



Model in image and intended as illustrative.

SELF/PEER  
EXPLOITATION

IT'S **NOT** OK.

A RESOURCE GUIDE  
FOR FAMILIES

ADDRESSING SELF/PEER EXPLOITATION



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The Canadian Centre for Child Protection is a registered charity dedicated to the personal safety of all children. Our goal is to reduce child victimization by providing programs and services to the Canadian public.

[protectchildren.ca](http://protectchildren.ca)

November 2012 | ISBN 978-1-927103-18-0

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A Resource Guide for Families is intended to provide general information to assist in dealing with an incident of self-peer exploitation. It is not intended to provide legal advice and should not be relied upon for such purpose.



## INTRODUCTION

The issue of *self/peer exploitation*<sup>1</sup> has become a growing concern for school personnel and parents. Coined in the media as "sexting," this behaviour is generally defined as youth creating, sending or sharing sexual images and/or videos with peers via the Internet and/or electronic devices. It usually involves exchanging images/videos through cell phone picture/video messaging, messaging apps (on iPhones, Blackberries, Androids), social networking sites, etc. Concerns over this type of behaviour are escalating, namely because:

- the consequences can be harmful in the immediate and long-term; and
- children are growing up in a technology-rich environment and are almost certain to be confronted with a *self/peer exploitation* incident(s) at some point during adolescence.

*Self/peer exploitation* is defined as youth creating, sending or sharing sexual images and/or videos with peers via the Internet and/or electronic devices.

## PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

The **Canadian Centre for Child Protection** ([protectchildren.ca](http://protectchildren.ca)) has created this *Resource Guide for Families* in conjunction with a *Resource Guide for Schools* that assists school personnel in adequately responding to these types of incidents. If your child has created and shared a sexual image/video of themselves with a peer(s), or shared an image/video of a peer with others, this guide will serve to:

- offer you some practical guidance for supporting your child and addressing the situation;
- help reduce the potential negative impact on your child (and your family) if this occurs;
- help minimize your child's involvement in this type of activity; and
- offer guidance that may limit the circulation of your child's sexual image(s)/video(s).

This resource is designed to assist families when responding to a *self/peer exploitation* incident; it is also a useful tool to base a discussion with your child about preventing her/his involvement in this type of activity.

**Affected Youth:** Youth whose image/video has been taken and/or distributed whether by themselves or someone else.

**Acting-out Youth:** Youth who have taken and/or distributed an image/video of someone other than themselves.

**Other Involved Youth:** Bystanders who are in receipt of the distributed image/video, whether by the *affected youth* or the *acting-out youth*.

<sup>1</sup>For the purpose of this document, the term *self/peer exploitation* does not include text messages involving sexual content.



Model in image and intended as illustrative.

## WHY YOUTH ENGAGE IN SELF/PEER EXPLOITATION

Young people engage in *self/peer exploitation* for the following reasons:

### Romantic Relationships or Sexual Experimentation

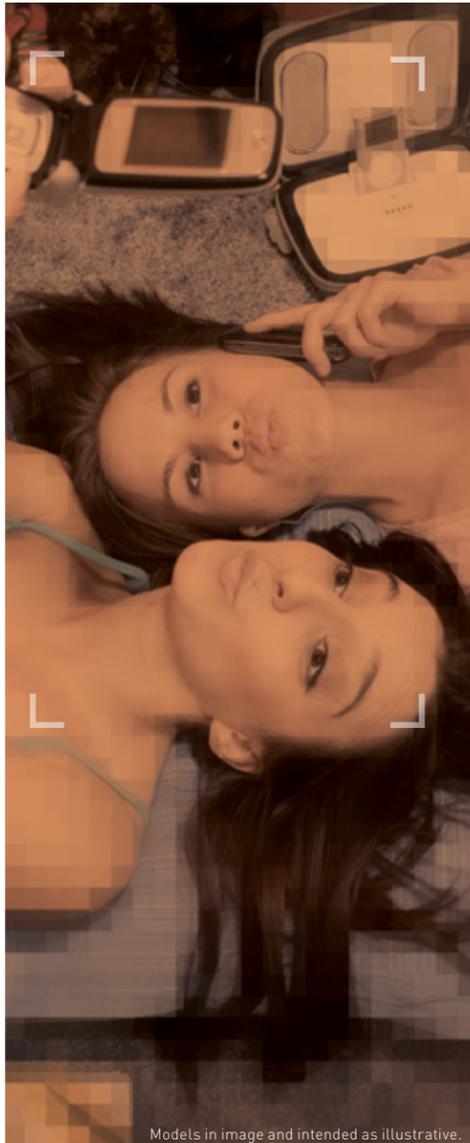
- During a relationship (offline or online), images/videos may be produced and shared voluntarily between romantic partners or experimenting youth. These images/videos may also be circulated to others with or without the knowledge of the *affected youth*.
- After the breakdown of a relationship, images/videos may be shared with others impulsively or with malicious intent (e.g. to embarrass the ex-partner or ex-friend).

### Attention-Seeking Behaviour

- Adolescents may produce and share images/videos among friends as a joke, a dare or a challenge. These images/videos may be circulated to others with or without the knowledge of the *affected youth*.
- Images/videos may be produced, shared or posted publicly (e.g. Facebook, YouTube) in an attempt to gain acceptance or popularity.

### Coercive Circumstances

- Peers, romantic partners or online acquaintances may demand images/videos through extortion/coercion. This could involve threats to release information, chat logs or other images/videos if the adolescent does not comply with the demands. This behaviour may be sexual in nature and/or for controlling purposes.
- Images/videos may be obtained in circumstances where the adolescent is unaware, unwilling or in a compromised position (e.g. images taken at a party and posted on a social networking site).



