

PARENTING TWEENS AND TEENS IN THE

# DIGITAL 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 provided herein are intended as general information only, not as advice. Readers should assess all information in light of their own circumstances, the age and maturity level of the child they wish to protect and any other relevant factors.

Second Edition, April 2017

ISBN #978-1-927103-99-9 (print version)

ISBN #978-1-988809-00-7 (electronic version)

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## WHY TWEENS/TEENS ARE VULNERABLE TO EXPLOITATION

Tweens/Teens are continually looking for social acceptance while forming a sense of who they are. To establish their sense of identity and autonomy, tweens/teens strive to become emotionally independent from their parents. Often their perception and identity is greatly influenced by their peers. This creates a need to be connected to friends on what seems to be an almost constant basis. Phones and other forms of technology allow teens to easily engage with likeminded individuals, gain instant social validation and feel like they're in a trusted space. The digital realm also allows them to experiment in ways they typically wouldn't face-to-face, including who they talk to and what they talk about.

This need for acceptance and belonging makes tweens/teens particularly vulnerable to individuals who may be seeking opportunities to take advantage of them. The personal fable of invincibility (e.g. belief that bad stuff happens only to others) makes tweens/teens even more vulnerable. The perception of anonymity and privacy online increases a young person's willingness to share personal information, leaving them open to manipulation by others. In some instances, there are adults who have harmful intentions or sexual interest in children, and in other cases, it may involve peers who use technology in an effort to harm another young person.

## Cybertip.ca **ALERTS**!

Cybertip.ca Alerts are notifications sent out to inform the public of concerning technology trends and new resources designed to increase children's personal safety. As Canada's national tipline for reporting the online sexual exploitation of children, the information reported to Cybertip.ca enables the Canadian Centre to identify the online risks children and youth are facing. Recognizing that it can be difficult to keep up with changing technology, signing up for these alerts provides you with important information to help keep your family safe while online.

[cybertip.ca/alerts](https://www.cybertip.ca/alerts)

# WHAT ARE THE KEY ONLINE SAFETY RISKS FOR TWEENS/TEENS?



## SEXTORTION

Sextortion involves individuals who coerce youth into sending sexual images or engaging in sexual acts via camera-enabled devices and then blackmail them with the threat of distributing the sexual images/videos if they do not pay money or provide more sexual images/videos.



## SEXTING

Self/peer exploitation (sexting) is generally defined as youth creating, sending or sharing nudes and/or videos with peers via the Internet and/or electronic devices (e.g., texting, messaging apps, social networking sites).



## LIVE STREAMING

Youth may live stream intimate acts and not understand others can capture a still image or video of them engaged in that activity.



## CYBERBULLYING

A form of extreme bullying among youth via technology. It is an abusive, targeted, deliberate and repeated behaviour intended to damage and harm another young person.



## NON-CONSENSUAL DISTRIBUTION OF INTIMATE IMAGES

It is illegal for a person to distribute an “intimate image” of another person without that person’s consent. If the image involves someone under 18, it may be illegal to distribute the image regardless of whether consent was provided.



For more detailed information on each of these areas of risk and recommended tips for parents, go to [cybertip.ca/youth](https://www.cybertip.ca/youth).

# WHAT CAN I DO TO KEEP MY TWEEN/TEEN SAFE?

1

## REGULARLY ENGAGE IN DISCUSSIONS ABOUT WHO YOUR CHILD IS CONNECTING WITH ONLINE

Become familiar with various social media platforms and chat apps (e.g. Twitter®, Instagram®, Snapchat®, Kik®, YouTube®), as well as apps for live streaming video (e.g. Periscope™, Live.ly™, Facebook® Live). Take note of the privacy settings for both phone and web versions of the social media tweens/teens are using.

### **Make it a habit to talk with your tween/teen about online activities. Discuss things like:**

- The privacy controls they have set up on the various apps they use.
- Who they are “friends” with on social media and how they know them.
- Who they chat with and/or video chat with online.
- What information they should and should not be revealing in their messages, posts and photos/videos.
- The fact the Internet is a public space and it’s easy to lose control over what happens to texts, photos and videos sent through apps and social media.
- If they’ve received any unusual requests online or if they’ve ever felt uncomfortable with an online interaction, and how they handled it.
- If any of their friends had a difficult experience online, and their feelings around what happened.
- Being a leader and not forwarding pictures of others they may receive.

