



CANADIAN CENTRE *for* CHILD PROTECTION®
Helping families. Protecting children.



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SELF/PEER
EXPLOITATION

IT'S **NOT** OK.

A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

ADDRESSING SELF/PEER EXPLOITATION

This guide is a resource to help families when responding to a *self/peer exploitation* incident. It is also a useful tool to use as a basis for a discussion with your child about preventing her/his involvement in this type of activity.



CANADIAN CENTRE for CHILD PROTECTION®
Helping families. Protecting children.

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection is a registered charity dedicated to the personal safety of all children. Our goal is to reduce child victimization by providing programs and services to the Canadian public.

protectchildren.ca

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This guide is intended to provide general information to assist in dealing with an incident of self-peer exploitation. It is not intended to provide legal advice and should not be relied upon for such purpose.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of *self/peer exploitation*¹ has become a growing concern for school personnel and parents. Coined in the media as “sexting,” this behaviour is generally defined as youth creating, sending or sharing sexual pictures and/or videos with peers via the Internet and/or electronic devices. It usually involves exchanging pictures/videos through smartphones, apps and social networking sites. Concerns over this type of behaviour are escalating, namely because:

- the consequences can be harmful in the short and long term; and
- children are growing up in a technology-rich environment and are almost certain to be confronted with a *self/peer exploitation* incident(s) at some point during adolescence.



Self/peer exploitation is defined as youth creating, sending or sharing sexual pictures and/or videos with peers via the Internet and/or electronic devices. Involved youth are defined as:

Affected Youth: Youth whose picture/video has been taken and/or distributed, whether by themselves or someone else.

Acting-out Youth: Youth who have taken and/or distributed a picture/video of someone other than themselves.

Other Involved Youth: Bystanders who are in receipt of the distributed picture/video, whether by the *affected youth* or the *acting-out youth*.



Model in image and intended as illustrative.

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

The **Canadian Centre for Child Protection** (protectchildren.ca) has created this *Resource Guide for Families* in conjunction with *A Resource Guide for Schools* that assists school personnel in adequately responding to these types of incidents. If your child has created and shared a sexual picture/video of themselves with a peer(s) or shared a picture/video of a peer with others, this guide will serve to:

- offer you some practical guidance for supporting your child and addressing the situation;
- help reduce the potential negative impact on your child (and your family) if this occurs;
- help minimize your child's involvement in this type of activity; and
- offer guidance that may limit the circulation of the sexual picture(s)/video(s).



This resource is designed to assist families when responding to a *self/peer exploitation* incident and is also a useful tool to use as a basis for discussion with your child about preventing her/his involvement in this type of activity.

¹For the purpose of this document, the term *self/peer exploitation* does not include text messages involving sexual content.

WHY YOUTH ENGAGE IN SELF/PEER EXPLOITATION

Young people engage in *self/peer exploitation* for the following reasons:

Romantic Relationships or Sexual Experimentation

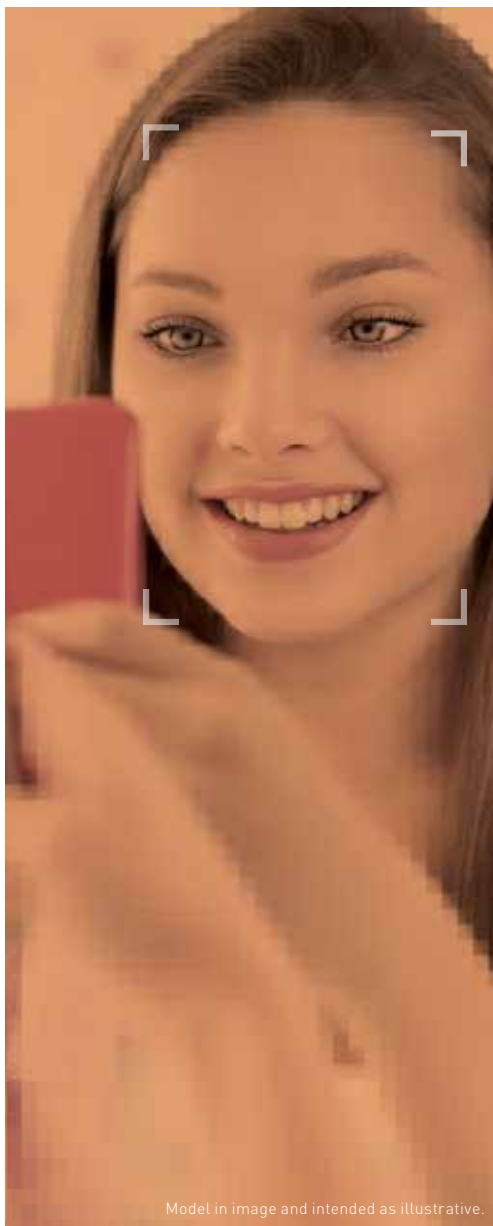
- During a relationship (offline or online), pictures/videos may be produced and shared voluntarily between romantic partners or experimenting youth. These pictures/videos may also be circulated to others with or without the knowledge of the *affected youth*.
- After the breakdown of a relationship, pictures/videos may be shared with others impulsively or with malicious intent (e.g., to embarrass the ex-partner or ex-friend).

Attention-seeking Behaviour

- Adolescents may produce and share pictures/videos among friends as a joke, a dare or a challenge. These pictures/videos may be circulated to others with or without the knowledge of the *affected youth*.
- Pictures/videos 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 pictures/videos through extortion/coercion. This could involve threats to release information, chat logs or other pictures/videos if the adolescent does not comply with the demands. This behaviour may be sexual in nature and/or for controlling purposes.
- Pictures/videos may be obtained in circumstances where the adolescent is unaware, unwilling or in a compromised position (e.g., pictures taken at a party and posted on a social networking site).



Model in image and intended as illustrative.



“Just as the body of an adolescent undergoes great physical changes, the brain also develops and changes but at different rates. The pre-frontal cortex of the frontal lobe is one of the last areas to develop; studies have shown that it does not fully mature until individuals are in their 20s. This area is involved in insight, judgment and impulse control. This means that although teens may logically understand the consequences of actions, they are more likely to act from their emotions and without consideration of these consequences. Teens first develop the ability to be objective and critical of others’ actions and later, they develop the ability to analyze and understand their own actions. Moreover, as these functions are developing, the changing hormonal environment of puberty also drives an adolescent’s behaviour.”