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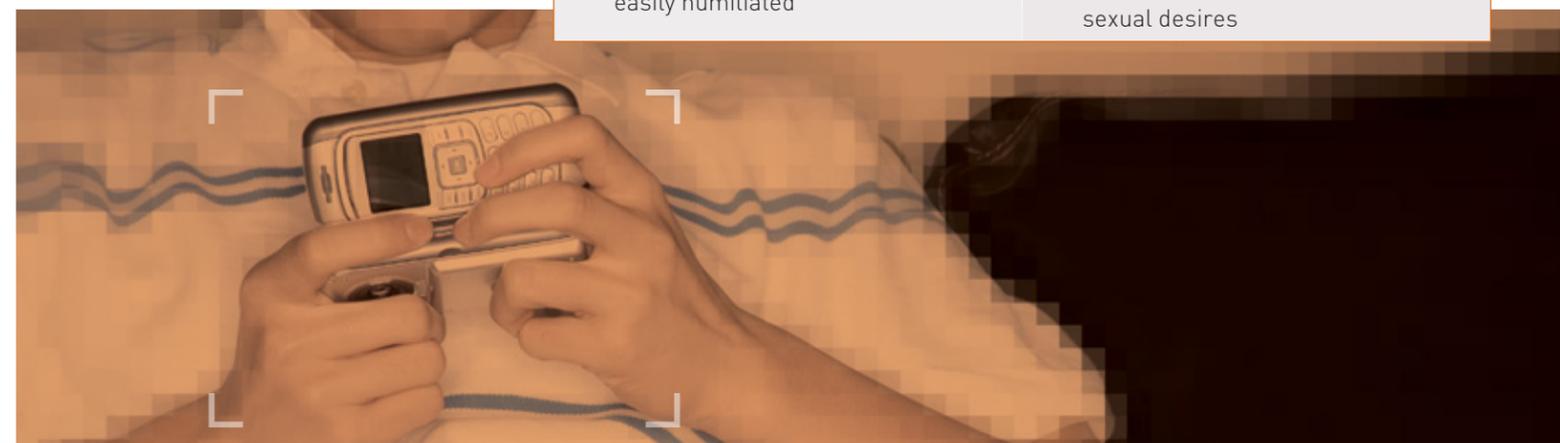
*“Just as the body of an adolescent undergoes great physical changes, the brain also develops and changes but at different rates. The pre-frontal cortex of the frontal lobe is one of the last areas to develop; studies have shown that it does not fully mature until individuals are in their 20s. This area is involved in insight, judgment and impulse control. This means that although teens may logically understand the consequences of actions, they are more likely to act from their emotions and without consideration of these consequences. Teens first develop the ability to be objective and critical of others’ actions and later, they develop the ability to analyze and understand their own actions. Moreover, as these functions are developing, the changing hormonal environment of puberty also drives an adolescent’s behavior.”*

– Dr. Debbie Lindsay

To gain insight into what contributes to youth engaging in this behaviour, it is important to understand brain development and the vulnerabilities that can occur during adolescence. Child development refers to the physical, cognitive, personal, and social changes that occur between birth and adolescence. Understanding the various stages of child development can help you know what to expect and how to best support your child as s/he grows and develops.

Consider the following as it pertains to your child’s development:

Children 13-15 years of age:	Children 16-17 years of age:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• feel as though acceptance and belonging are the most important things</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• experiment with various roles in an effort to figure out who they are</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are extremely influenced by peers and their behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• appear to have a fully-developed identity, but are not yet fully mature</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are vulnerable to those who offer insincere flattery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• object strongly to all narrow limitations on their self-image</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• feel that how they look and what others think of them is very important</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have an established sexual identity and seek intimacy</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• compare themselves to their peers in an effort to define who they are</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• seek independence and expect privacy</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• take huge emotional risks in search of their identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have an increased focus on what will happen in the future</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have a ‘pseudo-maturity’ and feel they can handle more than they are ready for developmentally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prioritize friendship</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are extremely sensitive and easily humiliated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• can have intense romantic relationships and increased sexual desires</li> </ul>



While media reports that *self/peer exploitation* behaviour is highly prevalent, gathering accurate data is challenging. This may be partially attributed to the fact that most youth are reluctant to seek help from a safe adult after becoming involved in this type of activity. Similar to a youth who is being bullied or is involved in bullying, reasons for **not** seeking help from a safe adult include:

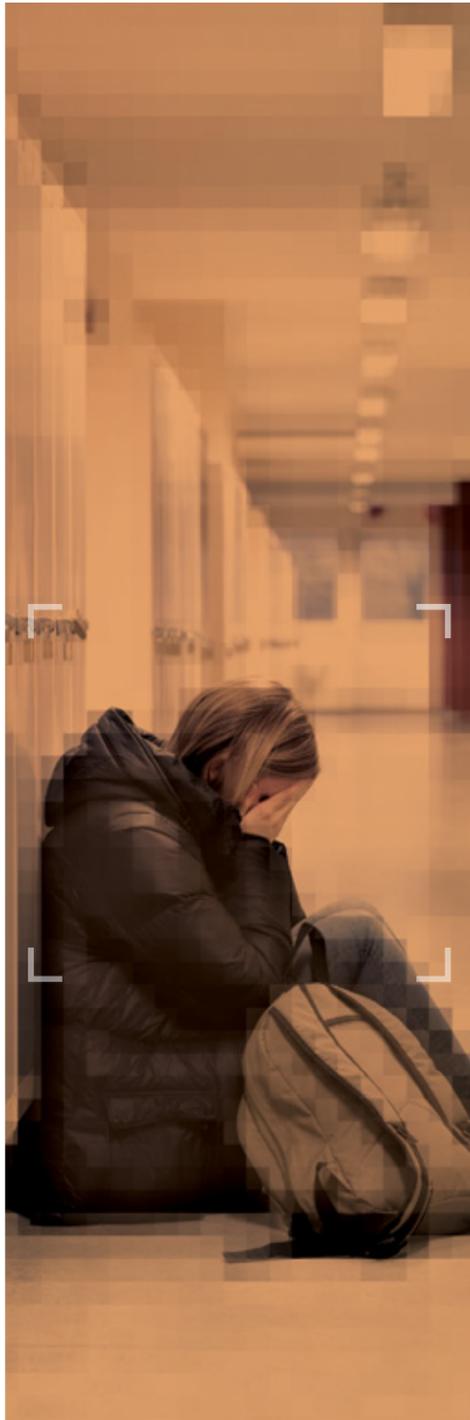
- They do not want to get into trouble.
- They are ashamed of having produced the content themselves.
- They are afraid of retaliation from other youth if an adult finds out.\*
- They are not sure an adult can help them.\*
- They have learned that “ratting” on peers is bad.\*

(\*Source: Adapted from Barbara Coloroso’s *the bully, the bullied, and the bystander*; page 214)

## POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON YOUR CHILD

The circulation of a sexual image(s)/video(s) among peers and its distribution via the Internet and/or electronic devices can have short and long-term impacts on youth. The effects will vary according to your adolescent’s personality, temperament, support systems, and resiliency. Some *affected youth* may feel embarrassed and extremely vulnerable. However, others (including the *affected youth* and/or *acting-out youth*) may appear unconcerned, and seem not to appreciate the potential damage that such content and behaviour may have caused or mean in the future.

