



# How to Talk with Teens about Online Sexual Violence

The harm facing children and youth online is amplified by ever-evolving digital platforms and emerging trends. With increased reliance on screens and time spent online, children and youth have become increasingly vulnerable to online exploitation and victimization.

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection has also seen an escalation in aggressive tactics being used to coerce and harm youth online. As such, youth need to be taught skills to help them navigate online situations safely, identify risky situations, and where to go for help if someone is trying to harm them online.

## SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Cybertip.ca, Canada's tipline for reporting online child sexual abuse and exploitation, has seen a large spike in online harm impacting youth in the past year<sup>1</sup>, including a:



**37% increase** in reports related to the overall online victimization of children



**83% increase** in reports of online luring



**38% increase** in reports of the non-consensual distribution of intimate images, with a 39% increase in youth reporting



**74% increase** in reports of sextortion involving online platforms youth use every day



Increase in youth's intimate images appearing on adult pornography sites and being shared on popular social media platforms

One of the most concerning trends is youth are, in most cases, **not telling anyone.** Youth who report to Cybertip.ca often indicate they have not told anyone what is going on (e.g., friends, family, school) for fear of being victim-blamed, letting the adults in their life down, or just not knowing who to turn to for help.

<sup>1</sup> 2021 versus 2020.



## WHAT IS ONLINE SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Online sexual violence is a broad term that includes unsolicited and unwanted sexual actions and behaviours directed towards youth online. Some examples include:

- Someone randomly sending youth sexual images (e.g., cyber flashing) and/or sexual messages online.
  - » Girls in particular are increasingly experiencing cyber flashing on platforms such as Snapchat® and Instagram®. Unfortunately, this form of online sexual violence is becoming widely accepted as a “new norm.”
- Unwanted and random or persistent requests for youth to send sexual images to someone they may or may not know.
  - » Pressure and coercion tactics have become increasingly aggressive and are being used by peers of both adults and youth
  - » Sometimes a person will send an unwanted sexual image as a tactic to try and coerce/guilt youth into sending one back (e.g., “I’ll show you mine, you show me yours” mentality)
  - » Even if the youth knows the person asking for sexual images, images sent under pressure are not consensual. This is online sexual violence.
- Non-consensual recordings, forwarding/posting, and/or threats of forwarding/post of sexual images of the youth
  - » [Cybertip.ca](https://www.cybertip.ca) is receiving reports of individuals using increasingly aggressive control tactics to pressure youth into sending sexual images, such as showing youth they know their address by sending an item like an empty box to their house.

## WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- Be aware of the aggressive nature of online sexual violence youth are exposed to and dealing with. It HAS increased.
- Have regular conversations with your teen to increase their awareness about safety concerns online and talk with them about how to handle situations they may encounter. See the “What if” scenarios below to help get the conversation started.
- Stay curious and try to understand the social pressures your teen is facing. Listen to what they have to say about pressures teens are faced with and how they feel about it. Talk about the issues around sharing sexual images with anyone, considering issues such as whether the relationship they are in is really consensual, what the pros and cons of sending an image may be, and when coercion is being used instead of consent.



- Instances of online sexual violence require immediate intervention. You can report online sexual violence to [cybertip.ca/report](https://cybertip.ca/report).
- Remind youth you are in their corner and it's your job to try to prevent bad things from happening. Let them know if they are ever not sure what to do, or feel they are in over their head, they can ALWAYS come to you for help. It is important to remind teens that the supportive adults in their lives will always stand by them and help them get through tough situations together.

## HOW TO TALK TO TEENS ABOUT ONLINE SEXUAL VIOLENCE — “WHAT IF” SCENARIOS

One of the best ways to start conversations around online sexual violence with teens and provide them with the knowledge and skills to navigate situations safely, is to work through “what if” scenarios. Here are a few examples to help you get started:

### SCENARIO 1

Emerson is talking to a person on Snapchat®. The person wants to live chat and keeps asking and asking Emerson to, “show some skin.” Emerson gives in, does it, and regrets it. The person took a screenshot.

The person immediately switches from being nice to harsh, and demands more pictures by threatening to send the screenshot to everyone on Emerson’s contact list. The person shows Emerson they have a screenshot of Emerson’s contact list.

#### What are the red flags?

The red flags in this situation are:

- The person wanting to live chat.
- The person pressuring Emerson to remove clothing.
- The person taking a screenshot.
- The user making demands of Emerson and threatening to forward the image.
- Several parts of this scenario are illegal. This is a serious situation that requires immediate intervention.