— Dr. Debbie Lindsay

To gain insight into what contributes to youth engaging in this behaviour, it is important to understand brain development and the vulnerabilities of youth during adolescence. Child development refers to the physical, cognitive, personal and social changes that occur between birth and adolescence. Understanding the various stages of child development can help you know what to expect and how to best support your child as s/he grows and develops.

Consider the following as it pertains to your child’s development:

Children 13-15 years of age:

- feel as though acceptance and belonging are the most important things
- are extremely influenced by peers and their behaviour
- are vulnerable to those who offer insincere flattery
- feel that how they look and what others think of them is very important
- compare themselves to their peers in an effort to define who they are
- take huge emotional risks in search of their identity
- have a “pseudo-maturity” and feel they can handle more than they are ready for developmentally
- are extremely sensitive and easily humiliated

Children 16-17 years of age:

- experiment with various roles in an effort to figure out who they are
- appear to have a fully developed identity, but are not yet fully mature
- object strongly to all narrow limitations on their self-image
- have an increased focus on what will happen in the future
- prioritize friendship
- seek independence and expect privacy
- have an established sexual identity and seek intimacy
- can have intense romantic relationships and increased sexual desires



Model in image and intended as illustrative.

While media reports that *self/peer exploitation* behaviour is highly prevalent, gathering accurate data is challenging. This may be partially attributed to the fact that most youth are reluctant to seek help from a safe adult after becoming involved in this type of activity. Similar to a youth who is being bullied or is involved in bullying, reasons for **not** seeking help from a safe adult include*:

- They do not want to get into trouble.
- They are ashamed of having produced the content themselves.
- They are afraid of retaliation from other youth if an adult finds out.
- They are not sure an adult can help them.
- They have learned that “ratting” on peers is bad.

(*Source: Adapted from Barbara Coloroso’s *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander*; page 214)

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON YOUR CHILD

The circulation and distribution of sexual pictures/videos among peers, via the Internet and/or through electronic devices, can have short- and long-term impacts on youth. The effects will vary according to your adolescent’s personality, temperament, support systems and resiliency. Some *affected youth* may feel embarrassed and extremely vulnerable. However, others (including the *affected youth* and/or *acting-out youth*) may appear unconcerned and seem to not appreciate the potential damage that such content and behaviour may have caused or mean in the future.



As a parent, it is important to keep in mind that a *self/peer exploitation* incident can have a life of its own. When something is created and shared electronically, its digital footprint can remain and/or resurface at any given point in the future. If your child is the *affected youth*, keep in mind that, whether real or perceived, the belief that the content is still circulating on the Internet and/or between other peers can be very challenging for her/him to manage emotionally. Support from a professional therapist may be required to help your child deal with this aspect.

If your child is involved in a *self/peer exploitation* incident, s/he may be impacted in the following ways:

Emotional Impacts

Depending upon your child's role in the incident, s/he may feel shame, humiliation, anger, resentment, hurt, self-blame, guilt and/or indifference. How s/he behaves may also vary greatly from expressing little or no concern to isolating and withdrawing or, in serious cases, engaging in self-harming behaviours or suicide attempts.

For information on responding to youth in crisis, visit [NeedHelpNow.ca/suicidalthoughts](https://www.needhelppnow.ca/suicidalthoughts).



If you are concerned that your child may be having suicidal thoughts, seek professional help immediately. You can also contact the suicide helpline in your community or take your child to the nearest hospital. Even if the threat doesn't appear imminent or you think your child would never go that far, you need to act quickly and take all signs of suicidal behaviour seriously. Respect and acknowledge your child's feelings — her/his emotions are very real. Encourage your child to communicate with you and reinforce that you are there to listen, support and help. As the parent, it will be important for you to offer reassurance to your child that things will get better — with the appropriate help, s/he will feel better about life again. See the Additional Resources section for information on youth and trauma.

Social Impacts

Depending upon your child's role in the incident, s/he may experience cyberbullying, alienation or harassment (including sexual harassment) from peers, as well as current and future damage to reputation. Other consequences may include school suspension or expulsion. This type of shaming can impact your child personally and socially.

See the Additional Resources section for tips on what to do if your child is being cyberbullied.

Criminal Impacts

Depending on the circumstances of the incident, behaviour associated with *self/peer exploitation* may also be criminal in nature. This can include the following:

- a) Youth inadvertently creating child pornography.
- b) Youth engaging in the non-consensual distribution of intimate pictures.
- c) Youth intentionally producing pictures/videos that meet the child pornography criteria.
- d) Youth engaging in behaviour that involves intimidation and/or coercion of the *affected youth* in combination with the creation and sharing of child pornography.
- e) Youth engaging in other criminal acts such as: criminal harassment, extortion, voyeurism, impersonation, defamatory libel, intimidation and mischief in relation to data.

If your child is involved in a *self/peer exploitation* incident that involves threats, coercion, extortion, etc., you will want to contact law enforcement (over and above what the school may have already done). It will be important for you to save any copies of texts, images and/or videos in the event that an investigation occurs.



The **non-consensual distribution of an intimate image** is when someone has a private sexual/intimate picture/video of someone and they share it on purpose without the person's consent. When the image/video involves someone under 18, it may be illegal to distribute the image/video regardless of whether consent was provided.



Models in image and intended as illustrative.

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON FAMILIES

If your child has been involved in a *self/peer exploitation* incident, you are likely feeling a wide range of emotions. This may include embarrassment, shame, anger, and a certain degree of vulnerability and uncertainty about what may happen next. You may be deeply concerned for your child and your family (your other children, yourself, etc.). Rest assured it is completely normal to be feeling all of these things and more. In some instances, you may be projecting anger towards the youth involved, which can include your child and the disappointment/shock in learning that s/he is involved in an incident of *self/peer exploitation*.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS INVOLVED

There are some practical steps that you can take to address your child's involvement in a *self/peer exploitation* incident in the short term and months to follow. Trying to anticipate the range of issues your child may encounter will be important. If your child is provided with an honest account of what may happen in the months following, you will increase the likelihood that s/he is prepared to manage it. This is especially important for the *affected youth* in the event the picture(s)/video(s) resurface at some point in the future.

Steps to Consider if Your Child Is the Affected Youth

1

REASSURE YOUR CHILD

Reassure your child that s/he is not alone and that together, you will get through this. In the event that you are the first to learn about your child's involvement in a *self/peer exploitation* incident, we encourage you to immediately notify and involve your child's school. They can be an important ally in helping you address the issue. Information to help you support your child is on page 14.



If the *acting-out youth* or *other involved youth* do not attend your child's school (e.g., ex-boyfriend [*acting-out youth*] lives in another jurisdiction), the school will have a limited role other than ensuring your child is properly supported and accommodated within the school environment while working through what has transpired.

