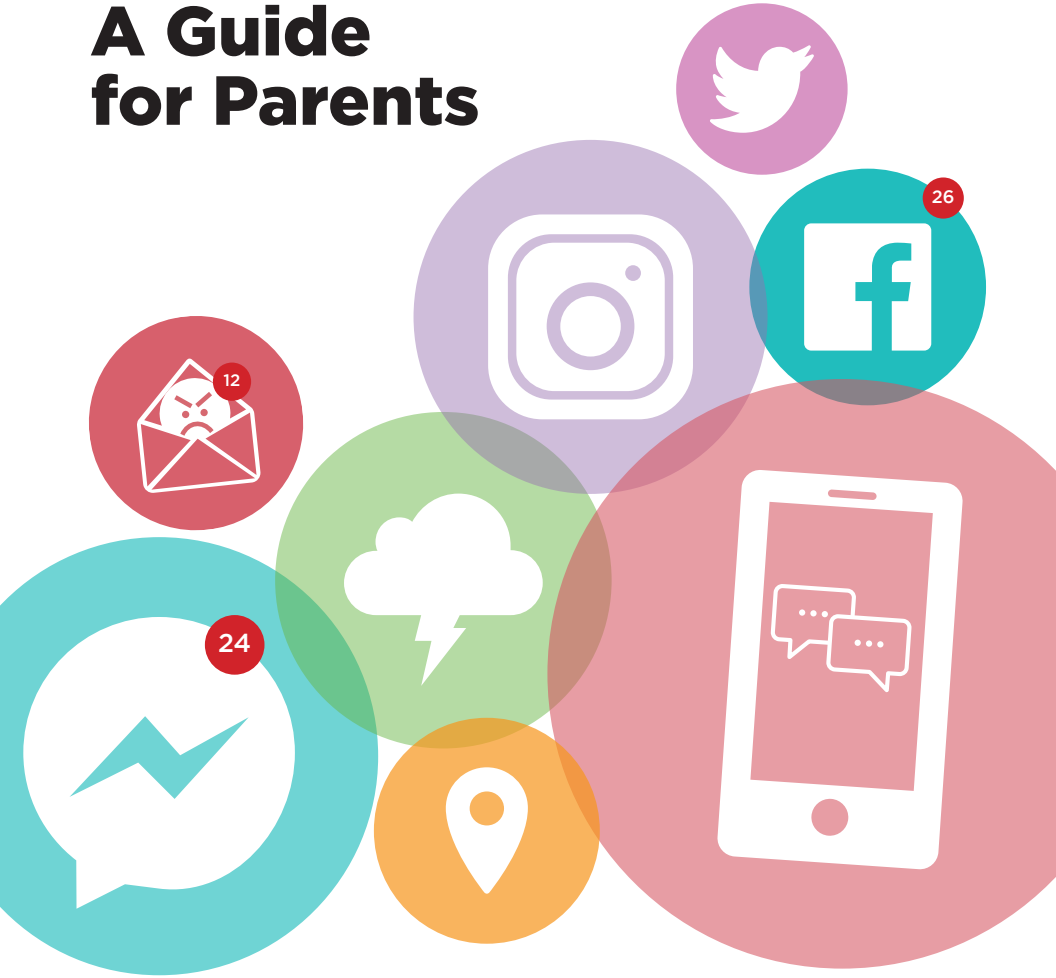
Taking your rights to heart

Association québécoise Plaidoyer-Victimes

Cyberviolence in Teen Intimate Relationships

A Guide for Parents



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Presentation

If you are the parent of a teenager, this guide and the accompanying animated videos contain information that is sure to be of interest to you.

Today's adolescents were born into a world dominated by the Internet and social media. It's second nature for them to text their friends while they're in class, sitting around the family dinner table, crossing the street, riding public transport or lying in bed in the middle of the night. Young people are plugged in 24 hours a day, seven days a week. With their smartphones, tablets and computers, they can create networks of friends that are never more than a click away.

Although the many advantages of information and communication technology cannot be denied, the fact remains that those same technologies can become effective weapons of control and violence when used for the wrong purpose. Cyberviolence in dating relationships is becoming increasingly widespread among girls and boys between the ages of 14 and 17, and many parents feel distraught and unprepared to deal with this new development. Others want to be better informed so that they can help their children protect themselves against the possibility of violence.

We have prepared this guide for every parent who wants to be better equipped to deal with this disturbing phenomenon. The four accompanying animated videos, available on the Facebook page or the YouTube channel of the *Association québécoise Plaidoyer-Victimes*, illustrate several of the main points presented in the guide. Why not find an opportunity to watch them with your teenaged child? They might be just what you need to get the ball rolling for an open dialogue about prevention and support.

The guide and videos have been prepared to:

- **make you aware** of the forms that cyberviolence takes in teen intimate relationships and its consequences
- **inform you** of the workings of the youth justice system in the area of cyberviolence in dating relationships and the related provisions under the Criminal Code
- **provide you** with practical advice and resources that can help you and your child
- **give you** the tools you need to better support your child.

Remember that informed parents help keep children safe.

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1

Understanding Adolescence and Cyberviolence in Teen Intimate Relationships

Cyberviolence is becoming an increasingly familiar occurrence. Awareness campaigns and information tools for teachers, parents and young people have lifted the veil on a phenomenon that affects the lives of many teens and initiated a dialogue on a subject that is both delicate and very serious.

It can nevertheless be difficult for parents to believe that their child is caught up in a situation of cyberviolence, especially if the perpetrator is their romantic partner. The time between childhood and adolescence is very short, especially as experienced by parents. In the blink of an eye, the difficulties of childhood may be transformed into problems of a much more serious nature. Parents often complain that they are the last to find out about what is going on in their children's lives. They feel caught short and unprepared to help their child deal with situations as complex as cyberviolence in the context of a romantic attachment. It isn't long before they feel overwhelmed and powerless in the face of what their child is experiencing.