## 2

## REGULARLY DISCUSS THE QUALITIES OF HEALTHY VERSUS UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

When a teen is sexually exploited, there is typically a distortion of the relationship and a misuse of trust by the adult or the peer. Tweens/teens need to know how to identify concerning adult behaviour and ways to respond safely, along with how to identify unhealthy dating relationships and coercive tactics involving peers.

### **Talk to your tween/teen about paying attention to unhealthy behaviours, such as someone who:**

- Persistently asks for sexual content (i.e., intimate pictures/videos).
- Tries to use pity/guilt to have them comply with a request.
- Tries to use content or information shared in confidence to try to embarrass or hurt them.
- Doesn't seem to take "no" for an answer (persistence).
- Seems to be sharing overly personal information too quickly.
- Offers money/gifts to try and get them to do something that makes them feel uncomfortable.

*Remind them healthy relationships involve mutual caring and respect. Without a clear understanding of what makes a healthy relationship, teens are more likely to tolerate relationships that put them at risk.*



Models in images. Intended as illustrative.

## WHAT IS THE AGE OF CONSENT FOR SEXUAL ACTIVITY?

### CHILD'S AGE

### CAN CHILD CONSENT?

Under 12 years old

**NO**; no person under 12 is able to consent to sexual activity.

12 or 13 years old

**SOMETIMES**; only if the age difference is **LESS THAN 2 years\***.

14 or 15 years old

**SOMETIMES**; only if the age difference is **LESS THAN 5 years\***.

16 years old or older

**YES**; **BUT** there are exceptions which are outlined below\*.

18 years old

**YES.**

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\*The close-in-age exception (12-15 years old) and exception to consent for persons 16 years and over does not apply where the other person is in a position of trust or authority over the child, the child is dependent on the other person or the relationship is exploitative.

**Consider reviewing the following with your tween/teen:**

- Explain that adults should not seek out friendship with teens or give them any type of sexual attention. This inappropriate behaviour at a minimum shows poor judgement and therefore makes it unsafe to interact with that adult.
- Talk with your child about the importance of seeking help from you if they are uncomfortable with any exchange with an adult. Even if they are embarrassed, reinforce you are there to help.

**ADULTS USING BLACKMAIL TACTICS ON TEENAGERS**

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

**Tweens/teens are vulnerable to being blackmailed by others for reasons that 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 often have crushes on adults
- They cannot interpret or identify an adult's intent and often assume responsibility when issues arise. This increases the chances they won't talk to a safe adult if they are involved in a troubling situation.



## Common Tactics Used by Adult Offenders with Teenagers



**FLATTERY** — Flattery is used particularly on girls in an effort to take advantage of the societal importance placed on female beauty.

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**PITY** — Pity is used to encourage a sympathetic response from a tween/teen and coerce them into feeling as if they are in a friendship or sexual relationship.

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**SHARING SEXUALLY EXPLICIT MATERIAL** — Exposing a teen to sexually explicit material is used to normalize sexual activity and desensitize a tween/teen to believe sexual activity with adults is okay.

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**PERSISTENCE** — Constant requests and persistence is used to wear down a teen's personal boundaries, often under the guise the adult will stop after the teen gives the person what they want (which is never the case).

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**UTTERING THREATS** — Threats are used to terrify a teen into complying with a request for sexual content.

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**DECEPTION** — Deception over live streaming apps/sites and video chat is a popular tactic among offenders. In these cases, an adult streams a video of what is often a teenage girl so youth believe they are talking to a teenage girl in real time when that's not actually the case.

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## 4

**DISCUSS 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 discuss direct and indirect ways of getting out of uncomfortable situations.

Ideas include:

**TELL IT LIKE IT IS** — *“No way.” “I don’t want my pictures all over the Internet.” “Forget it.”*

**MAKE A JOKE** — Humour may help change the topic and ease your tween/teen out of the situation.

**MAKE UP AN EXCUSE** — *“Sorry, I have to go out.” “My mom checks my phone randomly so I can’t.”*

**IGNORE** — Explain there is no need or urgency to respond to any messages, especially messages that make your tween/teen feel uncomfortable.

**STAND YOUR GROUND** — Teach your tween/teen to repeat their answer if someone is not listening. Explain that persistence is controlling behaviour. Encourage them to be firm in their response and if that doesn’t work just stop responding.

**BLOCK ALL CONTACT** — The option always exists to block or delete the individual. Also, it may be important for your child to save the messages in case at some point you need to show the communication to the school and/or law enforcement.

**REPORT IT** — Most social sites and apps have a reporting mechanism that can be used to report inappropriate behaviour by another user. Talk with your tween/teen about these features and encourage them to use it when needed.