2

ENGAGE IN FACT-FINDING

Ask your child to describe what s/he sent and to whom, how it was sent, when it was sent, and where it was posted/located. This information will assist in guiding your next steps.



VIEWING CONTENT: It is very important that parents do not actively seek out the viewing of the content unless there is a compelling reason to do so. Your child may feel embarrassed knowing that you have viewed a sexual image/video of her/him. For this reason, limiting the number of individuals who see the content is in her/his best interest.

3

EXPLORE THE STEPS YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL CAN TAKE

Assuming the police are not involved and that the school is willing to work with you, explore the concrete and immediate steps the school can take to communicate with the families of the children involved. As soon as possible, have the content deleted from personal devices and Internet accounts to help contain further distribution of the material. Should police be involved, speak to them about the steps they will be taking. It is important to determine who will be doing what to help remove the content from the Internet in your efforts to minimize any ongoing harm to your child.



SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD: You will have to judge what to do to best support your child through this difficult time. It may be challenging for you to avoid focusing on your own feelings of anger, doubt, mistrust and failure. However, it is precisely at this time that your child needs you to be at your best as a parent. Creating a safe environment for your child to talk about what happened will be critical in helping them navigate through whatever challenges they may face.

4

ADDRESS THE CONCERNING CONTENT

Contact the Website

If the concerning content continues to be publicly available on the Internet (e.g., social networking sites), you can also contact the site directly utilizing the *Report Abuse* function to request the material be removed (particularly in circumstances that do not involve law enforcement). This feature is available on most of the user-generated content websites. It is important that when you do this, you let the site know that you are the parent, that the person in the picture(s)/video(s) is under 18 years of age and that the content was made available without your child's consent. Visit **NeedHelpNow.ca** for additional details.

Send a Message:

If you do not know whether the concerning content is online or otherwise being shared but are worried that it might happen, or even if you know it is being shared, you may wish to send a message to the parent(s) of the *acting-out youth* and/or the parent(s) of *other involved youth* who may have the picture. You may wish to include the following types of statements:

- **Explain the issue.** I have reason to believe [your son/daughter, or insert name of *acting-out youth* or *other involved youth*] is in possession of an intimate image of my child. This is a serious and potentially criminal matter. I am reaching out to you with the hope that you will be able to assist in addressing this concern. *(You may also wish to include some details such as a description of the picture/video and the circumstances under which it was taken.)*
- **State that possession of the image is non-consensual.** According to my child, the picture/video was taken in circumstances considered to be private and personal and my child does not consent to [your son/daughter, or insert name of *acting-out youth* or *other involved youth*] being in possession of the picture/video. (If the picture/video was initially provided voluntarily, you may wish to adapt this language — for example, by adding the words “any longer.”)
- **Address past/future distribution.** My child does not consent to [your son/daughter, or insert name of *acting-out youth* or *other involved youth*] sharing it with any other person or posting it in any online location. *(If distribution has already occurred, you may wish to state that your child did not consent to that distribution, and does not consent to future distribution.)*
- **Request deletion.** I request that you speak to [your son/daughter, or insert name of *acting-out youth* or *other involved youth*] and ensure that he/she deletes the picture/video and all copies s/he may have of it immediately. In addition, if [your son/daughter, or insert name of *acting-out youth* or *other involved youth*] has posted the picture/video in any online or other location, I ask that you ensure that s/he remove the picture/video immediately.
- **Reference possibility of police involvement.** This request is being made now in order to avoid the need to involve police. In Canada, it is a criminal offence (section 162.1(1) of the *Criminal Code*) to distribute an intimate image of another person without the consent of that person.
- **Seek confirmation.** Please respond to this message and confirm that the intimate image has been deleted/removed as requested. If I do not receive confirmation from you within [set the number of days — anywhere from 2 to 7 should be enough], I may have no choice but to contact police.



Model in image and intended as illustrative.

5

INVOLVE YOUR CHILD

Ensure that your child is apprised of and understands what will happen next. The goal is to ensure that s/he feels empowered and part of the solution.

6

OUTLINE THE CONSEQUENCES WITH YOUR CHILD FOR THE BEHAVIOUR

While still being supportive, be clear that there are consequences for her/his behaviour (e.g., restricted cell phone and Internet use, increased supervision). Discipline should be logical and fit with the behaviour and should differ from a punitive approach. Examples may include:

- Instructing your child to temporarily suspend use of her/his Facebook® account to limit harm in viewing other peers' comments regarding the incident.
- Temporarily suspending your child's cell phone and/or Internet use as a consequence for her/his error in judgment and to limit her/his exposure to any online bullying that may ensue.
- **Reassure your child: Instruct your child not to retaliate against those involved in spreading the content. Reassure her/him that you are working closely with the school to ensure the incident is managed with great care and sensitivity.**

7

REINFORCE THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDS

Help increase the strength and resiliency of your child by reinforcing the importance of your child's friends in helping her/him manage through this time. They can serve as a protective factor and reduce the likelihood of bullying that may result from your child's decision to share sexual pictures/videos.

8

CREATE A SAFETY PLAN WITH THE SCHOOL

Work with the school to create a safety plan — you want to ensure that your child is properly supported and feeling secure. This should include your child knowing who to go to for help to address any further problems. The plan should also include what the adults in your child's life are going to do to help keep her/him safe.

Find out what the school knows about the incident, try your best not to react emotionally. It will be important for both parties to work together to solve the issues — make it clear that you are an ally and you trust the school will act in the same manner as well.

9

SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP (IF APPROPRIATE)

Seek professional counselling for your child as necessary.

!

If the picture(s)/video(s) of your child resurfaces at any point in the future and/or if your child is mistreated by peers, consult with the school. Depending upon the circumstances, a school response may need to be escalated to some form of law enforcement intervention.

!

MANAGING PEERS' REACTIONS/BULLYING:

Following a *self/peer exploitation* incident, it is important that you monitor interactions between your child and her/his peers. As a result of the incident, s/he may be targeted by peers and subjected to verbal and, in some cases, physical bullying, harassment, alienation and/or cyberbullying. This can leave your child feeling isolated, ashamed and helpless. Feelings of self-blame, guilt and humiliation may also be intensified.

Take any threat of suicide seriously and immediately seek professional help.

See the Additional Resources section for information on what to do if your youth is being cyberbullied and what to expect from a youth who has experienced trauma.



Model in image and intended as illustrative.

