BUILDING
Healthy ONLINE Relationships

Including communication tips, navigating cyberbullying, online dating, and more!

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There are all kinds of relationships, including with people we know a little and those we know a lot, like friends, family members, and people we date or have a crush on.

In most of our relationships, we interact in person, as well as online through:
- texting or online chats
- social media sites
- online communities
- online games where people can chat or talk to others
- livestreaming and video apps

Sometimes we meet friends online who we have never met in person!

The goal of this booklet is to help you learn about what healthy online relationships look like and to provide you with tools to navigate difficult online situations like cyberbullying, grooming, and sexting.

What makes a great relationship?

The qualities that make healthy in-person relationships are also important for online relationships. That's why this booklet begins by looking at what all relationships need to be healthy, both online and offline. To learn more about healthy relationships in general, scan the QR code or visit https://skprevention.ca/?s=7-301.

Great relationships should make you feel safe, respected, and accepted for who you are. You might be thinking about having fun with friends or texting someone you have a crush on. Whether online or in-person, healthy relationships require the same features.

On the following page is a list of some important features for a healthy relationship. Take some time to think about what is important to you in a relationship. Each person and each relationship is unique. What you think is important might be different from what your friends think, and it might be different depending on what kind of relationship you are thinking about (e.g., a friend versus someone you're dating).

Common Features of a Healthy Relationship

Being yourself: Both of you know your likes/dislikes and strengths/weaknesses. Both of you accept each other.

Communication: Both of you are honest about what you think and feel, and you listen to each other.

Respect: Both of you like each other for who you are and feel free to be yourselves with each other.

Trust: Both of you want the best for each other and are honest and dependable.

Support: You build each other up and are there for each other.

Fun: You laugh together and enjoy hanging out, messaging, or video chatting with each other.

Equality: Both of you make decisions that are right for yourselves and feel important and liked for who you are.

Independence: Both of you are able to spend time apart and be okay with it. You are not always texting or messaging each other. Each of you has your own friends and activities.

Boundaries: Both of you know what you want/don't want and your limits (what lines you don't want to cross).

Think about it:

What is important for you in a healthy relationship?

How does the importance of different features change if you consider a relationship with a friend? Teacher? Family member? Coach?

Healthy Online Relationships start with BEING YOURSELF

Being yourself is an important part of any relationship, including online relationships. Having confidence in who you are and liking yourself is the basis for healthy relationships with others.

Being yourself starts with knowing who you are.
• What do you value?
• What do you enjoy doing?
• What are your strengths and weaknesses?
• What are your likes and dislikes?

Answering these questions will help you to know the ways you want to spend your time online and who you want to spend your online time with.

A sign of a healthy relationship is when you feel comfortable to be yourself around that person and they help to bring out the best in YOU!

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Consider Your Online Identity and Online Reputation

Online Identity

Your online identity is the way you present yourself online. Whenever you create a new profile, post a comment or picture on social media, or send a text, you are adding to your online identity. Your online identity might be different than the identity you present daily to your friends and family. Having a different online identity can be a fun way to express yourself and learn new things, but it is not okay to use an online identity to trick or hurt others.

Online Reputation

Reputation is how others view and think of you. Just like in the real world, what you do and say online can impact your reputation. The images, opinions, and posts you share can change the way others see you positively or negatively. It is important to remember that what you do and say online might be seen by people you are not expecting such as a teacher, family member, or future employer.

Pause Before You Post

Ask yourself the following questions.
- Is this how I want people to see me?
- Does this post reflect who I am and what I value?
- How would I feel if this post was shared with others?
- What are the positives about posting? What about the negatives?
- Would I be okay with someone seeing this in the future (5, 10, or 20 years later)?

A good thing to keep in mind is to only do or say things online that you would do in the real world. The internet has no delete button. Even if you click 'delete', the things you do and say online could have already been forwarded, saved, or screenshotted.

It is normal to feel pressure to show a perfect version of yourself online. Remember, what you see online is often edited and filtered – not reality.

Keep It Private

Protecting your identity and personal information is an important way to stay safe online, particularly with people you don't know.