## 5

**REGULARLY DISCUSS 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 while this may be a difficult step to take, you are there to help them and their safety is your number one priority. Emphasize it is never too late to come to you for help, even if they've had an error in judgement.

Twins/teens often find it difficult to consider how their actions affect other people. They find it challenging to foresee the adverse emotional impact sharing a nude can have on tweens/teens whose images are being shared, but also on those who share them.

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

- When communication with someone starts feeling uncomfortable and/or feeling like a mistake has been made.
- When an individual starts makes lewd and offensive comments.
- Situations that start as 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.
- When communication with an adult has become sexualized or inappropriate. While it isn't unusual for a teen to develop a "crush" on someone older, it is inappropriate for an adult to have a "crush" or sexual interest in a teen. It is the adult's job to establish and reinforce appropriate boundaries.
- When the communication involves threats or blackmail.



Models in images. Intended as illustrative.

## LEGAL CONSEQUENCES

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Some of the activities teens engage in online can in fact have legal consequences. They may be unaware certain behaviours and actions can be deemed a criminal offence.

It's also important to understand some of the Canadian laws pertaining to online victimization in order to ensure the proper action is taken if these offences are happening to your own teen.

Below are some Canadian laws involving online victimization that could impact tweens and teens:



**Child Pornography** — Child pornography can include naked or semi-naked sexual pictures or videos of a person under 18, or of a person under 18 engaging in a sex act. It is illegal to view, keep, send, post or take such pictures or videos.



**Non-Consensual Distribution of an Intimate Image** — If someone has a sexual/intimate picture/video of another person that was created in private circumstances and that person knowingly posts it online or shares it with someone else knowing the other person would not consent to it being distributed, the person who distributed the picture/video could be charged.



**Harassment** — Harassment is considered doing or saying something that makes someone else scared for their wellbeing or someone else's wellbeing (e.g., making threats, stalking, repeatedly texting/emailing).



**Blackmail (extortion)** — Using blackmail or extortion to get a person to do something (e.g., pay money, send an explicit image) by making threats or being violent (e.g., pushing, yelling).



**Uttering Threats** — Uttering threats can range from threatening to damage property to threatening to hurt a pet, friend or loved one.



**Online Luring** — Online luring is when one person (typically an adult but not always) communicates with a young person through technology (e.g., texting, instant messaging, emailing) to make it easier to commit a specific sexual offence against that young person. For example, if a person emails a youth and hints at or tries to convince the adolescent to create or send explicit pictures that could be considered online luring.



**Making Sexually Explicit Material Available to a Person Under 18** — Showing or sending material like pornography to a person under 18 to make it easier to commit a sexual offence against the person.



**Sexual Exploitation** — It's considered sexual exploitation when a 16- or 17-year-old is touched, or is encouraged to touch themselves or to touch another person, for a sexual purpose by someone who is:

- In a position of trust or authority (e.g., parent, guardian, teacher, coach) over the young person.
- A person upon whom the 16- or 17-year-old is dependent in some way.
- Exploiting the young person in some way.

# HOW CAN I TELL IF MY TEEN NEEDS HELP?

As a parent, you know your child better than anyone else. If you have a “gut” feeling 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 behaviour patterns and the intensity of your child’s behaviour. Parental monitoring is critical in ensuring that tweens/teens remain safe as they gradually become more independent and develop their sense of identity.

## Some signs include:

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

*A change in behaviour does not mean that your child is being harmed. However, it does signal the need for increased involvement and communication to determine what is going on.*



Models in images. Intended as illustrative.

# WHAT IF I NEED MORE INFORMATION OR GUIDANCE?

There are resources available to assist you in navigating these complex issues with your teen depending on the nature of the incident and the severity.



- If your child is in immediate danger or if you discover communication or a relationship between an adult and your child that is sexual in nature, contact your **local police**.



- To report online luring or non-consensual distribution of an intimate image, visit **Cybertip.ca/report** or call us at **1-866-658-9022**.



- For further information for teens and parents on how to navigate the risks teens face online, visit **NeedHelpNow.ca**.



- For further information on self/peer exploitation consult our guide for families: **[www.cybertip.ca/app/en/internet\\_safety-self\\_peer\\_exploitation](http://www.cybertip.ca/app/en/internet_safety-self_peer_exploitation)**



- Should your teen want to speak to someone for support, consider **Kids Help Phone (1-800-668-6868)** for anonymous and confidential counselling services.



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