

Are you?

Online & Okay...

“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 Young Women Experiencing Digital Sexual Violence

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 your 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: www.urban.org/digitizingabuse/infographic.cfm
- Public Safety Canada: www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/cntrng-crm/chld-sxl-xplttn-nttrnt/index-eng.aspx

Reasons Why it's Hard for Young Women to Talk About Online/Digital Sexual Violence...

1. We're Scared Other People will Think It's Not a Big Deal.

"I was scared to tell my parents. I thought they wouldn't believe me, or they would brush it off."

- Youth survivor,
online sexual violence

Why it IS a Big Deal:

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. We do a lot of communicating, socializing and connecting with others online.

Digital and online sexual violence **can make a person feel alone in her "off-line" communities as well:** for example, we can experience the impacts of what happened online in our schools, with our 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

2. We're Scared Other People will Think We're to Blame ☹️.

"The hardest part was that even though I knew *he* was in the wrong, I also felt in the wrong because it was me who sent pictures to him. So I felt like a loser, you know: like it was my fault."

- Youth survivor, online sexual violence

Why that's Not Fair:

Communicating, flirting and "getting it on" consensually online (or in-person) is one thing. But **doing something against another's wishes – or to hurt or embarrass them – online is another.**

Let's be clear: digital and online sexual violence are acts of aggression, power and control. To say that digital sexual violence **is just "bullying", sexual activity, or a consequence of girls acting too sexy** misses the point!

"The blame should go 100% on the person who did the thing that was hurtful."

- Youth counsellor

"It [nude pictures appearing on the internet] does not mean that I asked for this. It does not mean that it comes with the territory. It's my body, and it should be my choice...It is not a scandal. It is a sex crime. It is a sexual violation..."

That's why these Web sites are responsible."

- Jennifer Lawrence, actress and victim of celebrity phone hacking, quoted in *Vanity Fair*

Reasons Why we Really Ought to Talk More About Online/ Digital Sexual Violence...

Because technology is a big part of our lives and our relationships—and it has an impact on our “offline” lives too. Over 90% of students in grades 7-11 believed that 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 too. Digital media is part of our day to day reality.

Because digital spaces are *our* spaces. Online and digital spaces are where women and young women connect and socialize with others too! Moreover, in a recent Canadian study, 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” – this includes young women.

Because women and young women can face the same pressures, expectations and concerns in virtual spaces (i.e. online) as they do in real-life (offline). As one youth worker shares: “a lot of young girls are trying to balance things. Sometimes it’s hard when you’re in a partner or dating relationship and you want to please your partner...but it’s also ok to *say no* if you’re uncomfortable.” It’s important to talk about these pressures and expectations so we know how to deal with them.

Because if you have faced digital sexual violation, you are not alone. 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 we can see, these kinds of violations happen more than we wish they did ☹️.



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.**

Something Happen Online that Made You Feel Upset, Uncomfortable or Scared??

Trust your instincts.

If you're in touch with someone online or via text and you begin to feel anxious, uncomfortable or confused about their intentions, listen to your feelings. It's okay to take your time, step back, or end the communication altogether. A good friend, acquaintance or crush will respect your feelings and limits! Have fun, but be aware of “red flags”. Watch out for someone who...

- Wants to rush into things
- Urges you to re-think or compromise your limits
- Pressures you for more information, pictures, sexts or other stuff – especially early on
- Claims to be “in love” or crazy about you early in communication, or early in a relationship
- Asks bold or inappropriate questions
- Has a reputation as someone who is disrespectful to others.

Know your rights and the law.

Knowing your rights helps reaffirm how you deserve to be treated by others. It can also increase your confidence about what is okay in a relationship, what is not, and help you stand up for yourself if you need to.

*“My ex took the photos and spread them around. I texted him and said *I was 16 when these photos were taken, I was technically a minor... and he stopped sending them out.*”*

- Youth survivor, online sexual violence

Know and seek out your support people ☺️

Standing up to mean, harassing and sexually violating comments is everyone's responsibility. If you are dealing with digital sexual violence, be sure to spend time with the people who “get” you, care about you, and will support you.

“One of my friends was dating some guy. When it ended, he put it all over Facebook... But then some of our men friends saw it. And they said wait a minute what are you doing? They confronted him and said why did you do that?”

- Friend of Survivor

“You don't have to forward it, and you don't have to talk behind her back. You have a choice to just be the bigger person.” – **Friend of Survivor**

Here are Some Things You can do to Support Yourself...

Need Help??



Good places to visit for more Info on this...

- How to reach out to an adult when you need support: www.kidshelpphone.ca/KHP/media/TeensMediaLibrary/PDFs/KHP-Talking-to-an-Adult.pdf
- Healthy Relationships and Dating Violence: www.yellowbrickhouse.org/english/files/2014/08/Healthy-Relationships-Guide-Final.pdf
- Draw the Line on Sexual Violence: www.draw-the-line.ca

Recognize healthy behaviors and abusive behaviors online. Be confident in naming abusive behaviors as abusive.

Learning about healthy and unhealthy relationships (online and offline) can strengthen your confidence in meeting and getting to know others. Learning about what abusive behaviors are can help you in spotting them, should they ever appear in your life. This information also reminds you that you are not to blame for someone else's mean behavior.

“I think it might be important to emphasize that this is a crime. This is not something that we can all do behind closed doors and anonymously and get away with it. It is abuse.” – **Youth Counsellor**

Take care of yourself.

It's important to take care of ourselves when life is good. But it is *really* important to do so when life is tough – for example, when we feel sad, angry or disappointed, or when someone hurts us.

Taking care of yourself keeps you strong and reminds you that you have value as a person. Some examples of taking care of ourselves include getting enough sleep, doing things that are fun, taking breaks and honouring our feelings.

Good places to visit for more Info on this...

- RAINN has an easy list of self care for survivors of harassment and abuse: <https://rainn.org/get-information/sexual-assault-recovery/self-care-for-survivors>
- Part of your self-care may mean facing your feelings. Kids Help Phone has some good information on how to deal with sadness, anger and more: <http://www.kidshelpphone.ca/Teens/InfoBooth/Emotional-Health.aspx>

[Women's Support Network \(WSN\)](http://www.womenssupportnetwork.ca) 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

[360Kids Support Services](http://www.360kids.ca) 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

The [Sutton Youth Shelter](http://www.suttonyouthshelter.ca) 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

The [Yellow Brick House](http://www.yellowbrickhouse.org) 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

This resource was created by the Online and Okay Project and funded by Women's College Hospital's 15K Challenge. Many thanks to the young women, women and service providers in York Region who contributed their thoughts and experiences to the Project. Your contributions informed this important resource. © 2015