If this sounds like you, take heart in knowing that it's completely normal to feel discouraged and ill-equipped to help a child who is a victim of violence. Know that there are solutions and that help is available.

The two key elements in cyberviolence in intimate teen relationships are adolescence and technology-facilitated violence.

A Few Words About Adolescence...

Cyberviolence in intimate relationships is a reality among young people today. Although this form of violence is no less serious than that experienced by an adult victim, adolescence has its own issues. Knowing more about these issues can help you understand why your child has adopted a certain attitude and why they hesitate to confide in you when they are going through a difficult situation.

"But why are teenagers so complicated?" parents often ask.

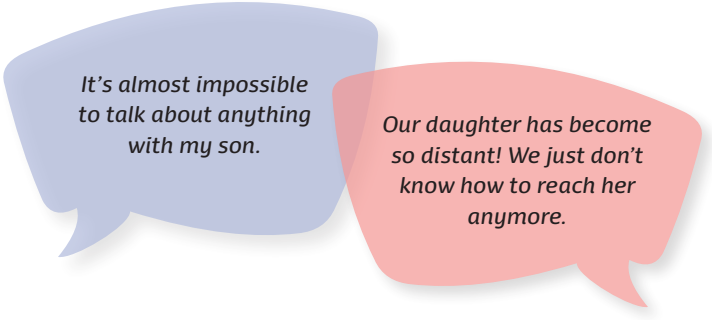
Adolescence is a period of transition. The first signs of puberty, accompanied by new attitudes and behaviours, usually begin to appear when children are entering high school. The heightened importance of clothes, music, friends, vocabulary and a desire for freedom are all signs that your child has become a teenager.

This period of transition also brings about major changes in the relationship between parents and their teenaged children.

Seemingly overnight, parents come up against a closed bedroom door with a

sign saying "Knock before entering" or simply "Keep out!" Family activities that teens used to look forward to are suddenly less interesting. Communication between parent and child that used to be positive and uncomplicated becomes mysteriously elusive. Parents' questions receive monosyllabic yes or no answers, eye-rolls or the ubiquitous "Whatever."

Although adolescence is not always a time of crisis, it frequently requires adjustments on the part of both parents and their children. The no-man's-land between childhood and adulthood is not for the faint of heart! Parents often lose their bearings and feel helpless when faced with certain new types of behaviour. Sometimes it's hard to recognize your own child—you feel like you're living with a stranger. And then there's the fear that your teenager will do something reckless like start drinking or using drugs, drop out of school or neglect family.



Young people share a common denominator: a desire to be independent and become their own person. How each teenager goes through this period of development depends on a range of factors such as personality, self-esteem, the quality of the parent-child bond, friendships, and so on.

In spite of everything, it's important to remember that adolescents are caught in a turmoil of conflicting needs and intense feelings. Their need for guidance is still there, even if it is hidden by their fierce desire for independence and freedom. Their need for security and their parents' support clashes with their need to demand privacy, assert their individuality and distance themselves from parental authority. All these contradictory needs produce extremely intense, sometimes ambivalent, emotions.

Teens can feel angry with themselves, their family and society in general. Mood swings, impatience, sadness, revolt and indignation are all outward expressions of their attempts to manage these contradictions. It is no surprise, therefore, that the intimate relationships experienced in adolescence are coloured by these opposing forces.



- For many young people, the feeling that they still need and depend on their parents is a source of frustration and conflict. Impatience, monosyllabic communication and withdrawal from many family activities are the outward expressions of those feelings. Fortunately, adolescence doesn't last forever! The better teenagers learn to know themselves and realize their potential, the better they will be able to develop harmonious relationships with their parents.
- In short, no matter what your child says, he or she needs your support and guidance.

Teenagers Romantic Relationships

Adolescence is also the time of first loves, which have an important role to play in a young person's quest for identity and self-affirmation. It is a time of discovering one's sexuality and learning about intimacy and feelings of love. First relationships can provoke intense, sometimes overpowering, emotions. Teenagers are not the only ones who have to deal with all these new emotions—their parents do, too.

Parents' reactions vary depending on a variety of factors, including the image they have of their child, their values, their education, their own life experience, the quality of the parent-child bond, and their child's personality and behaviour. There's no getting around it: adolescence is a time when parents are constantly asking themselves questions. Why does my child seem so different now? Does he or she have a girlfriend? A boyfriend? Are they having sex?

Many parents are astonished when they find out that their son has been involved in an intimate relationship for several months. Others can't believe that their daughter who is always home after school and so studious has been carrying on a virtual romantic relationship with someone she met online. And many parents will only find out years later that their child is homosexual.



- Three out of four teenagers in Québec between 14 and 18 have been involved in an intimate relationship.
- 50% of young couples between 14 and 18 have not yet had sexual relations.
- 80% of young couples say that their partner encourages their projects.
- 83% of teenagers between 14 and 18 say they have been attracted to people of the opposite sex, 11% to both sexes, 5% are questioning their sexuality and 1% are attracted to members of their own sex.[1]

Parents who have accurate information are better able to anticipate their children's behaviour and better equipped to handle the various issues associated with adolescence, such as the quest for self-identity and sexual orientation.

As a general rule, teenagers prefer to confide in their friends rather than their parents. A generation gap, rigid moral values, unrealistic expectations, authoritarian and repressive reactions will provoke children's fear of judgement and disappointing or angering their parents. These kinds of attitudes may reinforce a child's silence and block communication. Parents have to be aware of their feelings and try to understand the effect that their attitudes and convictions can have on their child.