Steps to Consider if Your Child Is the Acting-out Youth

As a parent, it may be difficult to receive news that your child has been involved in acting-out behaviour in a *self/peer exploitation* incident. Prior to addressing the situation, take a moment to assess how you are feeling. Your preferred course of action may range from disciplining your child all the way to minimizing her/his role and involvement in the activity.

The course of dealing with such behaviours varies depending on the motivation for the acting out and the behaviour engaged in. If your child has been involved in an incident that involves impulsive behaviour, the following steps can assist you to ensure a moderate and balanced approach. If your child's behaviour presents as coercive in nature, the next steps may be dependent on a criminal investigation. In addition to considering the following steps, you may wish to seek professional support and advice about how to respond through this time.

1

INTERVENE IMMEDIATELY

It is essential that you intervene immediately. By acting quickly, you are sending your child the message that you take the situation seriously and that steps must be taken to address and make amends for what occurred. You may want to start with obtaining your child's version of the events. Keep in mind that her/his reaction can range from fully acknowledging her/his involvement to outright denial.

Minimize the damage: Immediately find out if the content is publicly available and/or whether your child still has the content on any mobile device. Take steps to ensure that your child deletes any digital representation of picture(s)/video(s) that are exploitative in nature.

2

DETERMINE YOUR CHILD'S LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY

In consultation with the school, assess the level of responsibility that your child bears for the *self/peer exploitation* incident. Once you have a handle on the facts, walk your child through the importance of taking accountability for her/his actions. Recognizing that every situation is unique, remind your child that while it may be difficult to admit her/his role in what occurred, nothing will improve until s/he takes responsibility for her/his actions. If you receive resistance, explore what your child fears most if s/he admits to any wrongdoing.

3

IDENTIFY THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE BEHAVIOUR

Try and identify the factors contributing to your child's behaviour. What needs was s/he attempting to meet through her/his actions and what was the motivation behind acting out in this way? Your child's intentions are central to figuring out how to prevent this type of behaviour from happening in the future and supporting your child in finding healthy ways to meet her/his needs. Focusing on healthy skill development such as enhancing your child's ability to manage emotions (including managing feelings of hurt and anger), understanding relationship dynamics and building your child's sense of self-esteem and confidence are all important elements in avoiding future similar behaviour.

4

OUTLINE THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE BEHAVIOUR

It is important that your child understands the range of consequences and implications of her/his behaviour. In *self/peer exploitation* incidents, there are often multiple layers of impact and harm caused by sharing/posting sexual pictures/videos. This can also include the potential impact on your child as a result of this behaviour. When outlining the consequences, remember that effective discipline is not about shame or guilt, but rather about fostering acceptable and appropriate behaviour that incorporates respect, tolerance, empathy and a consideration of the feelings of others.

5

BUILD EMPATHY

Empathy is about caring for other people and having a desire to help them, as well as identifying with another individual's emotions. If your child learns to appreciate how others may feel as a result of her/his actions, s/he is less likely to act out in a way that causes harm to another. Articulating how you feel about her/his role in the *self/peer exploitation* incident, explaining why you feel that way, and discussing how her/his behaviour may have impacted others will all promote your child's ability to empathize.

6

REINFORCE THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDS

Your child's friends can be an important support in helping her/him through this time, **provided that the friends do not endorse or minimize what has happened**. They may be able to reinforce the steps and messaging that you are providing and can serve as a protective factor, reducing the likelihood of any bullying that may result from your child's decision to share sexual pictures/videos.

7

EXPLORE RESTORATION

A restorative justice approach focuses on addressing conflict in a manner that attempts to repair harm. Careful consideration should be given to whether your child is prepared to take responsibility and apologize to the *affected youth*. An apology must be based on the *affected youth*'s willingness and ability to receive it. In consultation with the school, determine whether the *affected youth* would be open to receiving such an offering in writing or in person. As part of making amends, also explore having your child participate in educational activities to enhance her/his understanding of the issues related to her/his behaviour and/or participate in volunteer or other community-based initiatives.

8

SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP (IF APPROPRIATE)

Seek professional counselling for your child as necessary. Professional support may be particularly helpful if your child's behaviour was a result of her/him experiencing ongoing distress that requires attention and resolution and/or if s/he is being impacted by the reaction of peers within the school environment.

WHEN TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT THIS ISSUE

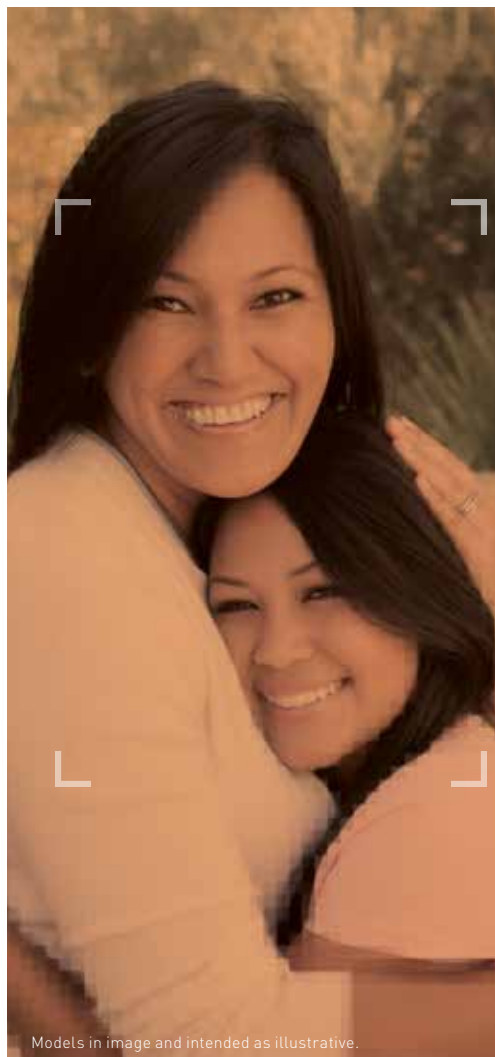
When speaking with your child about her/his involvement in the incident (whether s/he is the *affected youth*, *acting-out youth* or *other involved youth*), consider the following:

- Errors in judgment such as this provide your child an opportunity to learn and grow.
- Accountability and ownership for the situation is an important part of the learning and healing that needs to take place. If your child is the *acting-out youth*, involve her/him in discussions about how s/he is going to fix it, prevent it from happening again and repair the relationship with the *affected youth*.
- Consequences for the inappropriate behaviour need to be reasonable and fit the situation. **While consequences may be a developmental fear of adolescents, it should not stop parents from instituting boundaries and limits (in a loving, supportive and communicative way) in response to a serious situation.**
- Discussions about what healthy and respectful relationships look like and how others deserve to be treated should be part of the learning process.

