

# Online/Digital Sexual Violence...

“He forwarded a private photo of me to all his friends ☹️.”

“... rumours spread online about who I've hooked up with...”



“People wrote ‘You're a \*\*\*\*!’ on my Facebook page.”

***A Resource for Parents,  
Professionals and Other  
Support People***

## What is Online/Digital Sexual Violence? Some examples...

- ✓ Spreading lies online about someone's sexual reputation
- ✓ Spreading truths online about someone's sexual reputation
- ✓ Forwarding a sexy, nude or hookup picture or text of someone to your friends without that person's permission
- ✓ Pressuring someone to send something sexy or nude (for example, a picture or sext)
- ✓ Sending someone a sexual, nude or hookup text when they don't want you to
- ✓ Putting sexual putdowns or comments (i.e. “Lisa is a slut”) on someone's Facebook or Tumblr
- ✓ Making online/text threats or jokes to sexually assault someone

**[!] In addition: it is illegal** to produce, distribute, or view sexually explicit material involving people under the age of 18. Taking or sharing a sexual picture of someone who is under the age of 18 can be seen as producing and distributing child pornography —a serious criminal offence. If you or someone you know – even a teen's boyfriend or girlfriend – is sharing this kind of stuff, you should know this information!

### Good places to visit for more Info...

- Digitizing Abuse – Teen Dating Harassment Through Technology Infographic: <http://www.urban.org/digitizingabuse/infographic.cfm>
- Public Safety Canada: <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/cntrng-crm/chld-sxl-xpltn-ntnrt/index-eng.aspx>
- A good summary of laws about consent (saying “Yes” to sexual activity) and youth: <http://www.kidshelpphone.ca/Teens/InfoBooth/Money-jobs-laws/Laws/The-law-and-your-body.aspx#legalSex>

# Some Myths About Online/Digital Sexual Violence...

## 1. Myth: Digital/Online Problems are Not a Big Deal.

### Fact:

Digital and online sexual violence can make a person feel embarrassed, anxious, depressed, angry, vulnerable and hopeless. While it's true that the harassment might occur "only online", it's still a big deal.

The internet is an important place where women and young women spend their time. They do a lot of communicating, socializing and connecting with others online. Digital and online sexual violence can affect a person negatively in her "off-line" communities as well: for example, she may experience the impacts of what happened online at school, with her friends or classmates, and out in public.

The whole school had that photo. I didn't want to go to school anymore, I wanted to transfer. People were judging me...I would go hear my name in the hallway:  
"did you see the picture she sent?"

- Youth survivor, online sexual violence

"The critical period after she first shares what has happened to her at school or online, and what that feels like...that first initial disclosure and your response will make all the difference to her."

- Youth Counsellor

## 2. Myth: If Young Women Were More Careful Online, These Kinds of Problems Would Not Happen ☹️.

### Fact:

Communicating, flirting, sharing information and getting to know others online is, in fact, a common practice for most adults and youth today. Over 90% of students in grades 7-11 believe that their friends should be able to read their social media posts. The majority of adults use Facebook, email, text messaging and other forms of digital media as well. Moreover, a recent Canadian study showed that about "one-fifth of older students use the Internet as a resource for information about sexuality and relationships, and to seek out opportunities to experiment with flirtatious behavior".

While flirting and connecting online are *normal, healthy social practices*, doing something to hurt, shame or embarrass someone online is *not*. A recent Canadian study found that a quarter of the youth surveyed said that a sext of themselves that they sent was then forwarded to someone else without their agreement. The good news is that the majority of sexts exchanged (almost ¾!) were *not* forwarded on. But as you can see, these kinds of violations do sometimes happen.

It's important to remember that digital and online sexual violence are acts of aggression, power and control. Digital sexual violence is not just bullying, sexual activity, or a consequence of girls being too present (or too sexy) online.

"The most loving parents and friends can get off on the wrong foot by blaming: *you shouldn't have...or, next time, you'd better not...*, with the best of intentions. They are just trying to keep their kids safe. But in doing this, we are only telling young women to monitor their own behavior...instead of challenging the abusive behavior."

- Youth Counsellor

Some of this information thanks to: Media Smarts, 2014.  
*Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Sexuality and Romantic Relationships in the Digital Age report.*

# I am a Parent...How Can I Help my Teen Stay Safe??

## Support young people in recognizing healthy behaviors and abusive behaviors online.

It really is the best skill you can teach them! Learning about healthy and unhealthy relationships (online and offline) can strengthen a young person's confidence in meeting and getting to know others. Learning and talking about healthy relationships will also remind her what sort of treatment she is entitled to in a relationship, friendship or in online communications.

Support youth to trust their feelings. Remind them that if they are in touch with someone online or via text and begins to feel anxious, uncomfortable or confused about the other person's intentions, it's okay to step back or end the communication altogether.