As a parent, it is important to keep in mind that a *self/peer exploitation* incident can have a life of its own. When something is created and shared electronically, its digital footprint can remain and/or resurface at any given point in the future. If your child is the *affected youth*, keep in mind that whether real or perceived, the belief that the content is still circulating on the Internet and/or with other peers can be very challenging for her/him to manage emotionally. Support from a professional therapist may be required to help your child deal with this aspect.



If your child is involved in a *self/peer exploitation* incident, s/he may be impacted in the following ways:

### Emotional Impacts

Depending upon your child’s role in the incident, s/he may feel shame, humiliation, anger, resentment, hurt, self-blame, guilt, or indifference. How s/he behaves may also vary greatly – from expressing little or no concern to isolating and withdrawing or, in serious cases, engaging in self-harming behaviours or suicide attempts.

If you are concerned that your child may be having suicidal thoughts, seek professional help immediately. You can also contact the suicide helpline in your community or take your child to the nearest hospital. Even if the threat doesn’t appear imminent, or if you think your child would never go that far, you need to act quickly and take all signs of suicidal behaviour seriously. Respect and acknowledge your child’s feelings — her/his emotions are very real. Encourage your child to communicate with you and reinforce that you are there to listen, support and help. As the parent, it will be important for you to offer reassurance to your child that things will get better — with the appropriate help, s/he will feel better about life again.

### Social Impacts

Depending upon your child’s role in the incident, s/he may experience alienation or harassment (including sexual harassment) from peers, as well as current and future damage to reputation (school/peers, family, community, employers, etc.). Other consequences may include school suspension or expulsion. This type of shaming can impact your child personally and socially.

### Criminal Impacts

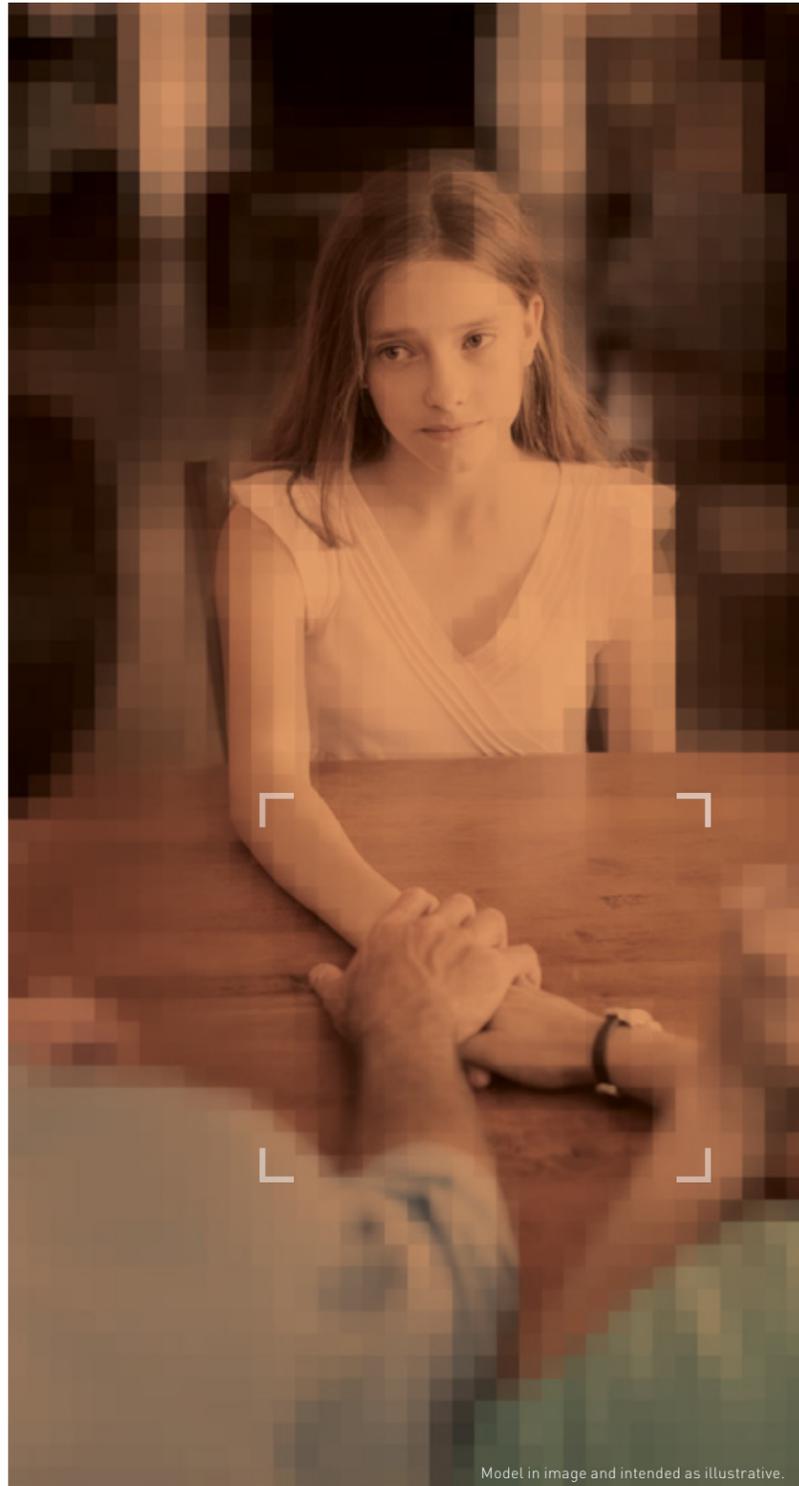
Depending upon the circumstances of the incident, behaviour associated with *self/peer exploitation* may also be criminal in nature. This can include the following:

- a) Youth inadvertently creating child pornography.
- b) Youth intentionally producing images/videos that meet the child pornography criteria.
- c) Youth engaging in behavior that involves intimidation and/or coercion of the *affected youth* in combination with the creation and sharing of child pornography.
- d) Criminal harassment, extortion, voyeurism, and impersonation.

