

# Internet Safety

## A Resource Guide for Parents



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## Tips for Parents to Keep Your Child Safe from Harm in a Cyber World

The online world is here to stay, and while it has created many wonderful opportunities, it has also created some serious dangers for youth. In the ever-changing cyber world it is appropriate that we create cyber rules, boundaries and etiquette with our children. We are providing parents and guardians with the following resource as supports to keep your child safe in an online world.

Setting cyberspace boundaries and expectations with youth are not fun or easy. Youth and parents often experience power struggles over rules and privileges associated with cell phones and Internet use. Research indicates that long term ideas and values around respect, communication, gender, violence and SEL (social and emotional learning) are fostered during the many hours youth spend digitally engaged.

Many young people are introduced to ‘digital playgrounds’ well before entering adolescence and digital rule breaking is still a relatively new avenue of parenting that requires specific attention and action. Parents and guardians may fear that their teen or tween may be sexting, or experiencing online harassment.

Below are five pieces of information for parents and to consider and integrate into family conversations and learning. Many youth feel that their parents worry too much and have little real awareness of what they navigate in both online and in-person social circles as young people. We encourage parents to enter conversations with young people early-generating age-appropriate conversations with pre tweens is great! Work on developing a mutual understanding around privacy, responsibility, consequences, and whole-hearted-open dialogue.



## **Five Tips for Parents Regarding Sexting and Cyberbullying**

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**Tip 1** Speak with teens and tweens about the implications of both sending and receiving sexually explicit photos and videos online.

Share the following statistic with your child: “More than 70 percent of teens hide their online behaviour from their parents and only one in five parents are aware their teens are both viewing and sharing inappropriate photos and are talking with compete strangers online.” The Digital Divide: How the Online Behaviour of Teens is Getting Past Parents, McAfee research 2012, <http://www.mcafee.com/ca/resources/misc/digital-divide-study.pdf>

Be willing to talk about your genuine feelings of concern and confusion with your son or daughter. Ask them what they feel about hiding online behaviour, and be prepared to really listen when they respond. Prior to your conversation, think about a story from your youth when you kept something from your parents that later had negative consequences. Be prepared to share this about yourself. Sexuality, boundaries and online etiquette are an evolving, on-going conversation where everyone learns. Educate yourself around sexting, legal responsibilities and gender dynamics related to dating and online relationships.

**Tip 2** Make a point to educate yourself about the many ways in which your teen or tween may be impacted by things that are communicated, shared, spoken or suggested in social online communities.

In Canada there have been some very high profile cases such as Amanda Todd, where Internet harassment led to the young woman’s suicide. Youth are often hesitant to initiate conversations about cyberbullying, or minimize online situations that may be impacting their self-esteem, academics and overall health. Be prepared to share on-going conversations with young people about respect as it relates to cell phones and other technology use. Youth have indicated the following:

- They have ended a friendship with someone because of something that happened with a friend on a social network.
- They have felt both physically and emotionally unsafe in online communication.
- They have experienced escalated violence including physical fights because of a conflict that was initiated online and was continued in person.
- They have experienced a peer hacking into their online account or have broken into another youth’s account.

- They have admitted using cell phones and computer's to cheat on tests.
- Over 62% of teens have witnessed cruel behaviour online and 23.3% have claimed to have been targets of cyber bullying. Many parents have no idea that their children have been targeted online.

Remind your children that if they have shared something they regret or if they are experiencing bullying because of something they sent that it is never too late to get help from you and others in their community.

**Tip 3** Talk about consent as it relates to sexting and healthy and respectful relationships with your children.

Discuss with other parents and with youth in your family about what is socially appropriate, and inappropriate in various communication contexts. Explore how fun or flirtatious messages between two teenagers in a romantic relationship might be shared outside that relationship to a large audience on wireless networks or the Internet, causing psychological, social and legal problems. Consent is a topic that many parents feel ill equipped to initiate and at the heart of healthy and respectful relationships, it is critical to address and educate youth about the value and importance of consent as it relates to technology, sexuality and respectful relationships.

“Consent is when a person freely gives their permission or agrees to something, after having carefully thought about whether or not they want to do it. This decision should have been made without that person being pressured or bullied, encouraged to use drugs or alcohol to influence their decision, or manipulated or made to feel stupid.” -

ThinkUKnow

**Tip 4** Be pro-active in talking about gender and sexting.

Speak with young men about sexism and sexual objectification of girls and women as a form of systemic violence. Support young women to know their inherent value has nothing to do with body parts and physical beauty. Listen to your daughter if she is grappling with self-esteem issues related to their bodies and how they are perceived by both young men and other young women in their social networks. Encourage young men to grow their reflective listening skills, their empathy and ability to think critically around what it means to be a powerful young man in the face of mainstream culture that encourages them to view girls and women as sexual objects. Support both young men and women to develop their appreciation of authenticity and intimacy that moves beyond the physical. Share your own stories of dating that embrace the concepts of dignity, self-respect and mutual fondness and appreciation. Support young women to counter a female culture that is based on competition and insecurity with trust and assertive

communication. Encourage your children to respect all people regardless of age, sexual orientation or ability. LGBTQ youth are often persecuted through online harassment and bullying. Educate yourself and your family around Transgender identity and know that Transgendered youth are often the target of online bullying and Transphobic actions.

