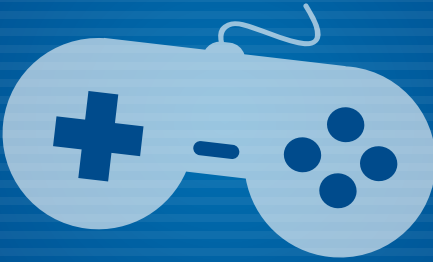


# KEEPING TEENS SAFE FROM ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION



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# HOW CAN PARENTS KEEP TEENS SAFE FROM ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION?

The Internet and new technologies have become central to teens' lives. While these technologies offer a variety of benefits (ranging from social connections to education and entertainment), they also come with risks that increase teens' vulnerability toward sexual exploitation. When using technology, youth are likely to experiment in ways they typically wouldn't face-to-face, including who they talk with and what they talk about. The need for acceptance and belonging makes teens particularly vulnerable to individuals who may be seeking opportunities to take advantage of them. In some cases, there are adults who have harmful intentions or who have sexual interests in children, who use technology to try to develop a friendship or relationship with the child in order to exploit the young person.

The perception of anonymity and privacy online can also impact a young person's willingness to share personal information, leaving them open to manipulation by others. Online conversations may initially appear as harmless, friendly banter but progress to sexual conversations. Understandably, youth may feel flattered by the attention and continue to engage in these types of conversations as "fun play." In other instances, the young person may really believe that s/he is friends or in a relationship with the person s/he is communicating with online. The interaction; however, may then escalate to the adult sending the teen sexually explicit material via text, email, social networking sites, video games, etc. in an attempt to normalize the activity. Live chat, videos or webcams may be introduced for the purpose of receiving non-sexual pictures and progress to nude or partially-nude pictures, and possibly sexually-explicit images of the teen. If the individual successfully convinces the youth to send a picture/video, this content may later be used to coerce and control the teen. Teens' brains are wired for social interacting and bonding with others. Their need for acceptance and belonging strongly drives their decisions.



**Persistence** is a common tactic used by adults who are interested in sexually exploiting children. Repetitive exposure to requests can blur personal boundaries and begin to normalize inappropriate behaviours. Teens may first resist requests for sexual images/videos but over time can be manipulated into complying. A common mistake made by youth is believing that if they give in just once, the requests for sexual information will end – which is never the case. Advise your teen that sharing sexual information online is never a good idea. Complying with sexual requests typically makes these types of situations worse!



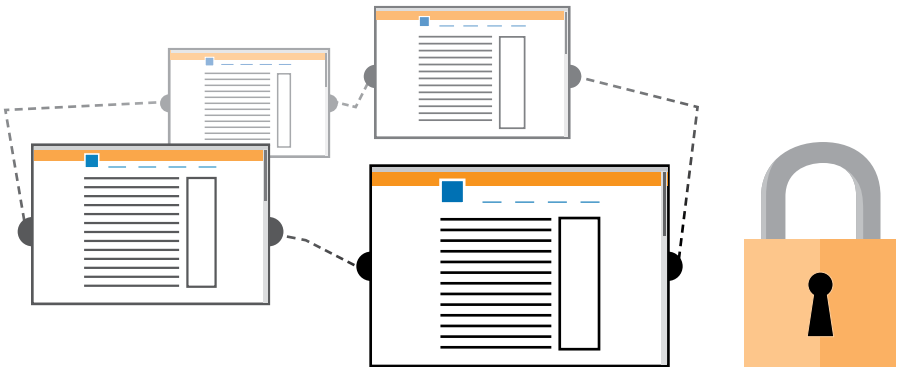
**As a parent, there are proactive steps you can take to help reduce the risk of your child being sexually exploited on the Internet. The following chapters include important topics you should discuss with your teen on a regular basis.**

# 1

## **Discussing Online Activities and the Popular Sites and Apps Used**

As a parent, it is important to remain informed about the spaces online where your child may be negatively impacted. Regularly engage in conversation with your child about the applications s/he is using to connect with other individuals. Risks exist anytime children open themselves up to communicating with others on the Internet.

Consider platforms such as social networking sites (e.g. Twitter®, Facebook®) and chat sites (e.g. Omegle™, Tinychat™), including live stream video chat (content delivered live over the Internet) often utilizing a webcam. Ensure that mobile apps (e.g. Instagram®, Snapchat™) are discussed; including ones that your child may also access through a desktop (e.g. Facebook®) as the features offered will likely vary from its web-based application.