Try to avoid:

- sharing personal information like your real name, address, school, or birthday; never share banking information or your social insurance number
- sharing passwords with anyone other than a trusted adult
- sharing your cell phone number or email address with someone you do not know or trust
- disclosing your current location or schedule
- responding to inappropriate requests or messages
- posting photos with identifying information in the background (like your house, street address, or school)

Consider:

- using a nickname for your username to protect your identity
- changing your account privacy settings from public to private
- choosing strong passwords and changing them often
- talking to a trusted adult about your online relationships

Healthy Online Relationships are about COMMUNICATION

Good communication is about talking, listening, and being open and honest about what you are thinking and feeling. When we communicate face-to-face with someone, we use more than just words. Body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice give clues to our real thoughts and feelings.

When communicating online, we don't always have these clues which can make online communication more challenging.

Text and Online Communicating[1]

- Be open and honest about what you are thinking and feeling.
- Be clear. Use Emojis ☺ :) ☹ :(or explain how you are saying something: *smiling* or (sarcasm!).
- Wait a minute before you post/send. If you are feeling angry or hurt, it is a good idea to pause until you are feeling calmer.
- If you are upset or unsure about something someone sent you, ask them what they meant. Talk to them on the phone or face-to-face if possible. Tell them how their message or post made you feel.

Remember that forwarding hurtful images or gossip is considered bullying.

[1]The information on this page was adapted with permission from Teen Talk, a website from the Sexuality Education Resource Centre Manitoba. See the full website at teentalk.ca

Healthy Online Relationships are about RESPECT

Respect is about liking people for who they are (e.g., their abilities, their personality, what they do), and paying attention to their wishes and feelings. It is about treating people in a way that shows you value who they are.

To be respectful online:

- honour people's privacy
- do not take pictures or recordings without permission
- do not post or send without permission
- think about people's wants and feelings before you send or post
- do not cyberbully others

Remember: Treat others online how you would treat them face-to-face and how you would like to be treated. Don't do or say things online that you wouldn't be comfortable with in person.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is bullying with the use of communication technology (online bullying). Examples of online bullying include:
- spreading lies and rumors about someone on social media
- sending threatening and hurtful messages, images, or videos
- posting embarrassing photos of others online
- using someone's name and identity to create a fake profile

Did you know?
Unlike other kinds of bullying, cyberbullying follows people to places they usually feel safe (e.g., their homes), at all times of the day. Cyberbullying is hurtful and dangerous. Depending on the situation, cyberbullying can also be a crime.

What to do if you are being cyberbullied?
If you are being cyberbullied, you are not alone. Go to **'What To Do and How to Get Support'** on the last page of this booklet for steps to take if you are experiencing cyberbullying.

Help be the Solution

If you share hurtful posts, messages, or photos, you may be participating in cyberbullying.

You can help stop cyberbullying by reporting hurtful content you see online to the website provider.

You can provide support to friends experiencing cyberbullying by sharing the tips provided in this booklet, encouraging them to talk to a trusted adult, and reminding them that it is not their fault.

Share A.W.A.R.E.[2]

It is important to pause before you post or share to help ensure that you are safe, respectful, and remaining true to yourself online.

Appropriate	Is what you are about to share **appropriate?** Is it true to you? Is it legal?
Who	**Who** could see what you share? Could someone save, forward, or screenshot it?
Accurate	Is what you are about to share **accurate?** Is it real and true, or is it a rumour, fake, or pretend?
Respectful	Is your post **respectful?** Will someone be hurt or upset by what you share?
Environment	Think about the **environment** of the post you are about to share. Is it a photo with a background that could indicate your location, school, or home address? Is it from a private conversation that should remain private?

[2]Share A.W.A.R.E. adapted with permission from ThinkUKnow, an education program led by the Australian Federal Police. See the full website at https://www.thinkuknow.org.au/.

Healthy Online Relationships are about TRUST

In a trusting relationship, both people want the best for each other, are honest with each other, and can count on each other. Building trust and deciding who to trust online can be difficult, especially if you do not know the person in real life.

Respect Privacy

Keeping private information private is important in online relationships. What is shared with you in a private conversation should not be forwarded or shared, except with a trusted adult if someone else is being hurt or is in danger.

Meeting People Online

Meeting new people online can be a fun way to make new friends, learn new things, and explore your interests. It can also be a way to find advice and support.

