APPROACH CONVERSATION WITH CURIOSITY

Talking about online risks are key topics to raise with your child. Consider starting by asking your child questions about what they know:

- “Have you heard of non-consensual nude sharing?”
- “Do you know what sextortion is?”
- “What do you think about sexting?”

Alter the conversation based on their response. During these conversations, reinforce the idea that not everyone is who they say they are online. People can easily be deceived online.



GENERATE “WHAT IF” SCENARIOS

Discuss how to deal with difficult situations online and practice generating possible answers to increase the likelihood they will be able to respond safely and tell someone if something concerning happens online. Things such as:

- “Who could you turn to for help if someone created a sexually explicit photo of you using AI?”
- “If you are livestreaming with someone, are you doing something on screen, that, if recorded, could be misused?”
- “Before sharing someone’s video or picture, ask yourself, could this harm you or someone else? Is it safe? Ethical? Is it legal?”

Teens learn more from solving problems and practicing decision making. They benefit from opportunities to apply learning to resolve real challenges. Invite them to consider implications, causes, and consequences, and involve them in choosing safe choices.

TAKE A TECH BREAK

Discuss how to disconnect daily – such as overnight, mealtimes, and breaks during the day. Set limits and boundaries around device usage.

KNOW THE LAW IN CANADA

Canada has made a commitment to ensure that all children are treated with dignity and respect. Children are entitled to equal benefit and protection of the law without discrimination. These protections are found in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, other Canadian laws, and international laws.

These laws help ensure that children are protected from harm, have access to basic needs, and have a voice to participate in society. There are several Canadian criminal laws that may intersect when dealing with online sexual violence depending on your circumstances.

Criminal offences are described in a general way. This is not a complete list, depending on your circumstances other offences may apply (the actual offences are defined in the *Criminal Code* of Canada).

ACTS THAT VIOLATE PRIVACY

- **Non-consensual distribution of an intimate image:** If someone has an intimate picture or video of you that was created in private circumstances when you had a reasonable expectation of privacy, and that person knowingly posts it online or shares it with someone else knowing that you would not consent to that (or being reckless about whether you would consent to it), the person could be charged.
- **Voyeurism:** Secretly observing or recording a person who would reasonably expect their actions are private if that person is:
 - ▶ in a place where one might change or remove clothing, or engage in sexual activity (e.g., bedroom, bathroom, changing room, cabin, tent); or
 - ▶ all or partially naked or engaged in sexual activity at the time, and the purpose is to see or record them in such a state; or
 - ▶ where the observing or recording is done for a sexual reason.

ACTS THAT MAKE OTHERS FEEL UNSAFE

- **Harassment:** Doing or saying something that makes someone fear for their safety or the safety of someone else (e.g., threatening conduct, stalking, repeatedly texting, emailing, or trying to connect).
- **Extortion (blackmail):** When someone intends to get something by using threats or violence (e.g., pushing, shoving, yelling) to make, or try to make, a person do something.
 - ▶ **Note:** Sextortion is a type of extortion and this charge could apply.
- **Uttering threats:** Threatening to hurt someone, damage their property, or hurt an animal they own and intending to cause fear in the person receiving the threat.
- **Intimidation:** Being violent, stalking, or making threats of violence against a person, someone in the person's family or the person's property, to get a person to do something, or stop doing something.
- **Counselling to commit suicide:** Encouraging or aiding another person to die by suicide.





UNWANTED OR ILLEGAL SEXUAL CONTACT

- **Online luring:** A situation where one person (typically an adult, but not always) communicates with a young person through technology (like texting, direct messaging, or chatting through an app, game, or website) to make it easier to commit a specific sexual offence against that young person.
- **Making sexually explicit material available to a person under 18:** Showing or sending material, like pornography, to a child to make it easier to commit a sexual offence against the child.
- **Sexual exploitation:** When a 16- or 17-year-old is touched by or encouraged to touch themselves, or any other person, for a sexual purpose by a person who:
 - ▶ is in a position of trust or authority (e.g. parent, guardian, teacher, coach) over the young person
 - ▶ the 16- or 17-year-old is dependent upon in some way
 - ▶ is exploiting the young person in some way
- **Invitation to sexual touching:** Encouraging a person under 16 to touch themselves or someone else for a sexual purpose (whether in person or online). It includes indirect touching (with an object, for example).
 - ▶ **Note:** When both people are close enough in age AND have lawfully consented, charges may not be laid.
- **Sexual interference:** Touching any part of the body of a person under the age of 16 years, for a sexual purpose, with a part of the body or an object.
 - ▶ **Note:** When both people are close enough in age AND have lawfully consented, charges may not be laid.

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