

## SELF/PEER EXPLOITATION

# WHAT PARENTS OF TEENS NEED TO KNOW

As a parent, it can be difficult to receive the news that your child has been involved in a *self/peer exploitation* (also known as “sexting”) incident. *Self/peer exploitation* is generally defined as youth creating, sending or sharing sexual images and/or videos with peers online or through electronic devices (e.g., texting, messaging apps, social networking sites).

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. Rest assured, it is completely normal to be feeling these things and more.

Reasons why teens may become involved in a self/peer exploitation incident will vary, as will the impact of the incident on the teen. Some teens may feel embarrassed and extremely vulnerable, however others (including the teen whose image has been taken and/or distributed as well as the teen who has taken and/or distributed an image/video of someone else) may appear unconcerned, and seem to not fully appreciate the potential damage that such content and behaviour may have caused or what it might mean in the future.

### What should parents know about this issue?

- Be aware that teens do not typically share experiences they are embarrassed or ashamed of with their parents — don’t assume you would know if there was a problem.
- Teens will make errors in judgment — it is all a part of growing up. When a teen does make a mistake, use it as an opportunity for them to learn and grow. Encourage them to separate the error in judgment from how they define themselves.
- The circulation of sexual images/videos among peers and their distribution online can have short- and long-term impacts. The effects will vary according to a teen’s personality, temperament, available support systems and resiliency.

**It is very important that you monitor interactions between your child and their peers following a self/peer exploitation incident. They may be targeted by peers and subjected to verbal, and in some cases, physical bullying or harassment as well as alienation. In some instances, this can leave your child feeling isolated, shamed, helpless or humiliated. Take any threat of self-harm seriously and immediately seek professional help.**



## Conversations to have with your teen:

1.

Discuss the difference between healthy relationships (i.e., loving, respectful, caring) and unhealthy relationships (i.e., manipulative, intimidating, pressuring). 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.

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2.

Explain the importance of establishing and respecting personal boundaries when using technology. Both the information your teen has shared and the information others have shared with your teen should be protected and handled with respect (e.g., not shared with others). Emphasize that this continues to apply once a relationship has come to an end.

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3.

Discuss the types of problems that may arise from sharing private and intimate information electronically, including images and videos. Once 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, for example, to engage in further sexual activity.

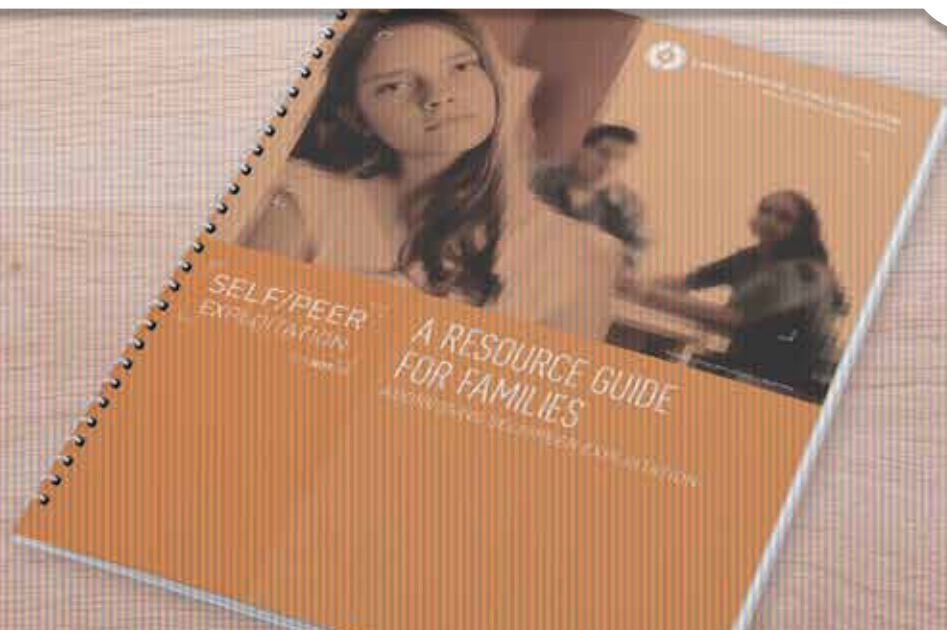
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4.

Teach your adolescent that it is illegal to distribute an intimate image of someone without their consent.

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**To help parents manage this social challenge, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection (through its [Cybertip.ca](http://Cybertip.ca) program) has created a resource guide for families. For more information, please visit [cybertip.ca/self\\_peer\\_exploitation](http://cybertip.ca/self_peer_exploitation).**



Model in image. Intended as illustrative.