It is important to remember that people online are not always who they say they are. People may create fake profiles and pretend to be someone they are not (also known as catfishing). Sometimes people create fake profiles to hurt others through cyberbullying or grooming.

Always talk to a trusted adult before you meet someone in person for the first time. If you do meet up, meet in a public space and share your location with a trusted adult.

If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe online, trust yourself. You are allowed to block and report any behaviour that makes you feel uncomfortable.

What is online grooming?

Online grooming happens when someone, usually an adult, tries to become friends with someone younger to control them and take advantage of them for a sexual purpose (e.g., to talk about sex, ask for naked photos or videos). Online grooming is also known as luring or e-grooming.

Online grooming seems to take place mostly in chatrooms and via instant messaging that allows people to be more anonymous. However, grooming can happen anywhere online.

Although grooming behaviours may seem normal at first, they become more serious over time. Understanding the process of grooming will help you to watch for warning signs in your online relationships.

How does grooming happen?

- Someone approaches you online – it might be someone you know or someone using a fake profile.
- They may try to build a connection with you by talking about things you're interested in and/or by providing compliments and support.
- They may give or promise you gifts, money, drugs, or alcohol.
- They may try to turn you against your parents, friends, and other support people.
- They may send you sexual pictures or play online sex games to try to make you feel more comfortable sending pictures in return.
- Once they gain your trust, they may talk about sex or try to engage in sexual activity.
- They may try to meet in person.

Healthy Online Relationships are about SUPPORT

Healthy relationships are about encouraging one another and building each other up through good times and bad.

Technology allows us to support each other, even if we are not together in the same place. You can provide support to your friends online, and they can do the same for you.

Support also includes sharing the information you have learned in this booklet with your friends if they are dealing with unhealthy relationships online.

Healthy Online Relationships are about HAVING FUN!

Whether texting your family members or playing games online with friends, whatever you do online – have fun!

Relationships are not always easy. Sometimes friends might do or say something online that upsets you. Being honest about your feelings and trying to work together to solve problems can make your relationships better.

Remember that sometimes face-to-face communication is easier. Taking a conversation offline might be a more effective way to express your true thoughts and feelings.

It is important to consider if someone brings out the best or worst in you. If someone is making you feel bad and is not willing to work on your relationship, it might be best to end things. You want to be able to laugh, be goofy, and have fun with your friends online.

Let's Talk about Dating

Not everyone your age is dating, and that's completely normal. Even if you aren't dating, it's important to know what a healthy online dating relationship looks like.

Remember – just like in any relationship, a healthy dating relationship starts with you. Communication, respect, trust, support, and having fun are important aspects to have in a dating relationship, online and offline!

Equality, independence, and boundaries are important in all relationships, and are especially important in dating relationships.

*Note: Some people may define 'dating' differently than others. When talking about dating relationships in this booklet, it means any kind of relationship with a person in a romantic way (e.g., someone you have a crush on or flirt with, someone you go out with once or twice, someone you're in a long-term relationship with, and so on).

Online Dating Relationships are about EQUALITY, INDEPENDENCE, and BOUNDARIES

EQUALITY
- The relationship is balanced
- You both feel happy and comfortable
- You are allowed to make decisions and choose what is right for you

INDEPENDENCE
- Spending time apart – not always texting or messaging each other
- Having your own friends, interests, hobbies, and activities

BOUNDARIES
- Knowing what you want and don't want to do in a relationship
- Knowing your limits (i.e., what lines you don't want to cross)
- Feeling safe and comfortable in your dating relationship

Setting Boundaries Online[3]

SPEAK UP

Tell the people you date what you are cool doing and what you aren't. Stay true to yourself. Think about the following questions.

- When is it okay for your partner to text you?
- Do you want to post your relationship status online?
- What photos are you comfortable with your partner posting?

BE CLEAR

Say exactly how you feel. Be honest without being hurtful. Consider taking your conversation offline and talking in person. It is always okay to ask for time to think about things before making a decision. You could say:

- "I am not sure if I am comfortable with this. Can we go for a walk tomorrow after school to talk about it?"