There is no denying that it is unnerving to realize that your son or daughter is no longer a child and that they are having experiences that no longer involve you. Many parents have great difficulty accepting this loss. Recognizing that your children are full-fledged individuals who no longer correspond to the image you had of them can be a real challenge as well as a source of sorrow and even disappointment.

All parents obviously want their children to flourish and develop their full potential. We want them to be happy! It's hard, though, to know what to say and do to help your child deal with the upheavals of adolescence while trying to keep your own reactions in check. It's always a good idea to talk to other parents or consult a professional in order to learn how to manage a given situation.



Adolescence can be destabilizing for parents. It's completely normal to feel frustrated, angry and/or irritated by your child's behaviour. Teenagers don't come equipped with a user's guide. If you acknowledge your feelings and talk to other parents or professionals, your emotions are less likely to get the better of you when the going gets tough. You will be better able to control your reactions and to deal with the confusing ups and downs of adolescence with greater serenity.

No matter how open-minded and ready to listen you are, however, your child may still conceal a romantic attachment from you. Young people love to have a secret garden, and intimate relationships are a big part of their life. Maybe your son doesn't feel the need to confide in you right now. Maybe your daughter is experiencing her first relationship and is very happy. If you leave the door wide open for your child, it will be easier for them to come to you if problems arise—problems like being a victim of violence or cyberviolence.

As a parent, it is crucial that you do not underestimate your role in preventing violence or cyberviolence. Teenagers do not grow up in a vacuum. Their parents' values regarding intimate relationships and sexuality as well as models of other couples in their lives are a big influence on young people. Even though children may appear to reject everything their parents represent, they are far from impermeable.

Technology-related Violence

In spite of the complexity of the issues they have to deal with, most teenagers get through adolescence relatively well. Their intimate relationships are generally positive experiences that teach them much about life. Through their intimate connections, boys and girls learn how to manage and share their emotions, to trust themselves and others, to give and to receive, to listen and make themselves heard. Conflict management and the pursuit of practical solutions are other life skills that are learned through relationships. In short, romantic attachments allow young people to know themselves better, determine their sexual orientation, and identify their strengths and their limits.

Not all adolescent intimate relationships are positive, however; some can be frankly unhealthy. A partner's unacceptable behaviour can unsettle a girl or boy who is experiencing love for the first time. Young people are not exempt from behaviours of excessive jealousy, control, domination and violence in all its forms. Violence in dating relationships is, unfortunately, fairly common, as cyberviolence in particular becomes increasingly present in adolescent relationships. And that is what parents are worried about.

What is cyberviolence? How can you tell if your child is a victim of cyberviolence? What are the consequences of this form of violence in adolescence?

Those are some of the questions we'll be looking at in the next section.



Key Points to Remember

Accept that you will sometimes have to trade in your role of authority for that of an advisor or counsellor. Teenagers need to assert themselves. They want their parents to listen to their opinions and respect their preferences.

Learn how to negotiate with your teen. State your expectations clearly, but leave room for compromise in areas that are less of a priority for you.

Stay informed. Finding out more about adolescence, young people's sexuality and cyberviolence will help you deal with your teenager and provide them with the support they need.

Your child needs you. Show that you are ready to listen and stock up on patience and good humour.

Remember that informed parents help keep children safe.

2

Demystifying Cyberviolence

Video #1



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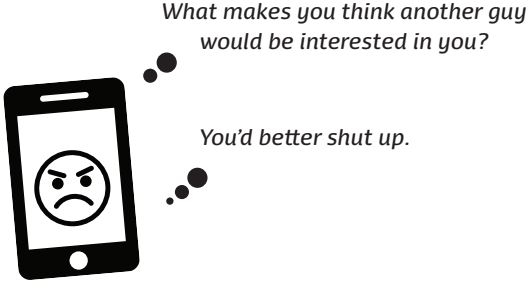
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The phenomenon of cyberviolence is becoming increasingly common in interactions among young people. Cyberspace offers an ideal platform for people who want to take revenge, humiliate and threaten, and teen relationships are no exception. A significant number of adolescents experience cyberviolence in their couple, and the importance of intimate relationships in adolescence makes this phenomenon even more worrying. What is really going on?

Cyberviolence

Violence in intimate relationships occurs when a partner's repeated actions, words or attitudes affect the physical or psychological integrity of the other person with the intent to control. A boy or girl experiencing violence in their relationship can be a victim of a variety of behaviours, including harassment, bullying, denigration, humiliation, threats, assault, sexual assault and mischief. What that means in concrete terms is that one partner is controlling the movements of the other, preventing them from seeing friends or participating in activities, criticizing the way they dress or behave in public, demeaning them in front of others, humiliating them in front of others, pushing them around or forcing them to perform certain sexual acts.

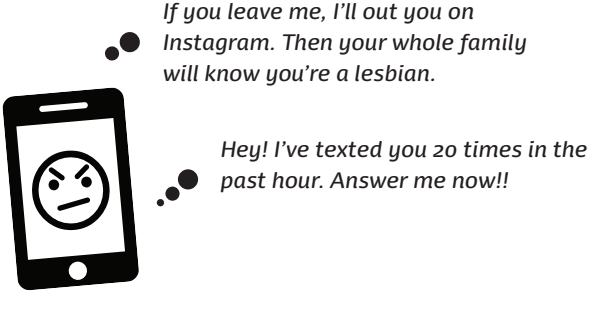


When one partner uses the Internet and social media to perpetrate violence against the other, there is cyberviolence in an intimate relationship. Information and communication technologies are making it increasingly possible for someone to victimize their intimate partner from any location, without even having to be in the same room.