## General questions to ask your teen about her/his online activities:

- » Who do you video chat with online?
- » Who are your friends on social media and how do you know them?
- » Have you ever been asked for information/content that made you feel uncomfortable? If yes, have your child describe the event.
- » Have any of your friends talked about a difficult situation s/he faced on the Internet? What are your views around what happened to your friend?
- » What are the most common things you share with your friends and others you are connected to?
- » What are the most unusual requests you have received online? How did you handle the situation(s)?
- » Have you activated any of the privacy settings or other controls on your accounts?



## After you have a better understanding of what your teen is doing online, consider reviewing:

- » **PARENTAL CONTROLS** – If your child is using a smartphone, some devices allow parents to limit access to specific apps, social media sites, Internet content and features available within the device.
- » **CHAT OPTIONS** – Some services allow users to restrict who can chat with them to only those on their contact or “friends” list rather than being open to all users of the service.
- » **INFORMATION ENTERED INTO PROFILES** - When creating a profile on a social networking site, app or online game, many services require certain fields to be completed but allow users to choose the information they enter into others.
- » **PRIVACY SETTINGS** – Some services provide privacy settings that allow users to limit what is shared with others.



[https://www.cybertip.ca/pdfs/C3P\\_SafetySheet\\_Apps-short\\_en.pdf](https://www.cybertip.ca/pdfs/C3P_SafetySheet_Apps-short_en.pdf)

# 2

## Discussing the Qualities of Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships

In an effort to reduce the risk of teens being sexually exploited, it is important to teach them the difference between healthy versus controlling relationships. When a child is sexually exploited there is typically a distortion of the relationship and a misuse of trust by the offender. In order to help teens who encounter adults online who present a risk to exploit them, they need to know how to identify concerning behaviour and how to respond safely.



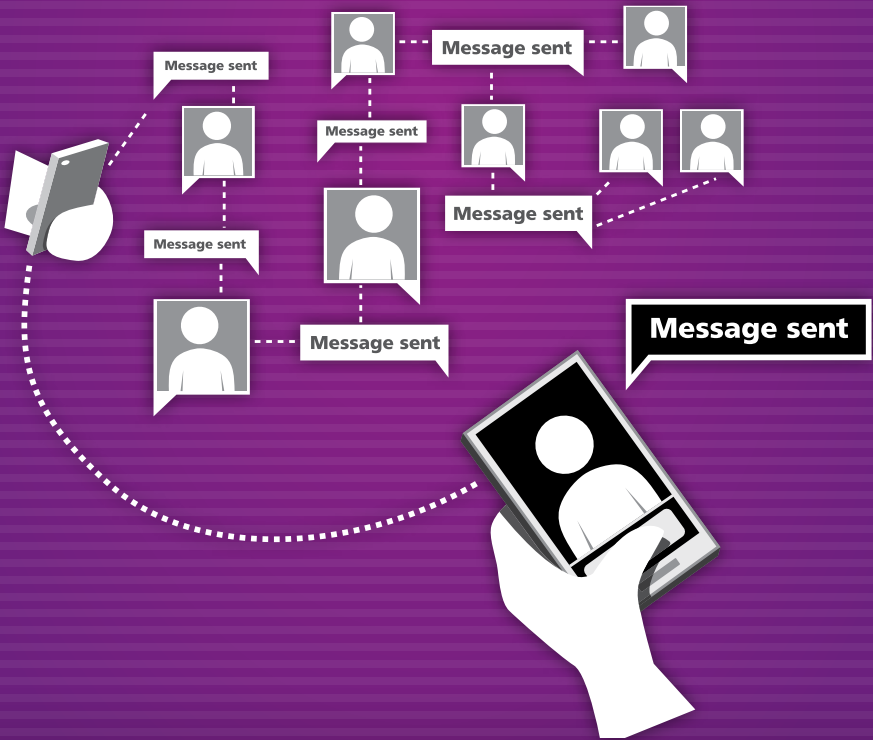
### Talk to your teen and identify concerning behaviours that s/he should pay attention to such as:

- » Asking sexual or overly personal questions.
- » Sending or asking for sexual content (i.e. intimate pictures or videos).
- » Using pity/guilt to gain compliance.
- » Using information shared in confidence to try to embarrass or hurt someone.
- » Offering someone money or gifts to do something s/he is uncomfortable with.
- » Not taking no for an answer (persistence).
- » Threats and blackmail.



