



Youth: What you need to know about online sexual violence

In the last year alone, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection (C3P) has supported well over 3,500 youth (as well as parents) regarding the harm they are experiencing online. Through talking with many of these youth, C3P has heard about some of the concerning tactics frequently being used to harm and harass them — from random people sending sexual DMs to being cyber flashed. These unwanted online actions and behaviours have, unfortunately, become common for youth to experience. But just because they are common, doesn't mean they're not harmful. **This is online sexual violence, and it is not okay.**

WHAT IS ONLINE SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

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

- Someone randomly sending you sexual images (e.g., cyber flashing) and/or sexual messages online.
- Unwanted and random or persistent requests for you to send sexual images or videos of yourself to someone you may or may not know.
 - » Sometimes a person will send an unwanted sexual image or video as a tactic to try and coerce/guilt you into sending one back (e.g., “I’ll show you mine, you show me yours” mentality).
 - » Even if you know the person asking for sexual images, if you send those images under pressure, that isn’t consensual sharing. That is still online sexual violence.
- Recordings of you made without your knowledge, and forwarding/posting or threatening to forward/post those sexual images or videos.



Online sexual violence is **VERY** different from sharing intimate images within a consensual relationship. Online sexual violence is unwanted, unsolicited, and aggressive.



MYTHS AND FACTS



MYTH: If someone is pressuring you for sexual images, it means they really like you.



FACT: Pressure is a form of control and if you are sending sexual images under pressure, that is not consensual sharing. Your limits and boundaries are not being respected, and that is not okay.



MYTH: Sending random sexual images is harmless.



FACT: It's not acceptable to randomly flash someone in the offline world, so why should it be allowed online? Sending sexual images can make the other person feel uncomfortable, disgusted, embarrassed, and confused.



MYTH: Only girls are asked for sexual images or videos online.



FACT: More and more boys are also being pressured to send sexual images online. Many times they are tricked into thinking they are sending images to a peer. The person then uses the imagery to threaten the youth for more images or money. This is illegal.



MYTH: It's my fault.



FACT: Teens can't compete with adults looking to harm them online. Sexual pressure, coercion, and control may make you feel like you can't report online sexual violence for fear of being blamed. This is not true. There is help and it's not your fault.

SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER

Negotiated sexual images or videos

- You may be in a relationship where you both consent to sending each other sexual images or videos. If you take an image or video of yourself and send it to someone, even if you trust that person, there is a real risk it could be forwarded to others or posted online without you knowing.
- Once the image/video has been forwarded beyond where you intended, it can be stored on others' devices. Where it goes from there is out of your control - it is not uncommon to see images of youth appear on adult pornography sites.



Non-consensual forwarding or posting

- In Canada, it is a crime to share or distribute a private sexual image or video of someone if they have not consented to it. This is a form of online sexual violence.¹
- Non-consensual recording or forwarding/posting sexual images/videos can have harmful emotional, social, and psychological impacts on the youth who is depicted in the picture, as well as on others. It can cause significant damage.

Unsolicited requests for sexual images or videos

- If someone randomly requests sexual images or videos from you, this is a form of online sexual violence.
- Pressuring someone (whether you know them or not) for sexual images or videos is coercion. It is controlling behaviour.
- Sexual images or videos sent under pressure are not considered to be consensual sharing and is a form of online sexual violence.

Receiving unwanted sexual images

- If you receive an unwanted sexual image, it can be really upsetting. Receiving an unwanted sexual image does not mean you now owe that person a sexual image of yourself.

Exposure to pornography

- Watching pornography can be damaging and distort your idea of what a healthy and consenting sexual relationship looks like.
- What is happening within pornography is often unhealthy or unsafe in real-life relationships.
- Excessive viewing of pornography can have negative health impacts that interfere with real-life intimacy.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- If you are experiencing any form of online sexual violence, talk to a safe adult in your life. They are there to support you; you are not alone.
- You can also report any form of online sexual violence or victimization to [Cybertip.ca](https://www.cybertip.ca).

¹ Sexual images of youth are illegal and while there are very limited defences for consensual creation there are no defences for posting sexual images online or forwarding them.