## Supportive Things to Say to Your Teen about Online Activity...

- "Have fun, but be aware of things that don't feel okay".
- "I am here if you have any questions."
- "If something ever happens online that makes you feel scared, upset or uncomfortable, remember that you can come to \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ about it." (List a few trusted adults in your teen's life)



## Good places to visit for more info on this...

- How to talk to teens about online extortion:  
[https://www.cybertip.ca/pdfs/C3P\\_SafetySheet\\_OnlineExtortion\\_en.pdf](https://www.cybertip.ca/pdfs/C3P_SafetySheet_OnlineExtortion_en.pdf)
- Parenting Teens in a Digital World:  
[https://www.cybertip.ca/pdfs/C3P\\_ParentingintheDigitalWorld\\_en.pdf](https://www.cybertip.ca/pdfs/C3P_ParentingintheDigitalWorld_en.pdf)

## Keep the Lines of Communications Open: Tips on Talking to Young People about Online Activity...

- Start conversations about online violence. This helps the teens or young people in your life understand that you are comfortable talking about these issues. For example: "I just heard a story in the news about... (summarize a recent news story about online safety or sexualized violence). What do you think about what happened?"
- Gently challenge any talk that comes up that blames victims of sexual and online violence. For example: "I'm not sure about that. I think that the only person who was in the wrong was..." Or: "How do you think the young woman felt when this happened?"
- Talk openly about your own online interactions, experiences and activities.
- Check in with your teen regularly about her online interactions, experiences and activities...and check in with her if you are worried about her online activity. Be sure to approach things from a place of concern —not anger, shame or disappointment. For example: "I noticed something on your Facebook page that made me want to check in with you..."

## Don't Forget the Big Picture ☺.

The teen years are an important time of development, independence and growing into a unique person. For young people, acceptance, friendships and relating to others are really important. Young women can face the same pressures, expectations and concerns in virtual spaces (i.e. online) as they do in real-life (offline). These can include peer pressure, comparing oneself to other teens, and pressure to measure up to gender stereotypes and expectations.

## A Few Tips for Parents...

- ✓ Resist cutting off access to digital and online media in order to keep your young person safe. As one youth counsellor shares: "Parents need a compromise between the two: make it so teens know that their parents are concerned about them...but not so restricted that the teen feels like she is imprisoned for the sake of safety. The world is out there: she will need to know how to navigate it, not remain hidden."
- ✓ Check in with youth about what motivates their online (and offline) activity: "I always ask teens to think about what they want to get out of a social interaction, their feelings and needs behind it: *What do you hope to gain by putting this [picture, text, email] out there?*" – Youth Counsellor
- ✓ Check in with young people about social pressures and expectations they face, and help them to negotiate these pressures.

# I am a Youth Worker, Teacher, Social Worker or Other Professional: What Else Can I Do??



**If a young person tells you that she has experienced digital sexual violence, there are many ways to support her emotionally.**

**Here are some tips we heard from young women who have faced digital sexual violence...**



## Believe her story.

- “As long as you have somebody behind you, I think anybody feels better”. – Youth Counsellor
- “Believing – also not minimizing what’s happening. That is what helped me.” – Youth survivor, online sexual violence

## Support her confidentiality wherever possible. If you have limits to confidentiality, explain them.

- “I have a counsellor. When I do have problems with anything, I discuss it with her and she can't say anything to anyone else unless I say ok. We have that agreement.” – Youth survivor, online sexual violence

## Resist judging.

- “What made me feel a little bit better was hearing that everybody makes mistakes.” – Youth survivor, online sexual violence
- “My teacher sat and listened to me. She didn't say why did you send him that picture? She said to me that HE was in the wrong, HE was wrong for showing the photo to his friends. That made me feel totally different about things.” – Youth survivor, online sexual violence

## Support her in remaining connected to her community.

- “Sometimes the student doesn't want to go back to their school. Maybe peers are talking. Help her consider her options, and what she wants to do next.” – Youth Counsellor
- “Being called-out online as a slut or whatever...its effect is very isolating. Talk to her about how she is coping and who her community is, her remaining allies. At the least, you can be an ally.” – Youth Counsellor

## Good places to visit for more Info...

- Reporting Child Abuse, Neglect or Exploitation: <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/topics/childrensaidd/Reportingchildabuseandneglect.pdf>
- Tips on staying safe online: [https://www.cybertip.ca/pdfs/C3P\\_SaferInternetDay\\_KeepingTeensSafe\\_en.pdf](https://www.cybertip.ca/pdfs/C3P_SaferInternetDay_KeepingTeensSafe_en.pdf)
- Be a good bystander: Draw the Line on Sexual Violence: [www.draw-the-line.ca](http://www.draw-the-line.ca)

## Know the basics about the law and young people's rights.

Talking to teens about their rights helps reaffirm how they deserve to be treated by others.

**[!] Last but not least...** If you are a professional that supports young people under the age of 18, you should know your obligations to share or report certain incidences of sexual violence, exploitation or misconduct impacting minor youth. This may mean that, under some circumstances, you cannot promise youth that their story will remain between the two of you. Check with your employer. Learn more about your obligations, and be sure to tell youth about any limits to your confidentiality.

[Women's Support Network \(WSN\)](#) is a centre dedicated to providing free, confidential services for women who have experienced sexual violence.

Office (call during business hours): 905-895-3646

24-Hour support line (call anytime): 1-800-263-6734 / 905-895-6734

Web: [www.womenssupportnetwork.ca](http://www.womenssupportnetwork.ca)

[360Kids Support Services](#) provides housing, outreach, employment and support services for children, youth and families in York Region.

Outreach: 647-299-4861 • Home Base Drop-In Centre 905-884-3070

Web: [www.360kids.ca](http://www.360kids.ca)

The [Sutton Youth Shelter](#) provides emergency shelter for youth, transitional housing support, community supports, outreach to youth, counselling and life skills.

Office: 905-722-9076

Web: [www.suttonyouthshelter.ca](http://www.suttonyouthshelter.ca)

The [Yellow Brick House](#) offers support and services to women and young women experiencing abuse in York Region, including a 24-hour crisis line, emergency shelters, counselling and legal support services.

Office: 905-709-0900 • Crisis Line: 1-800-263-3247

Web: [www.yellowbrickhouse.org](http://www.yellowbrickhouse.org)

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