**Together, discuss what problems might arise from activities, such as:**

- » A person sharing intimate pictures/videos with someone else online.
- » A person receiving intimate pictures/videos from someone else online.
- » A person using the Internet/electronic devices to meet up with people s/he first meets online.
- » A person sharing personal information about her/his insecurities, or problems and worries, with someone who s/he doesn't know well.





## Did You Know?

*In Canada, any electronic communication between an adult and a child that is, or could be perceived as, sexual in nature may be illegal. The criminal offence is known as online luring, and is defined as a person (usually an adult) using telecommunications to communicate with someone they know, or believe to be, under the age of 18 years in order to make it easier to commit a sexual offence against that child, or abduct the child. Online luring should be reported to police or [Cybertip.ca](http://Cybertip.ca).*

# 3

## Discussing the Importance of Adults Demonstrating Healthy Boundaries with Teens

Talk with your teen about the importance of appropriate interactions between children and adults. Consider reviewing the following with your teen:

- » Explain that adults should not seek friendship with teens or give them any type of sexual attention. This is inappropriate behaviour and at a minimum, shows poor judgement - making it unsafe to interact with that adult.
- » The role of an adult is to protect and support children and youth. There is an imbalance of power between an adult and a child. Children do not have the same level of knowledge or experience, nor are they developmentally ready to compete with an adult mind. Talk with your child about the importance of seeking help from you if s/he is uncomfortable with any exchange with an adult. Even if s/he is embarrassed, reinforce that you are there to help.





## Reality Check around Adults using the Blackmail Tactic on Teenagers

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*Youth often feel they are capable of managing a situation involving blackmail. This is rarely the case. Teach your teenager to **NEVER RESPOND** to threats or extortion.*

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### **Developmentally, teenagers are vulnerable to being blackmailed by others. Reasons for this include:**

- » They are still developing socially and emotionally, and therefore it can be easy to confuse, control or coerce them.
- » They are taught to respect and listen to adults.
- » They do not have a developed understanding of sexuality.
- » They cannot interpret or identify an adult's intent and often assume responsibility when issues arise. This increases the chances that they won't talk to a safe adult if they are involved in a troubling situation.

# 4

## Discussing Direct and Indirect Ways of Getting Out of Uncomfortable Situations

It can be very difficult for youth to get out of a situation that becomes uncomfortable or potentially unsafe, especially if they have an existing relationship with the person of concern. It may be overwhelming or feel too risky to be direct and therefore it can be beneficial to explore direct and indirect ways s/he can get out of uncomfortable situations.

### Examples include:

- » **BEING DIRECT** – “I don’t want to.” “No way.” “Forget it.”
- » **POLITELY REFUSING** – “No thanks, I am going to pass.”
- » **MAKING A JOKE** – Sometimes humour can help change the topic and ease your child out of the situation.
- » **GIVING A REASON WHY IT’S NOT A GOOD IDEA** – “I don’t want my pictures all over the Internet. Forget it.”
- » **MAKING AN EXCUSE OR BLAMING SOMEONE ELSE** –  
“Sorry, I have to go.” “I have to go out with my family.” “My mom checks my stuff all the time. She checks my phone randomly.” “My parents would ground me for life.” “I got in trouble and my computer is being monitored.”  
“My parents are really strict.”
- » **NOT RESPONDING** – Explain that there is no need or urgency to respond to any messages. Teach your child not to respond to messages that make her/him feel uncomfortable.



- » **REPEATING THE STATEMENT IF NECESSARY** – Teach your child to repeat her/his answer if someone is not listening and being persistent. Explain that persistence is controlling behaviour. Encourage your child to be firm in her/his response and let her/him know if the individual doesn't leave her/him alone, to stop responding.
- » **DISCONTINUING (BLOCKING) ALL CONTACT** – Encourage your child not to respond to any messages if someone is making her/him feel uncomfortable or unsafe. The option also exists to block the individual. Of note, it may be important for your child to save the messages as you may need the information at a future date to show to the school and/or law enforcement.
- » **DELETING CONTACTS** – Let your child know s/he should delete contacts on any of her/his social networks who are making him/her feel uncomfortable or unsafe.
- » **CHANGE CONTACT INFORMATION** – Talk with your child about the option to change her/his email address and/or username on any sites s/he uses.
- » **REVIEW PRIVACY SETTINGS** – Explore whether any of the social networking sites your child uses allow users to set limits on who can search for her/him and who can send her/him friend requests.
- » **REPORT** – Most social networking sites and apps have a reporting mechanism that can be used to report user's activities on the site/app. Talk with your child about these features and encourage her/him to use them when needed.