According to a Québec study, no less than 35% of adolescents in a couple relationship are experiencing cyberviolence.[2]

To fully understand this phenomenon, it's important to remember that today's teenagers have grown up in a world characterized by the omnipresence of the Internet, social media and all kinds of technology. Smartphones, tablets, computers, webcams, geolocation, spyware, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, YouTube, Kik, Tumblr and Facebook, today's teens are plugged in from morning 'til night. For them, it's only natural that their love lives are played out in emails, texts, social networks and even online video games. The Internet and social networks are also where people go to meet other people. They offer young people the possibility of chatting online with another person, getting to know them and falling in love without ever having met them in person: virtual relationships happening right at home.

Although these forms of communication provide the perfect opportunity for young people to find each other and interact, they can, if used for the wrong purposes, become powerful tools for violence in intimate relationships. They can be used to threaten, track and control a partner. Cyberharassment, for example, is a frequent form of violence among young people, usually used by jealous, insecure teens to control a girlfriend or boyfriend. Offenders text their partner non-stop day and night, demanding immediate responses, tracking their movements, publishing inappropriate or hurtful comments, spreading or threatening to spread false rumours, revealing secrets, invading their partner's favourite websites, making death threats, and more.



Teens and Sexting

Sexting (or erotic selfies, also called sexfies), which is creating and transmitting photos or videos featuring partial or full nudity or sex acts, is another rapidly growing phenomenon among young people. These messages or publications are composed using very sexual language on a cellphone, the Internet or any other digital communication device. Sexting is practised by both boys and girls.



Scientific documentation shows that sexting is a common practice among teens, especially girls (one out of five girls in Québec send sexts).[3]

Sexting is hard for parents to get their heads around. The idea that their child might be sending out sexual images electronically may seem more like fiction than reality, but it is nonetheless a possibility.

The reasons why young people sext vary from one person to another and one situation to another. Many things can lead adolescents to send sexts. They may, for example, be:

- exploring their sexuality with their girlfriend or boyfriend
- trying to get closer to someone they really like
- attracting or keeping the attention of someone desirable
- trying to seduce
- having some fun
- filling a need for attention and recognition
- trying to keep their partner's love
- responding to pressure from their partner
- trying to be sexy and interesting
- giving their partner a surprise or a present
- responding to pressure from friends.



A Kids Help Phone survey[4] reveals that one out of four young people who sext send sexual messages under pressure. More girls report being pressured than boys, by their partner or their friends.

Although the majority of adolescents send sexts to the person they're romantically involved with, that is not always the case. The Kids Help Phone survey indicates that:

- 49% sent them to their girlfriend/boyfriend
- 43% sent them to someone they liked and were hoping to be in a relationship with
- 31% sent them to someone they only knew online
- 20% sent them to someone they didn't know.

Regardless of why teens sext, it is impossible to know where the shared photos and videos will end up in cyberspace. Sexting can easily be used to blackmail and threaten. Distributing sexually explicit images of a partner, often called revenge porn or sextortion, is a serious assault on a person's integrity. Even more risky is sending sexts to complete strangers. Just because the sender knows or has a relationship with the recipient, however, is no guarantee that they will respect their partner's privacy.

Once sexual images and videos have been launched into cyberspace, they can become viral, viewed hundreds of times by hundreds of people. It isn't hard to imagine how mortified and ashamed a boy or girl can feel when all their friends at school have seen sexually explicit images of them on Instagram. You should also be aware that several online resources provide advice on how to remove sexually-published photos or videos from the Internet (see the *Resources* section on page 64).

Young people are subject to various forms of influence, such as family, school, friends and social activities. In spite of major advances in the area of sexual stereotyping, however, teens are constantly bombarded with stereotyped images. The depictions of young men and women in videoclips, advertising, fashion magazines, the Internet, movies and television series aimed at young

people are often caricatural. The hypersexualization of girls continues to be a serious issue. The various forms of media that are an integral part of young people's daily lives convey messages on sexuality and relationships that are not always egalitarian and based on mutual respect.

Teenagers do not always have the necessary maturity to discern positive from negative. Young people who cannot discuss sexuality and relationships at home are forced to look elsewhere for information on which to base their decisions.



If you are uncomfortable with the idea of talking about sexuality with your teen, why not start by just talking about your discomfort with the whole issue? Admitting your embarrassment could open the door to a real conversation with your son or daughter. They may very well feel exactly the same way and be relieved to know you share their reticence.

Young people are just that: children on their way to becoming adults. They don't have all the necessary tools to evaluate the possible consequences of a decision. Something that might seem fun and harmless at first could end up causing a great deal of damage and distress. Whether they know it or not, teens need advice, guidelines and access to positive, egalitarian relationship models. That's where parents have an important role to play.

The Consequences of Cyberviolence

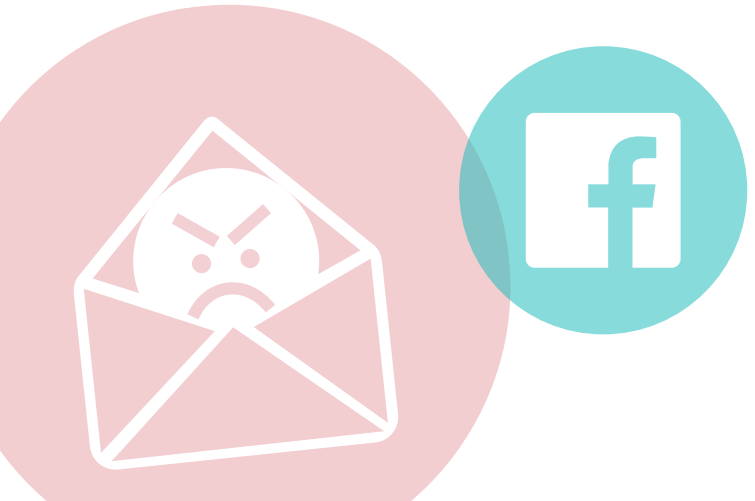
As we mentioned in the first section of this guide, teens rarely confide in their parents. "Fine" and "okay" don't give us much to go on! Many parents have trouble figuring out whether their child is fine or not, never mind understanding what's bothering them.