If your child is the *affected youth*, it will be important to weave in some reassuring messages. Consider the following themes:

- Listen to your child without judgment. Reinforce that s/he is not alone — as her/his parent(s), you are there to listen. Use words such as “Tell me more about that,” followed by remaining quiet and listening carefully to her/his concerns.
- Separate the incident from defining who s/he is. Assist your child in moving past self-blame.
- Advise your child that you are there to help her/him deal with the situation in a dignified and respectful way.
- Be optimistic and reinforce that your child will persevere. S/he will get through this.
- Empower your child by encouraging positive self-talk and reframing how s/he may be viewing the incident.
- Reinforce the importance of keeping good friends close by to help get through this. Friends can act as a buffer for your child from the harmful effects of *self/peer exploitation* and help her/him cope, provided that they don’t endorse or minimize what happened.

For further information, you may wish to review the “Information for Parents” and “Responding to a Youth in Crisis” sections on **NeedHelpNow.ca**. See the Additional Resources section of this guide for information on recognizing trauma in your youth and steps to take to help her/him.



Models in image and intended as illustrative.

Teaching your child to think for herself/himself and to approach a challenge as an opportunity to solve a problem will increase the likelihood that s/he turns to you for help when faced with a troubling situation.

WHO ELSE MIGHT SUPPORT YOUR CHILD?

There are a number of allies who can help protect and support your child following the occurrence of a *self/peer exploitation* incident. Remember to maintain confidentiality as best as possible — limiting the exposure and impact on your child is very important. The groups that you may turn to for help include:

Your Child's School

The school has a responsibility to take action. While most *self/peer exploitation* incidents occur outside of the school setting, there is no question that youth can be negatively impacted within the school environment. There should be a plan put in place that considers options that are uniquely tailored to the incident. For example, some incidents can be managed using restorative justice approaches. Such approaches:

- provide the opportunity for amends to be made with the *affected youth*, helping her/him feel safe and gain closure;
- allow the *acting-out youth* to assess the impact of her/his behaviour, take responsibility for her/his actions and gain insight into the factors that contributed to her/his conduct; and
- enable the community to understand the issues with regard to the behaviour of concern and participate in prevention initiatives that enhance community safety and well-being.

Another important resource within the school for helping your child manage any issues that may ensue with peers is the school counsellor. Also, consideration of accommodations within the school environment may be useful (for example, deferring tests/assignments, providing enhanced academic support for classes missed while dealing with the incident, etc.).

Professional Support

Your family doctor can be a good starting point for accessing a referral for support. A professional therapist may be necessary to support your child in managing the potential emotional impacts tied to sending a sexual picture/video of herself/himself to peers (and possibly broader impacts if the picture/video is posted online). Finding a therapist who understands the potential extent of the trauma associated with having content/information circulating on the Internet may be helpful in assisting your child process and move past what has occurred.

Your Child's Friends

The importance of having at least one good friend cannot be underestimated in helping your child navigate through a *self/peer exploitation* incident. If your child does not have a circle of friends to rely upon, it will be important to help her/him strengthen her/his sense of self, understand what it means to be a good friend and learn strategies for how to introduce herself/himself into a group. Having healthy friendships is an important protective factor for your child in helping manage difficult situations. In a situation where your child is the *acting-out youth*, you will want to identify friends that understand the seriousness of what has transpired, while offering support through what may be a difficult time.



Models in image and intended as illustrative.



PREVENTION

Having regular conversations with your teenager about the risks associated with using technology to experiment sexually is very important in increasing the chances of making safer online decisions.

Use media stories about this issue to engage in a conversation with your teen.

It can be very difficult to get teenagers to open up about things that are going on in their lives, especially if it involves sexuality and dating relationships. An effective way to talk about this issue (and others) is to use real life stories from the media involving other teens. Seize the opportunity to discuss the risks and what could have been done differently. Your teenager is less likely to become defensive when the scenario is not personally about her/him. This can creatively open the door for your child to weave in something that has happened to her/him or one of her/his peers.

Discuss the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships.

Remind your teen that pressure from a boyfriend/girlfriend to engage in sexual conversations or share sexual images/videos does not constitute a caring relationship. Healthy relationships involve respect, dignity, honesty, trust, kindness, listening, acceptance, and loyalty.

Explain the importance of establishing and respecting personal boundaries.

Any images/videos or other information your teen has shared as well as similar content that her/his peers have shared with your teen should be protected and handled with respect (i.e., not shared with others). Emphasize that this continues to apply once a relationship has come to an end.

Discuss problems that may arise from sharing private and sexual information.

Once images/videos or other information is sent, it can be easily misused. This may include the recipient showing it to friends, sending or posting it online or using it to manipulate the other person (e.g., to engage in further sexual activity).

Discuss ways to get out of uncomfortable situations.

Teach your teenager how to get out of unwanted conversations and/or relationships. Some direct ways of getting out of uncomfortable situations include refusing to do something by saying "I don't want to" or "No thanks" or discontinuing contact by not responding to messages and deleting or blocking the person as a contact. Indirect ways of ending a conversation include making excuses such as "I have to go out with my family" or blaming parents "My mom checks my phone/tablet randomly and would ground me."

Discuss the importance of seeking your help if things have gone too far.

Explain the importance of seeking your help without the fear of her/him getting into trouble. Reinforce that it's never too late to ask for help, even if s/he had made a mistake or is embarrassed about what has happened. Emphasize with your child that her/his safety is your number one priority.

Discuss the Canadian laws that intersect with this issue.*

*Criminal offences are presented in a general way to aid understanding. The actual offences are defined in the *Criminal Code of Canada*.

There are several criminal offences that could apply depending on the circumstances. For example:

Child pornography

Child pornography is any naked or semi-naked sexual picture of a person under 18, or of a person under 18 engaged in a sex act. It is illegal to view, take, keep, send or post such pictures or videos.

Non-consensual distribution of an intimate image

The non-consensual distribution of an intimate image involves someone having a sexual/intimate image of another person that was created in private circumstances, and that person knowingly posting it online or sharing it with someone else knowing that the person in the image would not consent to that (or being reckless about whether they would consent to it). A person who engages in this behaviour could be charged.

Voyeurism

Voyeurism is secretly observing or recording a person who reasonably believes her/his actions are private and:

- who is in a place where the person might be expected to change or remove clothing (e.g., bedroom, bathroom, change room, cabin, tent);
- who is all or partially naked or engaged in sexual activity at the time; or
- where the recording is done for sexual reasons.

