



Safer Internet Tips

Responding to Self/Peer Exploitation*



Referred to by the media as “sexting,” self/peer exploitation is defined as creating, sending or sharing sexual images and/or videos with peers via the Internet or electronic devices. It usually involves exchanging images through cell phone picture/video messaging, messaging apps, or social networking sites.

As children and youth are growing up in a technology-rich society, the likelihood of being confronted with a self/peer exploitation incident increases.

Why Youth Engage in Self/Peer Exploitation

- **Romantic Relationships or Sexual Experimentation:** Youth in a relationship (offline or online) may voluntarily produce and share images with each other. These images may subsequently be circulated without the knowledge of the affected youth. After the breakdown of a relationship, images may be shared with others impulsively or with malicious intent.
- **Attention-Seeking Behaviour:** Images may be produced and shared among friends as a joke, a dare or a challenge. These images may be circulated to others with or without the knowledge of the affected youth. Images may be produced, shared or posted publicly (e.g. Facebook, YouTube) in an attempt to gain acceptance or popularity.
- **Coercive Circumstances:** Peers, romantic partners or online acquaintances may demand images through extortion/coercion, or threaten to release images obtained in circumstances where the adolescent is unaware, unwilling or in a compromised position.

Steps to Consider if your child is a Youth Affected by Self/Peer Exploitation (victim)

- Reassure that they are not alone and there is help available to assist them get through this. Notify the police and school officials to ensure the incident can be appropriately documented and investigated. Save the evidence – although there may be an instinct to delete or remove the offending images to prevent further harm to the youth, this information may be used as evidence if a criminal investigation ensues.
- Engage the School for Assistance: Explore with school officials what steps can be taken to prevent further harm and stop any related behaviour from continuing. Work with the school to create a safety plan to ensure those who have been affected feel supported and know what and to go to for help to address any further problems.
- Address the Offending Content: After evidence of the offending content has been saved, if the content continues to be publicly available on the Internet (i.e. social networking sites), contact the site directly by utilizing the Report Abuse function to request the material be removed. Visit the Canadian Centre for Child Protection's www.needhelpnow.ca for additional information for removing offending content.

When Talking to Youth about their Involvement

When speaking with a youth about their involvement in the incident (whether they are the victim or offending youth) consider the following tips:

- Listen to the youth without judgement. Keep the lines of communication open, let them know you are there to listen to them and to support them. Depending upon the youth's role in the incident, they may be experiencing a wide range of emotions and social impact amongst peers.
- Errors in judgement, such as this, provide youth an opportunity to learn and grow. Accountability and ownership of the situation is an important part of learning and healing. Differentiate the error in judgement from having the incident define who the youth is.
- Consequences for the inappropriate behaviour need to be reasonable and fit the situation. Use the incident as the backdrop for discussions about the boundaries and limits for the safe use of electronic devices. Discuss what healthy and respectful relationships look like and how others deserve to be treated.

Resources

KidsHelpPhone.ca - 1-800-668-6868 - a 24-hour, toll-free, confidential helpline for children and youth.

Cybertip.ca - Operated by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, along with being Canada's tipline for reporting the online sexual exploitation of children, Cybertip.ca provides resources for parents, educators, and youth on Internet safety.

GetCyberSafe.gc.ca - a resource of the Government of Canada providing information to keep Canadians safe online.

Kids in the Know - www.kidsintheknow.ca - is the Canadian Centre for Child Protection's interactive safety education program designed for students from Kindergarten to Grade 9. The program provides educators with resources to teach effective personal safety strategies to reduce the likelihood of victimization in the online and offline world.

NeedHelpNow.ca - an initiative of the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, providing information and support to youth who have been negatively impacted by a sexual image to help stop the spread of the image.

www.mediasmarts.ca - Provides digital and media literacy programs and resources to provide adults with information and tools to help children and youth develop critical thinking skills for interacting in the digital world.

* Adapted from resources found at www.cybertip.ca