Like any other form of violence, cyberviolence can cause changes in the victim's behaviour. An adolescent who is being bullied or harassed online may become withdrawn, jump when the telephone rings or hesitate to answer. They may show less interest in school or activities they usually enjoy. They may have trouble sleeping or lose their appetite.

Keep an eye out for changes in behaviour: they are usually a good sign your child is in distress—possibly involving cyberviolence.

Scientific research has confirmed that the consequences of cyberviolence can be significant and, sometimes, long-lasting. Young victims may be anxious, present symptoms of depression or low self-esteem, suffer eating disorders, have suicidal thoughts or attempt suicide, develop an alcohol or drug problem or have a distorted body image. The degree of violence and control exerted on victims can be severe, even among young people.

Although psychological violence is the most common form of cyberviolence encountered among adolescents, verbal, physical and sexual violence may also occur in the context of dating relationships. Information and communication technologies become tools for psychological violence, bullying, harassment and threats—all of which are extremely effective ways to control, dominate and denigrate a romantic partner.



Psychological Consequences

- Fear, anxiety, sadness or loneliness
- Shame, humiliation or guilt
- Anger, frustration or a desire for revenge
- Feeling vulnerable, powerless or betrayed
- Loss of self-confidence and trust in friends and family
- Fear of getting involved in a new relationship
- Distorted body image
- Feeling unsafe

Behavioural Consequences

- Aggressive behavior
- Withdrawal, isolation
- Substance abuse (alcohol, drugs, medication) or addiction
- Suicidal thoughts or behaviours

Health Consequences

- Exhaustion
- Depression
- Sudden weight loss or gain
- Insomnia or loss of appetite
- Digestive problems
- Immune problems or allergies

Social Consequences

- Teasing, insults or bullying from peers
- Being stigmatized, shut out or rejected by peers
- Reputation damaged, intimacy violated or privacy exposed without consent
- Loss of interest in school, often late or absent
- Drop in grades at school or showing signs of dropping out
- Loss of interest in social, cultural or sports activities that used to be important

The more intrusive and severe the cyberviolence, the more the young victim will fear for their safety. There is also a greater likelihood of more serious consequences, such as eating disorders or depression.

Behaviors Considered Crimes

Apart from significantly affecting the lives of victims, cyberviolence can also have very serious consequences for young offenders. Several forms of behaviours associated with cyberviolence are considered crimes in Canada.

Here are some of the offences with which young perpetrators of cyberviolence can be accused:

Uttering Threats

It is a criminal offence to **threaten** any person with **death** or **bodily harm**. This includes threats issued in person, by text message, telephone, social media or through the intermediary of another person. Also considered an offence are threats issued regarding a person's **property** or **animal** (such as threatening to break a partner's cell phone or hurt their pet dog).

Harassing Communications

Repeatedly communicating with a person or causing repeated communications to be made by means of telecommunication with the intention of **harassing** them (constantly texting "Where are you?" "Who are you with?" "What are you doing?," for example) is a criminal offence, regardless of the form of **telecommunication** used (social media, email or telephone).

Criminal Harassment

Repeatedly following a person from place to place against their will (such as visiting their home or waiting for them after school), **repeatedly** sending them threatening messages (on social media, messaging or email, for example), constantly watching them and engaging in **threatening conduct** (like hitting walls in their presence or using threatening words) are all forms of criminal harassment. Such harassment causes the victim to **fear for their safety** or the **safety of anyone known to them**.

Extorsion

Trying to obtain something from another person through the use of **threats or violence** is a criminal offence ("I'll post your photo if you don't give me the money I want," for example).

Child Pornography and Publication of an Intimate Image

Producing child pornography (filming or photographing), **distributing** it (such as showing or sending it to friends), **possessing** it (having photos or videos on one's cell phone or computer), or **accessing** intimate or sexually explicit content featuring a minor, with or without their consent, is a criminal offence. That means that a teenage girl under 18 who takes a nude photo of herself and sends it to her boyfriend can be accused of producing child pornography. Sharing an intimate photo of a minor (that reveals her breasts, for example), with or without their consent, is also a criminal offence. In short, it is a crime to publish an intimate photo of a partner in which they are partially or completely nude, regardless of whether their consent has been obtained or not.

Young people also use violence to respond to violence without necessarily measuring the risk of being accused of a crime.



Scientific documentation shows that young people tend to respond to violence with some form of violent behaviour. Thus, close to one out of two teens are both victim and agent of cyberviolence.[5]

Their actions in the context of an intimate relationship can therefore have very serious consequences for both the victim and the offender. The majority of adolescents are ignorant of the criminal nature of many forms of behaviours associated with cyberviolence in dating relationships. So, for that matter, are most parents.



- If you find out that your child is a victim of cyberviolence, be sure they understand the serious consequences of responding to cyberviolence with other forms of cyberviolence. Taking revenge by posting intimate photos of their partner, threatening them on social media or circulating false rumours on the Internet are all criminal offences.
- There are several resources that provide information for parents and their children on the consequences of cyberviolence (see the *Resources* section on page 64).

Cyberviolence Affects the Whole Family

Sometimes, the cyberviolence experienced by a son or daughter can weaken family cohesion. Parents may react differently to their child's behaviour. One may prefer not to judge their child and offer their unconditional support, while the other may be furious and express their disapproval in no uncertain terms (on learning that their child has been posting sexually suggestive photos

online, for example). Disagreement between parents on how to react in a given situation can result in a breakdown in communication, putting the entire family into a state of crisis.