**Tip 5** Create opportunities to explore the concept of a “digital footprint” with youth.

Have a family night where you sit down and review the following questions that are important for both youth and adults to ask as it relates to sexting and online sharing:

- Why am I sending this?
- What would happen if I did not send it?
- Would I share this in person?
- Am I under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or peer pressure?
- What are possible long-term effects of sending this?
- Is there something else I could share that is less of a risk?
- Am I participating in online sharing that is abusive ( sharing something that is not mine to share)
- Does it pass the ‘Newspaper test’? Would I be ok with it appearing on the front page of a newspaper where my mother, father, principal, or grandparents could see?

[http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/14\\_plus/Need-advice/Selfies-and-sexting/](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/14_plus/Need-advice/Selfies-and-sexting/)



## Five Tips for Parents Regarding Pornography

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The Internet has made pornography readily available to children and youth.

### Tip 1 Get informed yourself.

Check out two TED talks: Gary Wilson and Ran Gavrielli.

<http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/Why-I-Stopped-Watching-Porn-Ran>  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSF82AwSDiU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSF82AwSDiU)

They are both terrific resources for becoming informed about the way in which pornography has become increasingly violent towards women and is highly addictive for the developing and forming teenage brain. Also of note, if you have more time and are interested is the following report done by Mary Layden:

[http://www.socialcostsofpornography.com/Layden\\_Pornography\\_and\\_Violence.pdf](http://www.socialcostsofpornography.com/Layden_Pornography_and_Violence.pdf)

Only by knowing ourselves how pornography influences attitudes, leads to sexualized violence against women and children (including human trafficking), can we begin to have informed decisions with youth about the need to not watch pornography. Knowing that the average age of exposure is 10, it is imperative that not only these conversations begin earlier, but if they have been missed up until now, that they need to take place.

### Tip 2 Be able to express your feelings about the presence of pornography in our world.

These may include sadness, sorrow, confusion, shame, and even grief, if we really get in touch with the reality of pornography. Moving from a stance of placing a teenager or a pre-teen into a state of fear if they have watched pornography, into expressing your feelings of concern and sadness, as opposed to anger, will open up the dialogue instead of shutting it down. This process will not likely be instant. You may need to sit quietly after watching the TED talks and really practice self-awareness to get in touch with your feelings. A great way of opening up the conversation, would be to ask, “I am feeling concerned about something, are you open to hearing what that is?”

### Tip 3 Be able to articulate that by watching pornography people are giving their consent to participate in cultures of violence.

Although often times, teenagers will not make the connection between consuming media such as Grand Theft Auto, or pornography, the reality is, pornography exists because people watch it. The only way that human beings will ever cut off the supply is to cut off

the demand. Beginning to practice empathy for people whose lives have been negatively affected by pornography, we can begin to create the type of change that is needed in the world. The reality is that people learn how to be social, and sexual, through everything that they see. It is important at this time to be able to ask youth what they are feeling. Possible feelings may include shame, sadness and regret. It is important as parents to have an open dialogue with youth and practice empathy, recognizing that it is not the fault of your son or daughter if they have consumed pornography. We are living in a system that is inherently violent, and pornography has become an integral part of the equation involving violence against women. It is a multi-million dollar industry that targets youth as consumers. A question that you could consider asking your child is that “by viewing pornography are you willing to consider that you are participating in a culture of violence?”

**Tip 4** Move the discourse into the importance of creating a more just and peaceful world in which violence is not part of sexuality.

This can be done by asking young men how they think women want to be treated in a sexual relationship, and by asking young women how they want to be treated in a sexual relationship. As an adult who grew up in the age before violent pornography you can talk about (as Ran Gavrielli does in the Youtube film) your hopes for a sexual relationship, and that these did not include violence. It is important for today’s youth – as the first generation – of online pornographic consumers (WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?), to know that there was a different existence for people before pornography; one in which gentle touch and loving, tender embraces were the norm.

**Tip 5** Have frank conversations about the nature of Internet addiction, including pornography consumption and the effects that it has on the teenage brain (See TED talks videos).

There are a myriad of negative effects for young women including rises in sexualized violence, depression, body image and self-esteem problems, which can lead to eating disorders and other ill health effects. For young men consumption of pornography leads to unrealistic expectations of young women, a tendency to leave relationships as a result of sexual objectification of women, erectile dysfunction, negative body self image and self esteem. Help is available for youth if they need help with this issue. Counselling is available through Salt Spring Community Services. In families one or both parents may be struggling with the consumption of pornography and may need help themselves in acknowledging the impact of this consumption in their lives. It is important to recognize that all of us are on a journey with regards to Internet safety and addiction, and that further conversations may be needed to move a healthier and better life forward, free from violence.