#### What should Emerson do?

Emerson should screenshot the messages, stop all communication, and block this user. It is important to tell a safe adult who can help, such a parent or caregiver. Emerson and/or Emerson’s parents/caregivers need to make the platform aware of what has happened. Emerson and/or Emerson’s parents/caregivers can report to [Cybertip.ca](https://cybertip.ca) or local law enforcement.



## SCENARIO 2

A random person DMs Olly so Olly checks out the person's profile. The person looks around Olly's age. Olly notices they don't post a lot and don't have a lot of followers, but they are following A LOT of people. Olly decides to message the person back. Then the person asks if Olly wants to video chat on Google Hangouts®.

Olly logs on and sees that the person is nude on camera. Immediately the person tells Olly how much they like Olly and wants Olly to get nude too.

### What are the red flags?

The red flags in this situation are:

- The user doesn't post much, does not have many followers, yet is following a lot of people.
- As soon as Olly logs on, the user appears nude on camera (this is cyber-flashing).
- The user tells Olly how much they like Olly without even knowing Olly.
- The user asking Olly to get nude. This is a coercive tactic and a high risk for victimization.

### What should Olly do?

Olly should screenshot the messages, block this user, and not respond, even if they contact him from another account. Save the username information for making a report to the platform, Cybertip.ca, and/or police.

Olly should also tell a safe adult, such as parent or caregiver, about what happened to get some help. Olly and/or Olly's parents/caregivers need to make the platform aware of what has happened, and can report it to Cybertip.ca or local law enforcement.

## SCENARIO 3

Aubrey chats with a person in a group chat while playing a game online. The user asks Aubrey to move to a private chat. The person starts getting weird and contacting Aubrey several times a day. Aubrey thinks the person is nice, but a little off. The person tells Aubrey they have a hard life and Aubrey is the only person they can talk to. Aubrey feels badly for the person, but the person puts on a lot of pressure on Aubrey to talk them several times a day about strange things that make Aubrey uncomfortable.

### What are the red flags?

The red flags in this situation are:

- The user asking Aubrey to move to private chat.
- The person contacting Aubrey several times a day.
- Aubrey's feeling that the person is getting weird.



### What should Aubrey do?

Aubrey needs to trust her intuition and stop talking to this user. Intuition and trusting one's gut feelings is important as this is the body's warning signal of danger. There is no need for Aubrey to be concerned with being nice or polite in this situation as it could be dangerous.

Aubrey should stop all communication with this user and talk to a safe adult about what happened who will be supportive.

## SCENARIO 4

Kai is chatting with a person online who then randomly DMs and cyber flashes Kai. The person says it's now Kai's turn. Kai cyber flashes too and then the chat ends abruptly. Immediately Kai is contacted by a user who says they have a copy of the image and demands to be sent \$850 or the user will send the picture out to Kai's family and friends. Kai blocks the user, but then Kai is contacted from another account she believes is the same user, and the user becomes more aggressive. Kai is completely panicked.

### What are the red flags?

The red flags in this situation are:

- The user DMing Kai randomly, then cyber flashing.
- The user telling Kai it is now Kai's turn, implying that Kai now must repay/return the act. This is a control tactic and is coercion.
- The chat ending as soon as Kai cyber flashes.
- The demand for money, coupled with threats.
- The use of a different account to contact Kai after Kai blocks the first account.
- All of the above red flags are acts of sexual violence. This is illegal.

### What should Kai do?

Kai should screenshot the messages, stop all communication with this user, and block them. If they try to contact Kai from another account, continue to block the user. Kai should never comply with the demands. Save the user's username information for reporting to the platform or Cybertip.ca.

Kai should tell a safe adult, such as a parent/caregiver, about what happened so they can help. Kai and/or Kai's parents/caregivers need to make the platform aware of what has happened, and can report it to Cybertip.ca or local law enforcement.



## SCENARIO 5

A random user sent Marwa a message in a chat app. The chat turns sexual by things the user is saying, and the user asks Marwa if Marwa wants to see the user's genitals. The user immediately sends a picture. Marwa is upset.

### What are the red flags?

The red flags in this situation are:

- A random user sending a message in a chat app.
- The chat turning sexual by the user.
- The user offering to send a nude and then sending one without a response from Marwa.

### What should Marwa do?

Marwa should screenshot the messages, stop all communication with this user, and block them. Marwa also needs to tell a safe adult who can help such as a parent or caregiver. Marwa and/or Marwa's parents/caregivers need to make the platform aware of what has happened, and can report it to [Cybertip.ca](https://www.cybertip.ca) or local law enforcement.



Model in image and intended as illustrative.