## Did you Know?

In Canada, a child under the age of 12 can never **consent** to sexual activity, and the age of consent for sexual activity among peers is generally 16 years (subject to some close-in-age exceptions). The age of consent rises to 18 in situations when the older person is in a position of trust or authority over the child (like a teacher, coach, etc.); when the relationship is exploitative of the young person; or when the young person is dependent upon the older individual for some reason (i.e. for food, shelter, etc.)

### Common Tactics Used by Adult Offenders with Teenagers:

<b>FLATTERY:</b>	used particularly on girls in an effort to take advantage of the societal importance placed on female beauty
<b>PITY:</b>	used to encourage a sympathetic response from a teen and coerce her/him into feeling as if s/he is in a friendship or sexual relationship
<b>SHARING SEXUALLY EXPLICIT MATERIAL:</b>	used to normalize sexual activity and desensitize a teen to believe sexual activity with adults is okay
<b>PERSISTENCE:</b>	used to wear down a teen's personal boundaries, often under the guise that the adult will stop after the teen gives her/him what s/he wants (which is never the case)
<b>UTTERING THREATS:</b>	used to terrify a teen to comply with a request for sexual content



## Practice “What If” Scenarios

Use stories from the media to talk with your child about real life situations that have unfolded with other teens. Create “what if” scenarios together and generate options for getting out of, or avoiding difficult situations. Include scenarios when flattery is used to mislead a child. If you are raising a teenage girl, particular attention should be paid to the flattery tactic given the mass media pressure that exists in society for females to “fit in” through physical attractiveness. Flattery is a very common control technique used by adults attempting to gain sexual access to young people.

# 5

## Discussing the Importance of Seeking Help

Identify situations when it would be important to tell you, or another safe adult, about an uncomfortable or potentially unsafe situation. Acknowledge that while this may be a difficult step to take, you are there to help her/him and that her/his safety is your number one priority.

Discuss what might happen if s/he doesn't seek help from a safe adult and emphasize that it is never too late to come to you for help, even if s/he has made a mistake.



## Help your teen identify examples of when a situation has gone too far such as:

- » When s/he is unsure about communication with someone and feel like s/he has made a mistake.
- » When an individual is making lewd and offensive comments towards him/her.
- » Situations that at first seem harmless and fun, but become uncomfortable, excessive, stressful, or scary.
- » When intimate pictures or videos are circulating without consent from the person in the picture/video.
- » Instances when communication with an adult has become sexualized or inappropriate. Explain to your teen that it isn't unusual for a teen to develop a "crush" on someone older, but it is up to the adult to establish appropriate boundaries. It isn't okay for an adult to have a "crush" or sexual interest in an adolescent.
- » When s/he is being threatened.

If things have gone too far, you and your teen can access the [NeedHelpNow.ca](https://www.needhelpnow.ca) website. NeedHelpNow is a resource designed to help youth deal with the negative consequences of the creation and distribution of sexual images and/or videos online. The website provides practical steps teens can take to regain control over the situation, including how to stop the spread of sexual images online, and how to seek the support of a safe adult.

*It is critical to remind your teen that it is **NEVER** too late to reach out to you or another safe adult for help.*



## Behaviours that may Trigger Cause for Concern:

As a parent, you know your child better than anyone else. If you have a “gut” feeling that something is not right, trust your instincts and explore the situation further. It is important for you to pay attention to changes in your child’s typical behavior patterns and changes in the intensity of your child’s behavior. Behaviours that are interfering with your teen’s life may signal cause for concern and the need for increased supervision and involvement.

### Some signs to pay attention to include, but are not limited to:

- » Your adolescent seems more withdrawn, sad, anxious, defensive, angry or secretive.
- » Your adolescent has significantly increased or decreased the amount of time s/he spends online.
- » Your adolescent does not respond to limits placed on how often and how long s/he spends time online.
- » Your adolescent has lost interest in activities that s/he has normally enjoyed.
- » Your adolescent is complaining of stomach aches or headaches.
- » Your adolescent develops problems with sleeping patterns such as difficulty falling or staying asleep at night, or sleeping all the time and avoiding interaction.



