

Parent Tip Sheet: Protecting Your Children from Online Exploitation

UNDERSTANDING AND PREVENTING ONLINE HARM

To protect our children from online exploitation, we need to understand what it is and the risks. This knowledge allows us to take positive steps toward solutions.



- CYBERBULLYING** Online harassment.
- ONLINE GROOMING** Manipulating trust for sexual purposes.
- ONLINE LURING** Tricking someone into unwanted sexual activity.
- SEXTORTION** Blackmail with sexual content.
- CSAM** Child sexual abuse material.

ONLINE SAFETY ESSENTIALS

STRANGER DANGER

Talk to them about who they can connect with online. Reinforce that online communication should be limited to people they know and trust in their offline lives: family, friends, classmates, etc.

EMPOWER, DON'T BLAME

If something happens, remind them they are not at fault and can learn to stay safe. Make sure your child knows they can talk to you openly and without judgment about things that make them feel unsafe or uncomfortable.

TEACH CRITICAL THINKING

Teach them to recognize manipulative tactics, such as too-good-to-be-true offers, pressure to do something quickly or in secret, or emotional manipulation.

STAY INFORMED

Know current online trends and risks. To do this, talk to your kids and explore apps together to familiarize yourself with their online world.

SET BOUNDARIES

Limit online time, limit unsupervised device use (particularly at night) and approve sites/apps – parental controls on your child's device can help you do this. At the same time, consider trust, balance and your child's maturity to gradually offer more freedom as they demonstrate responsibility.

RECOGNIZING POTENTIAL WARNING SIGNS

Beyond prevention, it's crucial to be aware of potential warning signs that your child might be experiencing online exploitation. These include:

- Sudden changes in behavior (withdrawal, anxiety, secrecy).
- Physical symptoms (stomach aches, headaches, sleep problems).
- Excessive time spent online, especially at odd hours.
- Unexplained gifts, money, or expensive items.
- Sudden knowledge of or engagement in mature, adult-themed topics that is not age-appropriate.
- Loss of interest in hobbies or social activities.
- Signs of depression or self-harm.
- Unexpected charges on accounts.
- Excessive communication with unknown individuals.

TAKING ACTION AND REPORTING

OFFER CALM AND UNWAVERING SUPPORT

If you suspect your child is being harmed, it's essential to remain calm. They need your support now more than ever. Take a deep breath and let them know you're there for them without judgement, no matter what.

Reassure them that you believe them, that they are safe with you, and that you will navigate this together, step by step.

Emphasize that there are ways to address this, and that you will find solutions together, as a team.

SEEK HELP FROM THE EXPERTS

You don't have to handle this alone. **Report the incident to [Cybertip.ca](https://cybertip.ca) or your local law enforcement.** They are trained to help in these situations.

If you feel your child is in immediate physical danger, please, without delay, **call the police.** Their safety is the priority.

Additional support you may want to consider is a **counselor or reaching out to your school for support.**

CAREFULLY DOCUMENT THE SITUATION

If possible, **preserve any evidence,** like screenshots of photos or messages. This isn't about distrust; it's about having the information needed to protect them.

Explain that **this documentation will help** those who can assist in making the situation stop.



BUILDING DIGITAL RESILIENCE

Responding to immediate threats is essential, but we must also focus on building digital resilience, which is an ongoing process of equipping our children with the tools to stay safe online.

FOCUS ON OPEN AND HONEST COMMUNICATION

Initiate age-appropriate conversations about online safety and create a non-judgmental environment for open dialogue.

IDENTIFY TRUSTED ADULTS AND RESOURCES

Help your child identify trusted adults and make them aware of resources like kidshelpphone.ca.

DEVELOP CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Teach your child to think critically about what they see online. Help them recognize that not everything they read, see, or hear on the internet is true or reliable. Encourage them to question sources, verify information, and consider multiple perspectives before forming opinions or sharing content. Building these skills empowers them to navigate the digital world with more awareness and confidence.

PROMOTE POSITIVE ONLINE BEHAVIOR

Teach children to be respectful, compassionate, and inclusive online. Lead by example, and show them good digital citizenship.

A critical part of engaging youth in technology is ensuring they have the knowledge and skills to be responsible and empowered online. Actua's Cyber Smart Education Project empowers youth to explore, create and connect responsibly online. Visit actua.ca for additional information and resources on keeping youth safe online.