Other laws

Go to **NeedHelpNow.ca/lawsincanada** to learn about other *Criminal Code* offences that may be involved in these types of situations, such as uttering threats, extortion, counselling to commit suicide, etc.

Talk about the risks of doing something sexual over live cam.

Reinforce that:

- It is easy for someone to record what a person is doing over live cam — don't be fooled by thinking it is live and therefore "no big deal."
- It is not difficult to "live stream" pre-recorded content. A person may think s/he is talking to someone in real time but the other person is actually streaming video that was recorded previously, and it can easily be a recording of a different person (e.g., real person is an adult but the pre-recording is of a teenage girl).
- Unless the person is known offline, there is no way of verifying who is on the other end of the webcam.
- S/he should trust her/his instincts, be skeptical and cautious. If the person your youth is communicating with on live cam is not visible (e.g., "I am having problems with my webcam today — that is why you aren't seeing me."), that person may be trying to hide her/his identity.

For more information on how to discuss *self/peer exploitation*, including sample media stories and scenarios, visit the "Information for Parents" section on **NeedHelpNow.ca**.

The **Canadian Centre for Child Protection** has developed materials to help youth learn about personal safety and navigate complex situations, such as:



Kids in the Know: A national interactive safety education program for increasing the personal safety of children and reducing their risk of victimization online and in the real world. Designed for children from kindergarten to high school, it focuses on building self-esteem through teaching critical problem-solving skills. This program has been purposefully designed to create a common language to help facilitate the way we teach kids about their own personal safety. For more information, visit kidsintheknow.ca.

Activity Booklets for Youth: In response to the growing issues of *self/peer exploitation* and cyberbullying, the **Canadian Centre for Child Protection** created two engaging, age-appropriate activity booklets that teach youth about boundaries, healthy relationships, sexual consent, communication and safe and respectful online behaviour. The Grade 7/8 activity booklet, *What's the Deal?*, and the Grade 9/10 activity booklet, *It Is a Big Deal*, can help parents start conversations with their youth, and the activities are intended to ensure that youth understand the risks associated with certain activities.

NeedHelpNow.ca: Created for youth, **NeedHelpNow.ca** is a website designed to help teens stop the spread of sexual pictures or videos and provide support along the way. The website also offers guidance on the steps that youth can take to get through a *self/peer exploitation* incident and for parents and other adults to respond to youth in crisis.

CONCLUSION

This guide is intended to support your efforts in managing *self/peer exploitation* incidents and to provide practical steps to keep your child safe and secure in the event that s/he becomes involved in such an incident. When dealing with these situations, remain optimistic and reinforce that your child will persevere. This will be vital in helping her/him recover and move forward in a productive and empowered way.



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Models in image and intended as illustrative.

SELF/PEER
EXPLOITATION

IT'S **NOT** OK.

ADDITIONAL TOOLS
AND RESOURCES

Pictures/Videos Posted Without Your Consent?



While this reproducible sheet has been written to guide youth through the steps to request content be removed from a website/online service, parents can also utilize this resource when addressing *self/peer exploitation* incidents.

Many youth take pictures/videos of themselves, send them to their friends and/or post the content online. In some instances, peers who receive the content may post it online and/or send it to others without permission of the person who is in and/or created it. Once content is circulated on the Internet, it can be easily duplicated and shared with others. Pictures and videos may end up on social networking sites, blogs, video-hosting sites, peers' smart phones and/or computers.

The majority of websites and other online services that allow pictures/videos to be posted on their service do not review the content before it appears. However, most have specific policies and guidelines about what can and cannot be posted. They rely on people posting the content to ensure that their material does not violate the privacy of specific individuals or breach copyright laws. **Most websites and online services have a formalized complaint policy which provides individuals with a way to report content that has been posted in violation of their policies.**

PRACTICAL STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO GET YOUR PICTURE/VIDEO OFF THE INTERNET

1

Determine what service (e.g., YouTube®, Facebook®, Instagram®) the picture/video is displayed on and contact that service to request that they remove the picture/video. You will find a list of popular websites/online services, information about their policies and their instructions on how to remove the content at **NeedHelpNow.ca**.



When contacting the website/online service, get directly to the point. The service likely receives a large number of complaints daily so you need to quickly let them know why your request is important.

At a minimum, include the following information in your complaint:

- a. **YOUR AGE:** Let the website/online service know that you are a child. Websites/online services are more likely to prioritize concerns about content involving children. If the picture/video was taken when you were a different age than you are presently, include your age at the time the picture/video was taken as well as your current age.
- b. **IDENTIFY YOURSELF:** Say that you are the child in the picture/video. If you are identifiable (i.e., a person who knows you would recognize you), include this information in your complaint since the website/online service may take your complaint more seriously.
- c. **STATE THAT YOU DID NOT CONSENT TO THE POSTING OF THE CONTENT:** Say that you did not post the content on their site, did not give permission for the content to be posted and that you want it removed. This lets them know that you object to the continued posting of the content.



You may also want to include information in your complaint about who had access to the content. If you sent the picture/video to someone else, say so, and provide the name of the person you sent the content to. Let the website/online service know that you did not give this person permission to post the picture/video. This may help the website/online service trace who posted the content. Most websites/online services will have policies that set out rules for the type of content that can be posted and any user who breaches the rules may be prevented from posting content in the future.

SAMPLE COMPLAINTS:

I am 13 years old and I am requesting the removal of a sexual picture/video of myself that appears through your service at the following URL: [insert the exact URL (website address) where the picture/video is located].

I did not post the picture/video on your site or give permission for it to be posted and I would like it removed.

If you do not know who posted the picture/video, you could say:

I do not know who posted the picture/video on your site.

I do not know who posted the picture/video onto your site, but I did send the picture/video to my boyfriend, [insert full name] and I did not give him permission to post it.

I am not sure who posted the picture/video onto your site, but I have reason to believe that it may have been [insert full name].

2

If you are involved in a *self/peer exploitation* incident that has gone too far and involves things like threats, intimidation, blackmailing, etc., we encourage you to report to police and/or talk to a safe adult about what is occurring. You may also want to send a report to **Cybertip.ca/report**.

For additional information on addressing a *self/peer exploitation* incident, please see **NeedHelpNow.ca**.



Model in image and intended as illustrative.