USE "I" STATEMENTS

Be clear about how you feel without blaming the other person. For example:

- "I don't want to be tagged in posts on Instagram."
- "I need time away from my phone before bed. I am putting my phone away at 9:30 p.m."

DON'T APOLOGIZE for Saying "No"

You have the right to say "no" any time. It is okay to change your mind to things you previously agreed to. You know what is best for you, and you never have to feel guilty for saying "no". For example:

- "No, I don't feel comfortable having these conversations anymore."

Let's Talk about SEXTING

Sexting is sending or receiving sexual messages through technology such as a cell phone, app, website, social media site, email, or webcam.

Sexts can include:
- sending a nude or semi-nude photo through text
- uploading photos or videos of sexual acts to a website
- live chatting or texting with sexual language
- sending emojis that suggest a sexual message

Why do people sext?
People sext for a variety of reasons:
- self-expression: to be fun, flirty, and sexy
- to build a sexual/romantic relationship: build intimacy, connection, and trust
- entertainment: as a joke between friends, for fun
- pressure from others: to fit in, gain status

Sexting is a personal choice – some people will decide to sext, and others will not. Only you know what is right for you!

Even if your friends say, "Everyone is doing it," most teens make the decision not to sext. Teens who decide to sext usually do so with a romantic partner.

It is never okay to sext because you feel pressure from others to do so.

Sext Responsibly – It's the LAW

The law in Canada aims to protect youth from abusive sexual activities, including sexting. Under the law, young people have the right to sexual expression, including creating and sharing sexual images of themselves if...

- The image is sent voluntarily between people close in age (the sender and receiver MUST both consent)
- The image doesn't show abuse or assault
- The image stays private (is not posted or shared)*

*Never post or share a sext, even if someone gives you consent to do so. Even with consent to share, it is illegal to post or share a sext.

Consent is KEY

Consent is...

- Positive and clear – an easy to understand "yes"
- Ongoing – you can change your mind anytime
- Clear-headed – you are awake, not drunk or high
- Not pressured – you are not threatened, harassed, or manipulated to say "yes"

It is your choice to sext, and to decide how far it goes.

Potential risks of sexting include:

- cyberbullying: threats, forwarding images
- social shaming: name calling, bullying, reputation damage
- negative mental health impacts: depression, low self-esteem
- legal consequences: trouble with police and the law

It is very important to know that sexting in and of itself is not necessarily harmful. Most of the harms from sexting result from feeling pressure to sext, non-consensual sexting, and forwarding of sexts.

Ways to Sext More Safely

- Get consent - only sext someone you know wants to see it and set expectations.
- Don't share sexts you receive from others.
- Only send sexts to people you know and fully trust.
- Never include your face so that social media sites don't automatically tag you in the photo.
- Check for identifying details in photos including tattoos, scars, jewelry, or other features that connect the photo to you (including your surroundings).
- Turn off location services on devices and make sure your photos are not automatically tagged.
- Turn off services that automatically backup photos.
- Use apps that automatically delete sent images after a certain amount of time (e.g., Snapchat). Delete sexts of yourself and others from your devices right away.
- Talk to a trusted adult if you experience non-consensual sexting.
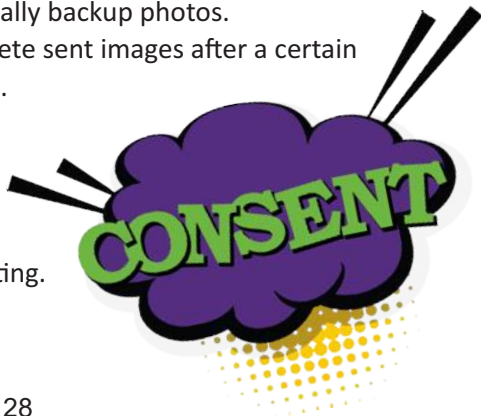
What is sextortion?

Sextortion is blackmail. It's when someone threatens to send a sexual image or video of you to friends, family, or other people if you don't provide more sexual images or videos, send money, or do what they say. Sextortion is illegal.

How does sextortion happen?

- After gaining your trust through flattery and pretending to be a friend, the person sends explicit images, suggesting the images are of themselves.
- Next, the person pressures you to send an image back.
- After the person receives the image, they threaten to send the image to people you know. To stop this from happening, the person demands money, more photos/videos, or other gifts.