It is important to deal with such situations as quickly as possible, as conflict between parents can intensify their child's feelings of shame and worthlessness. The family has a crucial role to play in helping their teen recover from an experience of cyberviolence. Seeking professional help as a family can help re-establish communication and even strengthen the family bond.

Although every situation is different, no form of violence or cyberviolence is without consequence. It is important that parents remain vigilant and show their support. Regardless of what they may say, children need to know they can count on their parents support and protection in good times and bad.

In the next section, we'll look at how you can help your teen in a situation of cyberviolence and offer some helpful tips for parents.



Key Points to Remember

Your role as a parent is important. Even if your son or daughter seems distant, everything you convey to them in terms of values, relationships models, attitudes and conflict management and resolution has an impact on your child. Never underestimate the importance of your influence and the power of your love.

Remember that informed parents help keep children safe.

3

Helping Your Child Victim of Cyberviolence

Video #2



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Learning that one's child is a victim of cyberviolence can be profoundly disturbing. Parents will be surprised, worried about their child's welfare and safety and wonder what they can do to help. This is especially true when one revelation opens the door to others. In the space of a few hours, parents may discover that their child is involved in an intimate relationship, is being subjected to violence in that relationship, is sexually active, has shared personal intimate photos online or is attracted to others of the same sex. Parents will be flooded with new emotions, the intensity of which may throw them completely off guard.



Parents who are already having trouble accepting the fact that their child has a girlfriend or boyfriend (because they think they're too young, for example) are sure to react very strongly when they find out that their child's partner is subjecting them to cyberviolence. It is also true, however, that parents' reactions are as varied as the situations that provoke them. Some are highly distressed, while others minimize the seriousness of the situation. For some, fear for their child's safety is their greatest concern, while for others, disappointment in their child's behaviour overwhelms everything else.

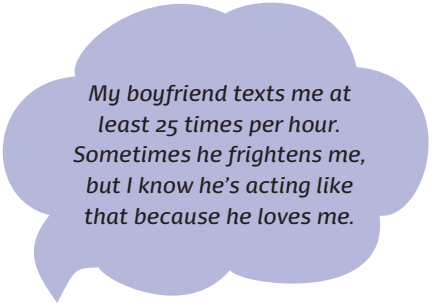
When a child is a victim of cyberviolence, it's normal for their parents to experience a whole range of emotions, from fury to disappointment and sadness. Every person reacts in their own way depending on a multitude of factors: the quality of communication between parent and child, the parent's values and life experiences, the seriousness of the situation, and the child's personality and behaviour.

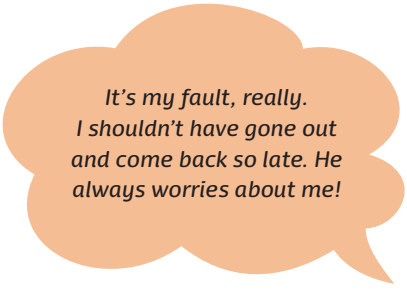


- The emotions you feel may destabilize and disturb you. Whatever you are feeling, there is no need to be ashamed. Shame, anger, fear, anxiety, disappointment and incomprehension—these are all perfectly natural reactions. No one is ever prepared to have to deal with the fact that their child is a victim of violence and all the information that comes to light because of that violence.
- Try to clearly identify your emotions and to understand why some cause you to react more than others. Sometimes our fear, anger and insecurity have more to do with ourselves than with the actions of our children. Experiences we have had in the past can cause us to react in certain ways, so it is important to keep a clear head.
- Try to understand the effect your emotions are having on your well-being, your child and the situation.
- Even if it's not always easy, try to step back from the situation a little bit in order to dial down the intensity of your emotions and assess the situation more calmly.

To help one's child, it is also important to understand the impact of a violent relationship in adolescence. Adolescents have a strong need to live their own experiences, often through trial and error. In their search for meaning, they try to figure out who they are and that makes them vulnerable to the judgement of others, especially a close friend or romantic interest. The approval of their peers, especially their girlfriend or boyfriend, is of critical importance to teens. Cyberviolence in dating relationships can therefore cause serious harm to young people who are experiencing love for the first time.

Since they have little experience with relationships, teens are often not equipped to recognize and deal with violence when it occurs. They may misinterpret their partner's displays of jealousy, aggression or control, thinking that such behaviour is a sign of their love and devotion. Hearing words like "I can't live without you," or "You are everything to me" can give the impression that our partner truly loves us.





The purpose of cyberviolence is to control and belittle the other in order to maintain a hold on them and "protect" the relationship. Insulting, threatening and blaming the victim for the violence inflicted while professing one's love and devotion creates conflicting feelings that are difficult to handle at any age—even more so during adolescence. This type of dynamic creates confusion and doubt in the victim about their own responsibility for the violent events, undermines their confidence and self-esteem and keeps them locked in a relationship of violence. Cyberviolence keeps young people from developing their full potential.

It is also important to know that breaking out of a relationship based on violence and cyberviolence requires courage and assertiveness. Even if a victim really wants to end the relationship, they may fear their partner's reactions. Sometimes a breakup ends the violence; sometimes it makes it worse.

- As a parent, it is important that you realize that putting an end to a violent relationship doesn't necessarily mean putting an end to the violent behaviour. Teens who perpetrate violence and cyberviolence are intent on controlling and dominating their partner. Ending a violent relationship is an act of affirmation and reclaiming power. A young victim who is able to break away from a violent partner wants the violence to stop so they can take their life back, which is often destabilizing for the other, who may intensify their violent behaviour in order to regain control. Although ending the relationship represents the best solution, it is important to be aware of the risks involved.
- Be sure to actively recognize your child's strength and courage in doing so.