## Tips for Parents on Internet Addiction and Technology Use in Families

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Children and youth (8-18 yrs. olds) now spend an *average* of 10 hours and 45 minutes a day, seven days a week with media including cell phones, Internet, social media and gaming activities. This translates into young people spending nearly double the amount of time their parents spend in full time jobs, engaged in technology. -the Kaiser Family Foundation in January 2010

Below are five tips to support youth, family and community health as it relates to technology use.

### **Tip 1** Understand the difference between 'normal' internet use and compulsive use.

If your child spends all of his/her waking hours, week in and week out, in front of a laptop or cell phone, ignoring academic responsibilities, family relationships, and sleep patterns are irregular or insomnia has become an issue, it may be time to set limits around technology use and day to day responsibilities and health and well-being. If you notice that your child is often online instead of doing homework and family chores, is spending more time online than with friends or family in person socializing, is losing track of time while in front of device, becomes defensive when you try and engage in a conversation about internet usage or checks messages compulsively throughout the day, it may be time to sit down and talk about new guidelines for usage. It is absolutely appropriate as a parent to set firm guidelines around technology use with young people. For example, you can explain to your child that you will need them to turn off their phone a half hour before their bedtime and place their cell phone away from their head, across the room. You can share that the reason you are asking for this is because there are health concerns associated with cell phones being close to/on the body for extended periods of time.

### **Tip 2** Encourage in person socializing and alone time without a cell phone or in front of a computer each day for your family members. Teach self-regulation (knowing when to turn the computer off, knowing how too much computer time effects one's mood and physical health) as part of responsible technology use.

Social media by its very design encourages people to spend more time alone, on computers, than with others face to face. Many young people learn valuable social and emotional skills such as vulnerability, confidence and reflective listening in face-to-face interactions and having ample time each day to be outside, unplugged and relaxed is a key part of physical and mental health. In our 15 years of youth violence prevention work, we have often heard young people wishing they could spend more time with their parents. Make a point of finding time each week to be with your child where technology

is shut off and put away, so you can look each other in the eyes, focus on a hands on activity together, or participate in an outdoor activity that promotes physical health, mental clarity and relaxation. Take note of your child's daily activities and model in your own daily schedule, the ability to unplug from technology. In our workshops with young people we share conversations about the difference between "Human Doing" and "Human Being". In a world that continues to speed up, values multi- tasking and perfectionism, explore in your family how you create "Human Being" opportunities together and as individuals. As a family, discuss the following question together: "Do I use technology as a way of escaping problems or relieving a mood?"

**Tip 3** Web Overuse has been linked to depression, social isolation and insomnia.

Changes in regular sleep patterns due to late night online chatting, texting, YouTube viewing, Facebook posting, Twitter updating, obsessive gaming, affects brain chemistry in both adults and young people. Notice if your child complains of back or eyestrain or carpal tunnel syndrome---as these may be signs of too much time in front of gadgets. Support youth to engage in off line activities that combat depression. Often people engage in compulsive online activity because they may not feel they have the capacity to deal with strong emotions like sadness, fear, anger or loneliness, and find internet to be a way to avoid seeking support. Adolescence is a time when young people are negotiating self-esteem, peer relations, puberty, dating and balancing family, school and friendships. Help your child understand that part of their journey from childhood to adulthood involved learning how to communicate about their challenges, heart aches and heartbreaks, successes and failures. Depression is often a combination of emotions that become challenging to feel and express to oneself and others.

**Tip 4** Consider gifting your family a copy of *The Joy Diet* by Martha Beck and share it with the young people in your life.

Beck's book explores the philosophy that in our fast paced world "doing nothing is the most productive activity you will ever undertake." Doing nothing is not problem-solving and is not planning. Doing nothing is being still, quieting your mind (and the cacophony of voices), and simply *being*. In our 15 years of working with young people we have repeatedly noticed that the majority of young people have an increasingly difficult time relaxing and having a deep inner experience of confidence and well-being. Young women are obsessed with how they look, dedicated to ill-advised levels of perfectionism on all fronts. Many young men are illiterate in social and emotional competency due to an increasing hyper masculinity that denies them the opportunities to be in touch with emotions such as shame, fear, grief and vulnerability within themselves. Supporting

young people to learn how to do nothing, be still and quiet are gifts that will have repercussions for generations to come.

**Tip 5** The Internet is influencing your child with questionable information about gender, relationships, self-esteem, communication and violence.

Many parents feel overwhelmed with the way in which their children are exposed to age inappropriate information on the Internet. If young people are spending double the amount of time their parent works a full time job, this leaves a lot of time where youth are unsupervised in an expansive new world. Essentially this is a social experiment which may have unforeseen or unintended consequences. One of the most profound things you can do is have conversations with your child. Express your feelings about the world in which we are living that has de-emphasized face-to-face communication for electronic communication. Talk about the problems this can create and how you feel. Talk about a different way of being and how much different life can be.