If your child is involved in a *self/peer exploitation* incident that involves threats, coercion, extortion, etc., you will want to contact law enforcement (over and above what the school may have already done). It will be important for you to save any copies of texts, images, and/or videos in the event that an investigation occurs.

Depending on the content and context of the image/video, it may constitute child pornography under the *Criminal Code of Canada*. Under the *Criminal Code*, any of the following is considered to be illegal: a photographic, film, video or other visual representation, whether or not it was made by electronic or mechanical means,

- that shows a person who is or is depicted as being under the age of 18 years and is engaged in or is depicted as engaged in explicit sexual activity, or
- the dominant characteristic of which is the depiction, for a sexual purpose, of a sexual organ or the anal region of a person under the age of 18 years.



Model in image and intended as illustrative.

## POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON FAMILIES

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. You may be deeply concerned for your child (safety and well-being) and your family (your other children, yourself, etc.). Rest assured, it is completely normal to be feeling all of these things and more. In some instances, you may be projecting anger towards the youth involved, which can include your child and the disappointment/shock in learning that s/he is involved in an incident of *self/peer exploitation*.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS INVOLVED

There are some practical steps that you can take to address your child's involvement in a *self/peer exploitation* incident in the short-term and months to follow. Trying to anticipate the range of issues your child may encounter will be important. If your child is provided with an honest account of what may happen in the months following, you will increase the likelihood that s/he is prepared to manage what may come. This is especially important for the *affected youth* in the event the image(s)/video(s) resurfaces at some point in the future.

## STEPS TO CONSIDER IF YOUR CHILD IS THE AFFECTED YOUTH

### 1 REASSURE YOUR CHILD

Reassure your child that s/he is not alone and that, together, you will get through this.

In the event that you are the first to learn about your child's involvement in a *self/peer exploitation* incident, we encourage you to immediately notify and involve your child's school. They can be an important ally in helping you address the issue.

Note: If the *acting-out youth* or *other involved youth* do not attend your child's school (i.e. ex-boyfriend (*acting-out youth*) lives in another jurisdiction), the school will have a limited role other than ensuring your child is properly supported within the school environment while working through what has transpired.

### 2 ENGAGE IN FACT-FINDING

Ask your child to describe what s/he sent and to whom, how it was sent, when it was sent, and where it was posted/located. This information will assist in guiding your next steps.

It is very important that parents do not actively seek out the viewing of the content, unless there is a compelling reason to do so. Your child may feel embarrassed knowing that you have viewed a sexual image/video of her/him. For this reason, limiting the number of individuals who see the content is in her/his best interest.

### 3 EXPLORE THE STEPS YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL CAN TAKE

Assuming the police are not involved and the school is willing to work with you, explore the concrete and immediate steps the school can take to communicate with the families of the children involved. As soon as feasible, having the content deleted from personal devices and Internet accounts will help contain further distribution of the material. Should police be involved, speak to them about the steps they will be taking. It will be important to determine who will be taking what steps to help remove the content from the Internet in your efforts to minimize any ongoing harm to your child.

You will have to judge what to do to best support your child through this difficult time. It may be challenging for you to avoid focusing on your own feelings of anger, doubt, mistrust and failure. However, it is precisely at this time that your child needs you to be at your best as a parent. Creating a safe environment for your child to talk about what happened will be critical in helping them navigate through whatever challenges s/he may face.

## 4 ADDRESS THE CONCERNING CONTENT

If the concerning content continues to be publicly available on the Internet (i.e. social networking sites), you can also contact the site directly by utilizing the *Report Abuse* function to request the material be removed (particularly in circumstances that do not involve law enforcement). This feature is available on most of the user-generated content websites. It is important that when you do this, you let the site know that the person in the image(s)/video(s) is under 18 years of age and that the content was made available without the consent of the person. Visit [needhelpnow.ca](http://needhelpnow.ca) for additional details.

## 5 INVOLVE YOUR CHILD IN WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT

Ensure that your child is apprised of and understands what will happen next. The goal is to ensure that s/he feels empowered and part of the solution.

## 6 OUTLINE THE CONSEQUENCES WITH YOUR CHILD FOR THE BEHAVIOUR

While still being supportive, be clear that there are consequences for her/his behaviour (i.e. restricted cell phone and Internet use, increased supervision). Discipline should be logical and fit with the behaviour which differs from using a punitive approach. Examples may include:

- Instructing your child to temporarily suspend use of her/his Facebook account to limit harm in viewing other peers' comments regarding the incident.
- Temporarily suspending your child's cell phone and/or Internet use as a consequence for her/his error in judgment and to limit her/his exposure to any online bullying that may ensue.

Instruct your child not to retaliate against those involved in spreading the content. Reassure her/him that you are working closely with the school to ensure the incident is managed with great care and sensitivity.

## 7 REINFORCE THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDS

Help increase the strength and resiliency of your child by reinforcing the importance of your child's friends in helping her/him manage through this time. They will serve as a protective factor and reduce the likelihood of bullying that may result from your child's decision to share sexual images/videos.

## 8 CREATE A SAFETY PLAN WITH THE SCHOOL

Work with the school to create a safety plan — you want to ensure that your child is properly supported and feeling secure. This should include your child knowing who to go to for help to address any further problems. The plan should also include what the adults in your child's life are going to do to help keep her/him safe.

When you speak to the school to find out what they know about the incident, try not to react emotionally. Ask them to review what will be done to remedy the problem within the school setting. It will be important for both parties to work together to solve the issues — make it clear that you are an ally and you trust the school will act in the same manner as well.