Pitfalls to Avoid

☐ Downplaying the Situation

Some parents may think that the violence being exerted on their child is just a silly teenage thing that will pass without any important consequences. As we have seen, however, the consequences can be extremely serious. Take the time to find out about the possible effects of cyberviolence.

Your child holds the key to their own story, so sit down with your son or daughter and talk about what they are going through.

☐ Blowing the Situation out of Proportion

Sometimes parents react even more strongly than their child. Even though it's not easy to hear that your child is being subjected to violence in their relationship, it's important not to impose all your own fears and insecurities on them. Having to deal with overemotional parents in addition to their own victimization may be too much for young persons. Parents need to be aware of this.

Talk to other persons who can give you support and good advice. Take a step back and listen to your child.

☐ Believing That Only Girls Are Victims of Violence

The violence that can occur in dating relationships affects boys as well as girls. Although it is true that girls live more episodes of violence than boys and are more victims of sexual violence, boys are not unaffected by violence and cyberviolence in their relationships. The consequences can be just as serious for them. Don't kid yourself: it's not just a girl thing.

☐ Wanting to Know and See Everything

Some worried parents may want their child to tell them every single detail about the violence they have been subjected to. Cyberviolence is intrusive and overly public by nature. It violates the integrity of the young victim, whose need for privacy and respect—so precious during the teen years—is ignored.

Respect your child's privacy. There is absolutely no need for you to see all the images or read the offensive messages in order to support your son or daughter. They already feel bad enough.

☐ Blaming the Victim

Any young person can be the victim of violence and cyberviolence. You might think that your child was reckless and secretive, that they failed to respect the rules of the house and that they should have come to you sooner. All of which may very well be true. But in spite of that, you cannot hold your daughter or son responsible for the violence they have suffered. It was not their fault: the person who carried out the bullying, threats and humiliation is solely responsible.

It's one thing to lack experience and maturity, to make mistakes and take decisions that turn out badly. But it is another thing to be subjected to violence and cyberviolence on the part of another person.

There's no doubt that teenagers need to learn to take responsibility for their actions and behaviour, but they can't be held accountable for the violent acts committed against them by another person. It is important to make this distinction clear in your own mind and help your child do so as well.

☐ Reproaching Your Child for Remaining Silent

As we mentioned earlier, teens rarely confide in their parents. Communication between adolescents and their parents (and adults in general) is notoriously difficult. Violence just accentuates that difficulty.

There are several reasons why children might be reluctant to talk about their situation: shame, fear of disappointing their family, losing their partner's love, uncertainty about the violent nature of their partner's actions, fear of being held responsible for the violence or risking reprisal from their partner or their parents.

Many teens think their situation will just get worse if they talk about it. Following a breakup, the violent partner's behaviour may indeed intensify. Young victims may fear for their safety. Don't forget that your child isn't an adult yet. Your son or daughter doesn't have all the tools they need to deal with such a delicate situation.

Go easy on them: their silence is not a sign of a lack of respect. It may be hard for them to confide in you if, in addition to the violence, they also have to tell you that they had been drinking, lied about their comings and goings and whom they were seeing, or have been concealing their sexual orientation. Some life situations can place your child in the centre of a serious dilemma that is complex to manage, especially in adolescence.

☐ Denying the Possibility That Your Child Could Retaliate

Once again, it is important to recognize that young people can both suffer and exert violence in their intimate relationships. Girls as well as boys tend to respond to violence and cyberviolence with similar behaviour without stopping to consider the risks they are taking.

Reacting to violence with more violence may not only intensify the violence suffered, but may lead to criminal charges. It is best to address this issue with your child.

☐ Imposing Your Own Solutions

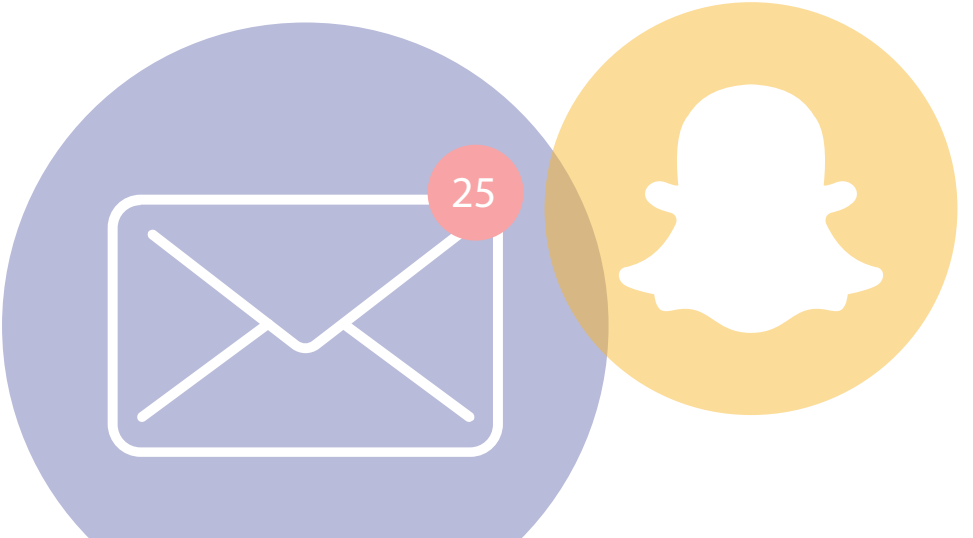
Nothing could be more normal than wanting to relieve your child's distress and fear in a situation of violence. Parents whose children are victims often feel they have to take action and solve the problem immediately. "We have to tell your principal," "We're going to call his parents right away,"

"We have to report this to the police" seem to be appropriate reactions at the outset. The solution put forward by parents, however, does not always correspond to that of the young victim.