If you are worried about sextortion, or if you are worried that your photos/videos have been forwarded, refer to **'What To Do and How to Get Support'** on the last page of this booklet.

That's a RED FLAG!

Signs of Unhealthy Online Relationships

Excessive calling, texting, or messaging *- "Where are you? Who are you with? Call me!"*
- Staying connected throughout the day is healthy, but constant communication might be a sign of control or unhealthy boundaries.

Unwanted text messages, sexts, or inappropriate questions
- Sending messages or sexts without consent, especially if you or the other person has asked it to stop, can be a form of harassment.

Monitoring location and activities
- Sharing locations from time to time can be convenient. It is not okay for you or your partner to constantly monitor current locations, online activities, or friends/followers.

Reading someone else's messages or monitoring social media

• Remember that you and your partner have a right to privacy and can talk to whoever you want. Telling someone who they can or cannot talk to and reading their messages can be a sign of excessive jealousy and control.

Sharing technology and passwords

• You and your partner are entitled to privacy. Asking for passwords or accessing each other's accounts could indicate control and a lack of independence.

Not taking no for an answer - "Come on, just try it once."

• Feeling pressure to do something you don't want to do or pressuring your partner could be unhealthy boundaries. No one should feel bad for saying no to things that make them feel uncomfortable.

Whether online or in-person, manipulation, threats, and name-calling are all signs of an unhealthy relationship.

What To Do and How to Get Support

If you are experiencing cyberbullying, grooming, sextortion, or are worried your photos/videos have been forwarded, you can take the following actions.

- If you fear for your safety or if a crime has occurred, call 911 or contact the police.
- Stop communication and block the person.
- Screenshot or save content to keep on record in case you ever need proof.
- Adjust your privacy settings, change your passwords, and report any fake profiles.
- Report the behaviour to the website it happened on.
- DO NOT comply with threats. Never pay money or send additional images/videos. The situation will NOT get better by doing these things. If you have paid money, check to see if the payment can be cancelled.
- Talk to an adult you trust about what is happening.
- Talk to someone at **Kids Help Phone***.

- Report online grooming and sextortion to cybertip.ca – a website for reporting online sexual exploitation of children and youth.
- Get support at NeedHelpNow.ca – a website that helps teens stop the spread of sexual pictures or videos and provides support along the way.

*Kids Help Phone provides free counselling services for young people. You can chat with a counsellor online at www.kidshelpphone.ca, text CONNECT to 686868, or call 1-800-668-6868.

Remember – you are not alone. Experiencing harm online can be scary, humiliating, and upsetting. It is important to remember that it is never your fault. There are things you can do and people to support you to address concerns.
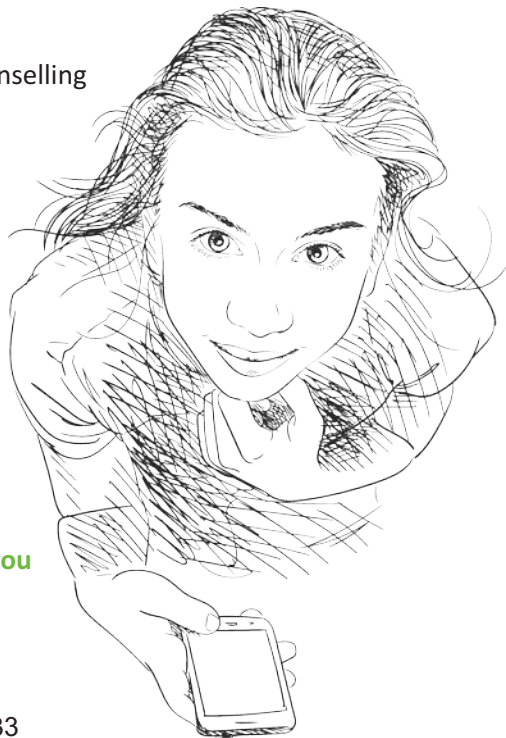
Online relationships, including dating relationships, can be a lot of fun! You can meet new people, learn new skills, and find new interests. By following the tips shared in this booklet, you can help make sure that your online relationships stay healthy, safe, and fun!