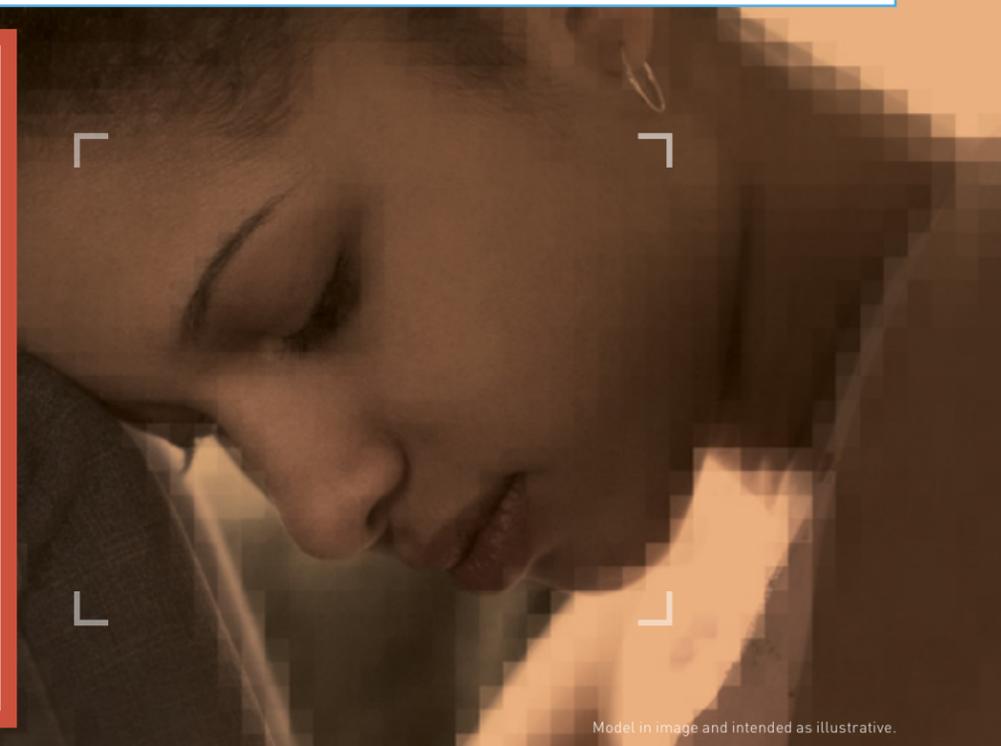
## 9 SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP (IF APPROPRIATE)

Seek professional counselling for your child as necessary.

Consult with the school if the image(s)/video(s) of your child resurface at any point in the future and/or if your child continues to be mistreated by peers. Depending upon the circumstances, a school response may need to be escalated to some form of law enforcement intervention.

### MANAGING PEERS' REACTIONS/BULLYING:

Following a *self/peer exploitation* incident, it is important that you monitor interactions between your child and her/his peers. As a result of the incident, s/he 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, and helpless. Feelings of self-blame, guilt and humiliation may also be intensified. Take any threat of suicide seriously and immediately seek professional help.



Model in image and intended as illustrative.

## STEPS TO CONSIDER IF YOUR CHILD IS THE ACTING-OUT YOUTH

As a parent, it may be difficult to receive news that your child has been involved in acting out behaviour in a *self/peer exploitation* incident. Prior to addressing the situation, take a moment to assess how you are feeling. Your preferred course of action may range from seriously disciplining your child, all the way to minimizing her/his role and involvement in the activity.

The course of dealing with such behaviours varies depending on the motivation for the acting out and the behaviour engaged in. If your child has been involved in an incident that involves impulsive behaviour, the following steps can assist you to ensure a moderate and balanced approach. If your child's behaviour presents as coercive in nature, next steps may be dependent on any criminal investigation. In addition to considering the following steps, you may wish to seek professional support and advice about how to respond through this time.

### 1 INTERVENE IMMEDIATELY

It is essential that you intervene immediately. By acting quickly, you are sending your child the message that you take the situation seriously and that steps must be taken to address and make amends for what occurred. You may want to start with obtaining your child's version of the events. Keep in mind that her/his reaction can range from fully acknowledging her/his involvement to outright denial.

**MINIMIZE THE DAMAGE:** Immediately find out if the content is publicly available and/or whether your child still has the content on any mobile device. Take steps to ensure that your child deletes any digital representation of image(s)/video(s) that are exploitative in nature, as well as any text messages regarding the incident.

### 2 DETERMINE YOUR CHILD'S LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY

In consultation with the school, assess the level of responsibility that your child bears for the *self/peer exploitation* incident. Once you have a handle on the facts, walk your child through the importance of taking responsibility for her/his action. Recognizing that every situation is unique, remind your child that while it may be difficult to admit her/his role in what occurred, nothing will improve until s/he takes responsibility for her/his actions. If you receive resistance, explore what your child fears most if s/he admits to any wrongdoing.

### 3 HELP IDENTIFY THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE BEHAVIOUR

Try and identify the factors contributing to your child's behaviour. What needs was s/he attempting to meet through her/his actions and what was the motivation behind acting out in this way? Your child's intentions are central to figuring out how to prevent this type of behaviour from happening in the future and supporting your child in finding healthy ways to meet her/his needs. Focusing on healthy skill development such as enhancing your child's ability to manage emotions (including feelings of hurt and anger), understanding relationship dynamics and building your child's sense of self-confidence and self-esteem are all important elements in avoiding future similar behaviour.

### 4 OUTLINE THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE BEHAVIOUR

It is important that your child understands the range of consequences and implications of her/his behaviour. In *self/peer exploitation* incidents, there are often multiple layers of impact and harm caused by sharing/posting sexual images/videos. This can also include the potential impact on your child as a result of this behaviour. When outlining the consequences with your child, remember that effective discipline is not about shame or guilt, but rather about fostering acceptable and appropriate behavior that incorporates respect, tolerance, empathy and a consideration of the feelings of others.

### 5 BUILD EMPATHY

Empathy is about caring for other people and having a desire to help them, as well as identifying with and feeling another individual's emotions. If your child learns to appreciate how others may feel as a result of her/his actions, s/he is less likely to act out in a way that causes harm to another. Articulating how you feel about her/his role in the *self/peer exploitation* incident, explaining why you feel that way, and discussing how her/his behaviour may have impacted others, will all promote your child's ability to empathize with her/his peers and others.

### 6 REINFORCE THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDS

Your child's friends can be an important support in helping her/him through this time, **provided that the friends do not endorse or minimize what has happened.** They may be able to reinforce the steps and messaging that you are providing and will serve as a protective factor and reduce the likelihood of any bullying that may result from your child's decision to share sexual images/videos.