Trauma and Youth Who Have Experienced Online Exploitation

Youth who have had a sexual picture or video of themselves shared with others can experience significant distress about others seeing these images and how they will be perceived and treated as a result. In addition to the fear youth have about the reactions of their friends and peers, they can experience extreme distress about the reaction of adults in their lives. How adults (e.g., parents, teachers, child welfare workers, law enforcement) respond to a youth who has experienced this type of exploitation and trauma is important. It can make the difference between the youth being able to process and cope with the situation or the youth becoming further distressed.

Here are some considerations for adults dealing with youth who have experienced traumatic stress as a result of online exploitation. To help a child feel supported and safe, it is important for parents and other adults to understand issues related to trauma and how to shape their responses toward youth.

What can cause the traumatic impact on youth?

A child may experience traumatic stress from an online experience that:¹

- Was sudden or unexpected
- Was forceful or violent
- Is perceived by the youth as overwhelming or uncontrollable
- Left the child feeling helpless, unsafe and/or having a lack of control

¹ Bowers, D. (2011). Adapted from a presentation at the Missing and Exploited Children Conference. Winnipeg, MB.



Models in image and intended as illustrative.

What do youth in crisis need from an adult who is first responding?

- To feel safe and supported
- To not feel judged
- A model of how to react to this situation (e.g., a calm reaction from the adult)
- To know that they do not deserve what is happening to them
- A sense of control over what happens next
- A sense of hope for the future
- Concrete strategies for next steps to support them and to attend to the exploitation

What are possible behaviours youth might demonstrate?

Individuals have unique reactions to trauma. Not every child who has a traumatic response to online exploitation will show the same signs. The impact on an individual depends on a number of factors related to their personality, temperament, neurological make-up, past experiences, family dynamics, the type of support network they have and specifics related to the exploitation they experienced. **It is important not to assume that a child is not distressed because they do not act the way an adult might believe someone in distress should behave.** Sometimes the signs are obvious, and sometimes they are not easily detectable.

Responses may include:

- Feeling jumpy, nervous and easily startled
- Feeling agitated
- Having images, sensations or memories of the traumatic experience intruding into the youth's thoughts
- Feeling numb, frozen or shut down
- Pretending everything is okay
- Change in general behaviour, seeming "out of sorts"
- Difficulty regulating emotions – rapid, sometimes exaggerated, changes in mood, where strong *emotions* or feelings occur (such as uncontrollable laughter or crying, heightened irritability or temper cycle in a short period of time)
- Difficulty concentrating or learning new information
- Change in academic performance
- Resistance to going to school



Model in image and intended as illustrative.

- Trouble falling or staying asleep, nightmares
- Generalized fear and anxiety – a persistent feeling that they are not safe
- Difficulty trusting relationships
- Difficulty handling changes
- Substance misuse, cutting or disordered eating
- Withdrawal/lack of interest in activities they typically enjoyed
- Isolating herself/himself from friends
- Sense of helplessness, hopelessness and/or presenting a negative world view
- Extreme changes in the way s/he is dressing
- No observable behaviour changes
- Asserting that s/he is okay
- Acting as if nothing problematic has happened
- Stating s/he can deal with this on her/his own

How can an adult who is first responding intervene supportively?

- Put the youth at ease by letting her/him know you are here to help
- Keep the pace slow and calm
- Tell her/him that her/his safety and wellness are the most important concerns
- Tell her/him you care about her/him
- Tell her/him you are sorry this has happened to her/him
- Acknowledge the difficulty of the situation
- Allow her/him to tell what happened without interruption or insisting on a chronological narrative; ask her/him to try to tell you what happened as an observer looking at a movie of the situation to help her/him avoid reliving the experience
- Avoid asking “Why” questions and stick more to “Tell me more about that” or “Tell me how you responded to that” statements
- Listen without judgement or skepticism, providing positive feedback for the sharing of the experience
- If her/his account sounds confusing, avoid pressing for clarity at this time
- Don’t make promises that may not be realistic
- Focus on problem solving and helping the youth clearly understand you are there to help sort this out and to assist in dealing with how this is affecting her/him, dealing with the exploitation and working toward attempting to bring resolution and closure to the matter

Steps for Parents to Help Their Child

Show support

Your unconditional love and support during this difficult and distressing time will help your child heal and move forward. It is important to avoid using this time for judgment, lectures, anger or catastrophizing the situation.

Build a sense of safety

Reassure your child that s/he is safe and there is no problem or situation that you cannot get through together. Reassure your child that s/he is not alone and that you will be there to help her/him.

Consult with professionals

This may be a stressful time for the entire family. It can be helpful to seek guidance, support and assistance from a mental health professional that has expertise in trauma and working with people who have been exploited. A mental health professional will know how to best support your child and the family unit during this difficult time. Seek out such professionals (e.g., psychologists, social workers, counsellors, psychiatrists) or speak with your family physician for a referral.

Learn about the impacts of trauma

Seek out resources to help you learn about trauma and how to support your child through her/his healing.

Give messages of hope during the recovery process

Youth who have experienced trauma can regain trust, confidence and hope. They have the ability to create a new "normal" and function within it. Help your child see the world as manageable, understandable and meaningful. The stronger the belief that things will become and stay better, the more significant the child's recovery will be. Interestingly and importantly, hope is not just a feeling. The experience of hopefulness actually contributes to physiological chemical changes in the brain that calm fear and anger and allow for increased resiliency and healing.¹

Help rebuild a positive sense of self and sense of control over her/his environment

When youth are going through a situation such as this, they may feel alone and powerless in their ability to control their own lives. In order to restore a sense of control, it is important to include your child in discussions about any next steps that include her/him and in decision making where appropriate.



Model in image and intended as illustrative.

¹ Bowers, D. (2011). Adapted from a presentation at the Missing and Exploited Children Conference. Winnipeg, MB.

Be patient and tolerant of moody behaviour

Youth who have a trauma response can demonstrate difficulty regulating their mood as they can be flooded by emotions. Set realistic expectations and be patient with changes in mood. Examples of moody behaviour may include agitation, anger, sadness, clinginess and outbursts.

Help manage overwhelming emotions

Stay calm and keep the environment low key. Be consistent and help your child understand, express and tolerate her/his strong emotions. S/he will get through it, reassure her/him that it will pass and it is just a feeling.

Help manage her/his flooding thoughts

Help your child see the links between her/his thoughts and feelings. Help her/him understand how working on controlling her/his thinking can help control how s/he feels. Consider exploring new activities that will help manage her/his thinking and emotions, such as yoga, art, music, etc.

Establish clear expectations

This should be done with flexibility and reduced consequences when rules are broken. Gently re-establish the boundaries.