*If you have noticed changes in your child’s behaviour, it doesn’t mean that s/he is being harmed. However, it does **signal** the need for increased involvement and communication to identify why there is a difference in your child’s behaviour.*

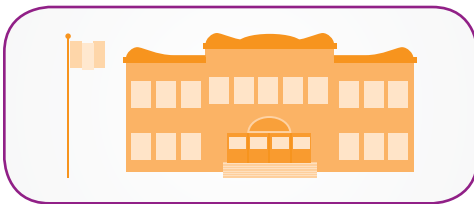


## Steps to take if your teen has had concerning contact with someone online:

Give careful consideration as to how you will intervene when you discover your child has had concerning contact with an adult on the Internet. The circumstances will be unique to each situation and should be treated as such. A variety of factors should feed into your decision-making such as:

- » How do they know each other?
- » How long have the two been in contact with one another?
- » What is the nature of the communication? Is it appropriate or inappropriate?
- » How often are they communicating?
- » What is the intensity of the relationship?
- » What is your "gut" feeling?

Outside support and guidance may be required to develop a plan for how to intervene and ensure that the proper supports are in place for your child (i.e. school, law enforcement). Depending upon her/his personality and the particular situation, there can be a continuum of responses from your child. S/he may express little to no concern and be angry over your perceived interference, all the way to feeling desperate, possibly ashamed and not knowing how to get out of the situation with the adult. If s/he is resistant to talking and upset over your involvement, review the information on page 9 and page 13 about the potentially illegal nature of an adult engaging in a sexual manner with a child.



## Other steps to consider:



**Talking with your teen:** Engage your child in this conversation when you know you're not going to be interrupted. Tell your daughter or son about the communication you read between him/her and the adult. Explain that you realize you do not have all the information, but you would like her/him to tell you about it. It is important to remember how difficult it is for anyone, child or adult, to talk about inappropriate contact from another person, especially when a child has this experience with an adult. Therefore, it is unlikely s/he is going to tell you everything in the first conversation. Remember, if the correspondence you read is concerning, it is important that it is addressed.

**Note:** Your child may respond by crying, getting angry, becoming worried, or embarrassed, etc. Reassure your child by letting her/him know that you will sort through this together. This lets her/him know that s/he doesn't have to deal with this situation alone. It also lets her/him know that you are not going to turn a blind eye to what is going on.



**Increase your involvement:** You may need to gather more information from additional supports in your child's life. While ensuring you are not overexposing your child, it can be helpful to talk to your child's school and/or the parents of any close friends or a best friend to see if they are aware of any information that either reduces or elevates the level of concern.

Increase your emotional and physical availability for your teen. Even if your child resists your support, it is important to stay closely involved.



### **Increase direct supervision and monitoring of online activities and phone calls:**

Increase involvement in the sites/apps your child is using to connect with others. Review how to use privacy settings and the limits that can be activated on profiles.



### **Enforce limits on Internet and smartphone use:**

Disconnect Internet access and smartphone use at a set time every night. Depending upon the level of risk to your child, you may consider temporarily suspending online access and phone use.



### **Seek professional help for your teen:**

Professional counselling may be very useful in addressing any issues your teen may be facing as a result of online sexual exploitation.

*If you discover the communication or the relationship between your child and the adult is sexual in nature, it is important to **consult** with law enforcement.*





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The Canadian Centre for Child Protection ([protectchildren.ca](http://protectchildren.ca)) is a registered charitable organization dedicated to the personal safety of children. We offer a number of programs, services and resources for Canadians to help them protect children and reduce their risk of victimization. This includes:

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Cybertip.ca is Canada's tipline for reporting the online sexual exploitation of children. Cybertip.ca also provides the public with information and other resources, as well as support and referral services, to help Canadians keep themselves and their families safe while using the Internet.

**cybertip.ca**

**missingkids.ca®**

MissingKids.ca is Canada's missing children resource and response centre. The program offers families support in finding their missing child and provides educational materials to help prevent children from going missing.

**missingkids.ca**

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Kids in the Know is an interactive safety education program for children from kindergarten to high school. The program is designed to empower children and reduce their risk of victimization. It uses a community-based approach to heighten awareness of child safety and protection strategies.

**kidsintheknow.ca**

 **COMMIT TO KIDS®**

Commit to Kids is a program to help organizations create safer environments for children. It provides strategies, policies, and a step-by-step plan for reducing the risk of child sexual abuse.

**commit2kids.ca**



Learn more:

[https://protectchildren.ca/video-get\\_involved](https://protectchildren.ca/video-get_involved)