### 7 EXPLORE RESTITUTION/RESTORATION

A restorative justice approach focuses on addressing conflict in a manner that attempts to repair harm. Careful consideration should be given to whether your child offers a formal clarification (an expression of accountability and apology) to the *affected youth*. An apology must be predicated on the *affected youth's* willingness and ability to receive this. In consultation with the school, determine whether the *affected youth* would be open to receiving such an offering. This may be done in writing or in person. As part of making amends, also explore having your child participate in educational activities to enhance her/his understanding of the issues related to her/his behaviour and/or participate in volunteer or other community based initiatives to demonstrate a willingness to give back. These avenues are well worth considering.

### 8 SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP (IF APPROPRIATE)

Seek professional counselling for your child as necessary. Professional support may be particularly helpful if your child's behaviour was a result of her/him experiencing ongoing distress that requires attention and resolution and/or if s/he is being impacted by the reaction of peers within the school environment.

## WHEN TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT THIS ISSUE



Models in image and intended as illustrative.

Teaching your child to think for her/himself and to approach a challenge as an opportunity to solve a problem will increase the likelihood that s/he turns to you for help when faced with a troubling situation.

When speaking with your child about her/his involvement in the incident (whether s/he is the *affected youth*, *acting-out youth* or *other involved youth*), consider the following:

- Errors in judgement, such as this, provide your child an opportunity to learn and grow.
- Accountability and ownership for the situation is an important part of the learning and healing that needs to take place. If your child is the *acting-out youth*, involve her/him in discussions about how s/he is going to fix it, prevent it from happening again and repair the relationship with the *affected youth*.
- Consequences for the inappropriate behaviour need to be reasonable and fit the situation. **While consequences may be a developmental fear of adolescents, it should not stop parents from instituting boundaries and limits (in a loving, supportive and communicative way) in response to a serious situation.**
- Discussions about healthy and respectful relationships - what they look like and how others deserve to be treated - must be a part of the learning process.

If your child is the *affected youth*, it will be important to weave in some reassuring messages. Consider the following themes:

- Listen to your child without judgment. Reinforce that s/he is not alone — as her/his parent(s), you are there to listen to her/him. Use words such as “Tell me more about that,” followed by remaining quiet and listening carefully to her/his concerns.
- Separate the error in judgment from defining who s/he is. Assist your child in moving past self-blame.
- Advise your child that you are there to help her/him deal with the situation in a way that provides the dignity and respect s/he deserves. While this was a poor decision, it does not, in any way, justify what occurred.
- Be optimistic and reinforce that your child will persevere. While this is an error in judgement, s/he will get through this.
- Empower your child by encouraging positive self-talk and reframing how s/he may be viewing the incident.
- Reinforce the importance of keeping good friends close by to help get through this. Friends can act as a buffer for your child from the harmful effects of *self/peer exploitation* and help her/him cope.

## WHO ELSE MIGHT SUPPORT YOUR CHILD?

There are a number of allies who can help protect and support your child following the occurrence of a *self/peer exploitation* incident. Remember to maintain confidentiality around the incident as best as possible — limiting the exposure and impact on your child will be very important. The groups that you may turn to for help include:

**Your Child's School:** The school has a responsibility to take action. While most *self/peer exploitation* incidents occur outside of the school setting, there is no question that youth can be negatively impacted within the school environment. There should be a plan put in place that considers restorative justice options that are uniquely tailored to the incident. Restorative justice approaches:

- provide the opportunity for amends to be made with the *affected youth*, helping her/him feel safe and gain closure;
- allow the *acting-out youth* to assess the impact of her/his behaviour, take responsibility for her/his actions and gain insight into the factors that contributed to her/his conduct; and
- enable the community to understand the issues with regard to the behaviour of concern and participate in prevention initiatives that enhance community safety and well-being.

Another important resource within the school for helping your child manage any issues that may ensue with peers is the school counsellor.

**Professional Support:** Your family doctor can be a good starting point for accessing a referral for support. A professional therapist may be necessary to support your child in managing the potential emotional impacts tied to sending a sexual image/video of her/himself to peers (and possibly broader impacts if the image(s)/video(s) is posted online. Finding a therapist who understands the potential extent of the trauma associated with having content/information circulating on the Internet may be helpful in assisting your child process and move past what has occurred.

**Your Child's Friends:** The importance of having at least one good friend cannot be underestimated in helping your child navigate through a *self/peer exploitation* incident. If your child does not have a circle of friends to rely upon, it will be important to help her/him strengthen her/his sense of self, understand what it means to be a good friend, and learn strategies for how to introduce her/himself into a group. Having healthy friendships is an important protective factor for your child in helping manage difficult situations. In a situation where your child is the *acting-out youth*, you will want to identify friends that understand the seriousness of what has transpired, while at the same time can offer support through what may end up being a difficult time.



## PREVENTION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

Understanding what constitutes healthy and unhealthy relationships as well as the importance of boundaries is critical to a child's success as s/he matures. With the power of technology and what is now a very public and connected world, these types of life skills are particularly important in limiting the harm that may come to your child. This is especially important when youth are using the Internet in combination with seeking autonomy and being sexually curious.

When youth consider what it means to be a good friend by demonstrating respect and dignity towards others, harmful activity among peers in the online and offline world is significantly reduced. In healthy relationships, both parties understand that they are only in control of their own actions — in other words, they cannot dictate how the other person responds or behaves. However, the person also fully appreciates that her/his actions can significantly impact the relationship. Attributes that are central to a healthy relationship include:

- **Respect:** Both people show consideration for each other's feelings and well-being and can be trusted with information shared in confidence.
- **Sharing:** Both people are able to confide in one another.
- **Caring:** Both people show concern for one another.
- **Support:** Both people can rely on the other for support and know they will act with each other's best interests at heart.
- **Fun:** Both people enjoy spending time together.
- **Acceptance:** Both people accept each other as they are and don't try to change them.

The **Canadian Centre for Child Protection** has developed prevention materials to assist, such as:



**Kids in the Know:** a national interactive safety education program for increasing the personal safety of children and reducing their risk of victimization online and in the real world. Designed for children from kindergarten to high school, it focuses on building self-esteem through teaching critical problem-solving skills. This program has been purposefully designed to create a common language to help facilitate the way we teach kids about their own personal safety. For more information, visit [kidsintheknow.ca](http://kidsintheknow.ca).