Help your child stay connected to what s/he enjoys

Encourage and support your child to stay connected to family, friends and activities that s/he previously enjoyed.

Help to process her/his experience

Help your child shape her/his experience to have more control over what comes next in her/his life. Be available to listen and to help shape your child's beliefs of her/his life to understand that a negative experience doesn't define who s/he is. Your child has control over writing her/his life story.

Advocate for your child

Be your child's champion and work with professionals to help her/him recover from trauma. Help others to understand your child's behaviour and reactions through a trauma lens so their expectations are realistic and their responses are supportive and caring.

Take care of yourself

To be effective, you must take care of yourself. Taking care of a child who has experienced trauma is very difficult, and it impacts the entire family. Make sure to take time to access the supports necessary for the entire family.



Models in image and intended as illustrative.

What to Do if Your Child Is Being Cyberbullied

Over the past few years, the **Canadian Centre for Child Protection** has witnessed a marked increase in reports to Cybertip.ca from youth ranging from 13 to 17 years of age. A large percentage of these reports are with regard to sexual images/videos being created and distributed among their peers via the Internet and/or electronic devices, sometimes as a form of cyberbullying. When children are sexually exploited/abused and technology has been used to memorialize the sexual harm, there is often an additional layer of trauma for the child.



The **Canadian Centre for Child Protection** defines cyberbullying as a form of extreme bullying among youth via technology. It is abusive, targeted, deliberate and repeated behaviour that is intended to damage and harm another young person.

Educators, school-based resource (liaison) officers, families and the community-at-large play a fundamental role in assisting and supporting youth who are cyberbullied. If you are concerned that your child may be affected by cyberbullying, consider the following strategies.

1

DISCONTINUE THE CONTACT

Make sure your child does NOT respond to the acting-out youth. Teach your child not to respond to any attempts made by the *acting-out youth* to engage in conversation or dialogue (e.g., walking away or ignoring any in-person contact and not responding to any texts or other online messages). Explain to your child that responding may only fuel the *acting-out youth* into escalating the activity. Not responding is especially critical if your child is being threatened or blackmailed – this should be reported to the police immediately.

Have your child adjust her/his privacy settings on social networking sites and block or delete the acting-out youth as a friend/contact on these sites. Most sites allow users to set limits on who can access their profile and send/post messages to their profile, and many provide users with the option to block or delete contacts. Having your child adjust her/his settings and block or delete contacts will help her/him limit or eliminate unwanted contact by the *acting-out youth*. This will not only help reduce her/his exposure to hurtful comments but will also help to reduce any distress s/he may feel whenever s/he is exposed to what the *acting-out youth* is posting. *Before your child deletes all online connections with the acting-out youth, s/he should make a copy of any prior communication in case s/he needs to involve the police at some point.*

Have your child change her/his email address and username. Deleting her/his accounts for a period of time will give your child an important emotional break from seeing the cruel commentary that may be happening online. S/he may also wish to create new accounts that only close and trusted friends and family know about.

2

ADDRESS ANY SEXUAL PICTURES/VIDEOS POSTED ONLINE

Contact the site where the picture/video is posted. Most popular sites (e.g., Facebook®, Twitter®, Instagram®) have a process for reporting, and many place a higher priority on situations involving youth. It's important to include the exact URL (website address) where the content is posted and your child's age at the time the picture/video was taken. Also identify yourself as the parent and your child as the person in the picture/video and indicate that your child did not post the picture/video, did not consent for it to be posted and objects to the continued posting of the content. For more information on how to contact popular websites, please visit **NeedHelpNow.ca**.



3

REPORT THE ACTING-OUT YOUTH

Report the acting-out youth to your child's school. If the bullying involves school peers, telling people in a position to do something about it, such as the administrators at your child's school (e.g., the principal), is important. If they refuse to act or take the issue seriously, escalate the matter to the school division, school board and/or school trustee, as appropriate.

Report to the website or cell phone service providers. If the bullying is occurring online, your child can report the situation to the provider that runs the website or service where the bullying is taking place (e.g., Facebook®, Twitter®). For bullying occurring via text messaging, explore what options exist to block contacts or screen incoming calls with your mobile service provider.

Report the acting-out youth to the police. Depending on the nature of the situation, who is involved and what the bullying has escalated to, there may be *Criminal Code* (Canada) violations to consider such as criminal harassment, intimidation, uttering threats, extortion, defamatory libel, personation, use of a computer in an unauthorized way or interference with data, child pornography, luring, counselling to commit suicide, etc.



Remember, if you are at all concerned that the situation involves an adult, content that depicts a crime (e.g., sexual assault), or the communications are causing significant distress to your child, reporting to a law enforcement agency as soon as possible is extremely important.

4

REINFORCE THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDS

Being around close friends can help your child feel safe, supported and give her/him strength to get through this difficult time.

WHEN PEERS OR FRIENDS ARE BEING BULLIED

Often, youth aren't sure what to do when a peer or friend is being bullied and feel that being silent is the answer. They may think: it's not my problem, s/he isn't my friend, I don't really like her/him anyway, s/he deserves it, I don't want to make it worse by bringing attention to it, I don't want to be targeted next, etc.

It's important for youth to have a variety of options for ways they can stand up against the mistreatment of others and this needs to be reinforced by adults. You can encourage a range of actions that include:

- Refusing to participate (including not "liking" or forwarding harmful messages) and removing themselves from the situation
- Including the person being bullied in school groups, what your child is doing at lunch, etc.
- Challenging hurtful messages with responses such as, "That's not cool," "I think s/he is awesome," etc.
- Letting the person who is being mistreated know how they are being treated is wrong and that it's not okay
- Going to a safe adult to let them know what is going on



If you are concerned that your child may be having suicidal thoughts, seek professional help immediately. Take all signs of suicidal behaviour seriously.



CANADIAN CENTRE *for* CHILD PROTECTION®

Helping families. Protecting children.

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection (Canadian Centre) is a national charity dedicated to the personal safety and protection of children. Our goal is to reduce the sexual abuse and exploitation of children, to assist in the location of missing children and to prevent child victimization.

The Canadian Centre operates Cybertip.ca — Canada's national tipline for reporting child sexual abuse and exploitation on the Internet, as well as other prevention and intervention services to the Canadian public.

Our mission is to:

REDUCE the incidence of missing and sexually exploited children

EDUCATE the public on child personal safety and sexual exploitation

ASSIST in the location of missing children

ADVOCATE for and increase awareness about issues relating to missing and sexually exploited children



Learn more: protectchildren.ca/video-get_involved





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