### textED.ca

**textED.ca** is an innovative website designed to help teach youth safe texting (SMS/MMS) practices. Designed for students in Grade 7 and up, the **textED.ca** website provides a fun, interactive platform for children to learn about the short-term and long-term ramifications associated with texting.



In addition to the development of resource guides for schools and families impacted by *self/peer exploitation* incidents, the **Canadian Centre for Child Protection** creates public awareness and prevention material regarding this social problem. Prevention resources are targeted towards youth, parents, communities, educators, child-serving organizations and law enforcement agencies. Visit [cybertip.ca](http://cybertip.ca) and [needhelpnow.ca](http://needhelpnow.ca) to view and/or request copies of our public awareness material.

## CONCLUSION

This guide is intended to support your efforts in managing *self/peer exploitation* incidents and to provide practical steps to keep your child safe and secure in the event that s/he becomes involved in such an incident. When dealing with these situations, remain optimistic and reinforce that your child will persevere. This will be vital in helping her/him recover and move forward in a productive and empowering way.



Models in image and intended as illustrative.



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Model in image and intended as illustrative.

SELF/PEER  
EXPLOITATION  
IT'S **NOT** OK.

ADDITIONAL  
RESOURCES



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## WHAT THE RESEARCH TELLS US

In 2012, the **Canadian Centre for Child Protection** executed a survey with 50 school-based police officers in provinces across Canada in which almost all stated that they felt *self/peer exploitation* incidents were vastly under-reported. While media reports that *self/peer exploitation* behaviour is highly prevalent, gathering accurate data is challenging. This may be partially attributed to the issue that youth are reluctant to seek help from a safe adult after becoming involved in activity. Similar to a youth who is being bullied, or is involved in bullying, such reasons may include:

- They do not want to get into trouble
- They are ashamed of having produced the content themselves
- They are afraid of retaliation from other youth if an adult finds out\*
- They are not sure an adult can help them\*
- They are not sure an adult will help them\*
- They have learned that “ratting” on peers is bad\*

(\*Source: Adapted from Barbara Coloroso; page 214 – the bully, the bullied, and the bystander)

There are, however, several studies that have uncovered key findings on the prevalence and reasons for *self/peer exploitation* behaviour among youth. On the following page are sample findings from three of these studies.



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The Canadian Centre for Child Protection is a registered charity dedicated to the personal safety of all children. Our goal is to reduce child victimization by providing programs and services to the Canadian public.

[protectchildren.ca](http://protectchildren.ca)

November 2012 | ISBN 978-1-927103-20-3

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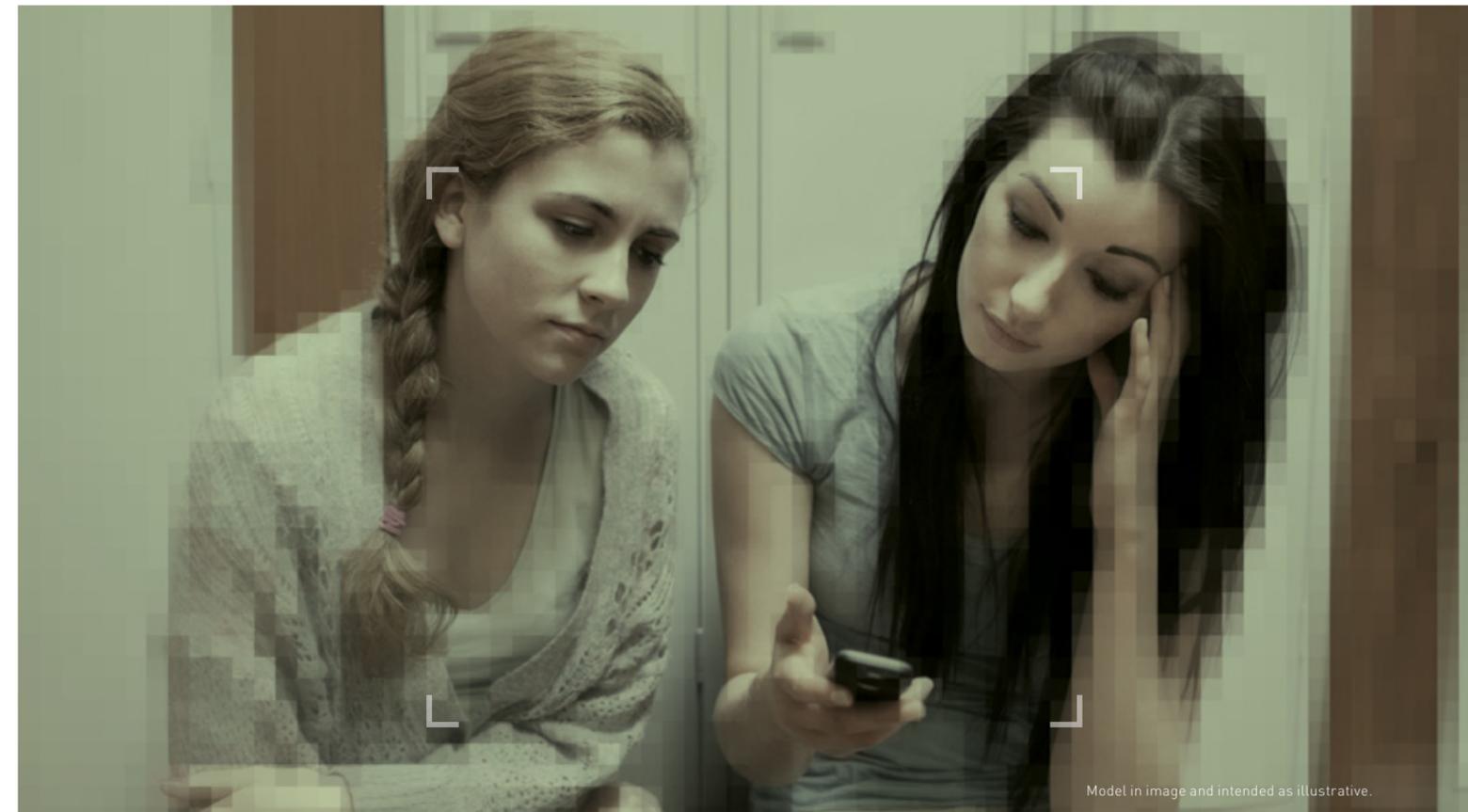
This guide is intended to provide users of A Resource Guide for Schools and A Resource Guide for Families with additional information that may assist when dealing with an incident of self-peer exploitation. It is not intended to provide legal advice and should not be relied upon for such purpose.



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In 2011, a study<sup>1</sup> of 1355 teens and young adults (14-24 years of age) in the U.S. on digital abuse issues found that:

- 15% of the respondents sent naked pictures or videos of themselves
  - 7% of these were 14-17 years of age
  - About half felt pressured to do so
- 21% of the respondents received naked pictures or videos of others

In 2009, a study<sup>2</sup> of 535 students from the UK (11-18 years of age) examined *sexting* behaviour (defined as sharing intimate pictures/video among surveyed adolescents) and found that:

- 40% of respondents said they knew friends who *sexted*
- 27% of respondents said that *sexting* happens regularly or all the time
- 24% of respondents said they would turn to a teacher for help if they were affected by issues related to *sexting*

In 2008, a study<sup>3</sup> of 653 teens (13-19 years of age) on sex and technology in the U.S. found that:

- 22% of girls and 18% of boys said they had sent/posted nude or semi-nude pictures or videos of themselves
  - 11% of young teen girls (13-16 years of age) reported the same behaviour
- 36% of girls and 39% of boys said it is common for semi-nude photos to get shared with people other than the intended recipient
- 25% of girls and 33% of boys said they have had nude or semi-nude images - originally meant for someone else - shared with them

In addition, this study examined the reasons teens sent/posted sexually suggestive messages, images or videos:

- 66% of girls and 60% of boys said they did so to be "fun or flirtatious"
- 52% of girls said they did so as a "sexy present" for their boyfriend
- 44% of all teens said they did so to respond to similar content they received
- 40% of girls said they did so as "a joke"
- 34% of girls said they did so to "feel sexy"
- 12% of teen girls said they did so because they felt "pressured"

<sup>1</sup>"Associated Press-MTV Digital Abuse Study". September 2011.

<sup>2</sup>"Sharing Personal Images and Videos Among Young People". Phippen, A. Report for the UK Council for Child Internet Safety. June 2011.

<sup>3</sup>"Sex and Tech: Results from a Survey of Teens and Young Adults". National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. December 2008.

## PICTURES/VIDEOS POSTED WITHOUT YOUR CONSENT?

Note: While this reproducible sheet has been written to guide youth through the steps to request content be removed from a website/online service, parents and educators can also utilize this resource when addressing *self/peer exploitation* incidents.

If you know where your picture/video has been posted, you can try and take steps to get it off the Internet. The most popular websites have a process for reporting and place a higher priority on situations involving children/youth. If you include certain information in your report, there is a good chance these sites will take down the sexual picture/video of you.

Many youth take pictures/videos and send them to friends or post the content online - you are likely no different. Sometimes, the content may end up on the Internet. When this happens, removing the picture/video is often a primary focus. If you have been impacted by a sexual picture/video being posted on the Internet, there are some practical steps you can take to regain some control over the content.

### PRACTICAL STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO GET YOUR PICTURE/VIDEO OFF THE INTERNET

- 1 Determine what service (e.g. YouTube, Facebook, Photobucket) the picture/video is displayed on and contact that service to request that they remove the picture/video. You will find a list of popular websites/online services and their instructions on how to remove the content at [needhelpnow.ca](http://needhelpnow.ca).

When contacting the website/online service, get directly to the point. The service likely receives a large number of complaints each day; therefore, you need to quickly let them know why your request is important.

At a minimum, include the following information within your complaint:

- a. **YOUR AGE:** This lets the website/online service know that you are a child/youth. If the picture/video was taken when you were a different age then you are presently, include your age at the time the picture/video was taken as well as your current age.
- b. **IDENTIFY YOURSELF:** Say that you are the child/youth in the picture/video. If you are identifiable in the picture/video (i.e. if a person who knows you viewed the picture/video, s/he would recognize you), include this as well — the website/online service may give it a higher priority.
- c. **OBJECT TO THE POSTING OF THE CONTENT:** Say that you did not post the picture/video to their site, did not give permission for the content to be posted and that you want it removed. This lets them know that you object to the continued posting of the content.

You may also want to include information in your complaint about who had access to the content. If you sent the picture/video to someone else, say so, and give the name of the person you sent the content to. Let the website/online service know that you did not give this person permission to post the picture/video. This may help the website/online trace back who posted the content – most websites/online services will have policies that set out rules for the type of content that can be posted and any user who breaches the rules may be prevented from posting content in the future.

**SAMPLE COMPLAINT:**

*I am 13 years old and I am requesting the removal of a sexual picture/video of myself that appears through your service at the following URL: [insert the exact URL (website address) where the picture/video is located].*

*I did not post the picture/video on your site or give permission for it to be posted and I do not want it to stay there.*

**If you do not know who posted the picture/video, you could say:**

*I do not know who posted the picture/video onto your site.*

**If you do know who posted the picture/video, you could say:**

*I do not know who posted the picture/video onto your site, but I did send the picture/video to my boyfriend, [insert full name] and I did not give him permission to post it.*

*I am not sure who posted the picture/video onto your site, but I have reason to believe that it may have been [insert full name].*

**2** You may want to make a report. If you are involved in a *self/peer exploitation* incident that has gone too far and involves things like threats, intimidation or blackmailing etc., we encourage you to report and/or talk to a safe adult about what is occurring. Information can be found at [needhelpnow.ca](http://needhelpnow.ca).

IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE NOT ALONE! YOU WILL GET THROUGH THIS AND THINGS WILL GET BETTER.

For additional information on addressing a *self/peer exploitation* incident, please see [needhelpnow.ca](http://needhelpnow.ca).

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection ([protectchildren.ca](http://protectchildren.ca)) is a registered charitable organization dedicated to the personal safety of children. We offer a number of programs, services and resources for Canadians to help them protect children and reduce their risk of victimization. This includes:



Learn more: [https://protectchildren.ca/video-get\\_involved](https://protectchildren.ca/video-get_involved)