Adolescents want to be respected and consulted about matters that affect them. If your child is being subjected to cyberviolence in a couple relationship, he or she is the primary person concerned. Involve your child in finding solutions and make sure they are comfortable with the final decision. Playing an active role in looking for solutions can help your daughter or son feel less powerless by taking positive steps to improve their well-being and safety and regain control of their life.

In situations where an adolescent's safety is at serious risk, however, parents may be required to be more proactive in their search for solutions. Nonetheless, engage your child's participation as early as possible in the process. In so doing, you will strengthen their sense of personal competence and help them to move on to a new phase in their life.

In certain cases, it is crucial that the police be called on to provide protection. The next section talks about reporting cyberviolence to the police.



Key Points to Remember

Regardless of what they might say, teenaged children need their parents' presence and support.

If you consider certain aspects of your child's behaviour to be unacceptable, say so. During adolescence, children need their parents' guidance. You are a parent, not a pal. It is important, however, to make the distinction between a person's behaviour and the person in order to make sure your teen doesn't feel hurt or judged or put up a wall. For example, telling your child that you consider sexting to be unacceptable does not send the same message as saying that he or she is rash and immature.

Accept the fact that you will have to tone down your role as an authority figure in favour of that of advisor. Parents need to adapt their behaviour to adolescence. "Guidance" is not synonymous with "authority and repression." Having an open conversation with your child, for example, on the subject of intimate relationships, sexuality and the consequences of cyberviolence is a form of guidance. Then, if they ever are a victim of violence, they will be more inclined to confide.

Parents may be tempted to confiscate the cell phone or computer of a child who is being subjected to violence. By doing so, however, they risk isolating them from their friends, who are a major source of support and comfort during adolescence. They also are sending the message that their child is somehow to blame for the violence they have experienced. It's a much wiser idea to negotiate a workable solution for you and your child.

If you remain calm and level-headed, your teen will be more inclined to hear you out. Remember that you are a model for your child.

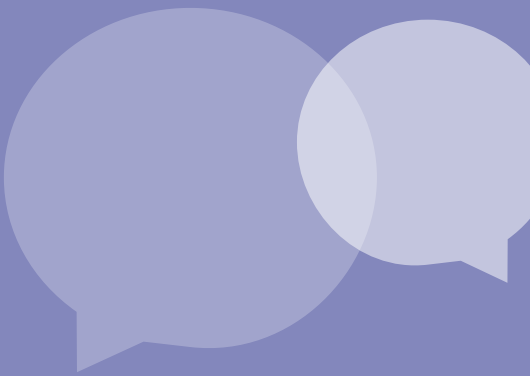
Take the time to sit down and talk things over with your child, even if it isn't always easy. Show them that you are interested in them and in their activities, and that you love them. Propose activities that you know they enjoy. Feeling loved can help them overcome the violence. Children need their parents' love and protection during adolescence.

Ask them to talk to you about their partner/ex-partner so that you can try to understand their problems and offer advice.

Insist that your child stop answering texts, emails or phone calls from their violent partner. Responding will just incite further violence.

Be sure that all communications that contain threats or constitute harassment are saved. Talk to your child so he or she saves screen shots of any social media sites that have published the content, as they could be used as evidence if you decide to report the situation to the police.

In spite of everything, try to share moments of laughter with your child. Not only will it bring you closer, it will do them a world of good.



Remember that informed parents help keep children safe.

4

Reporting Cyberdating Abuse

Video #3



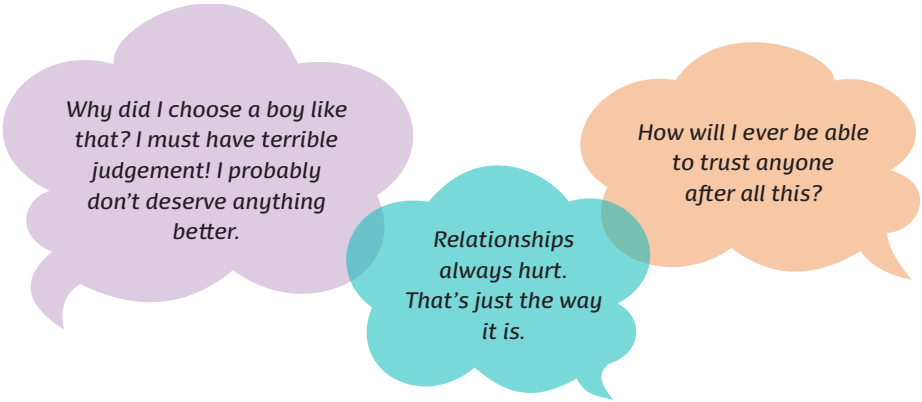
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All forms of violence are serious, whether they are perpetrated in cyberspace or elsewhere. Adolescents who are victims of cyberviolence in a dating relationship may risk being subjected to physical violence as well. Violence between young people can have serious consequences.

Cyberviolence is often of a criminal nature; victims may fear for their safety. Teens who are constantly being tracked and threatened see all the areas of their life (family, social network, school, friendships, leisure and work activities) contaminated by a technology that is intrusive and ubiquitous—not to mention the effect that a violent intimate relationship can have on a young person's view of love and loving relationships in general. Violence in adolescent intimate relationships must not be dismissed as silly teenage behaviour.



The time has come to take action when a young victim fears for his or her safety or a parent fears for their child's well-being. When that time comes, parents need to sit down with their teen and have a serious discussion about the situation. Warnings and meetings with the parents of the violent partner or the school principal are not always enough to stop the violent behaviour.

Why It's Important to Report the Violence

Talk to your child about the possibility of lodging a complaint with the police if you fear for their safety. Adolescents are often reluctant to call on the police for help. If young people are reluctant to disclose the violence and cyberviolence they are experiencing on the part of their partner, reporting the situation to the police is just that much harder.

Scientific documentation has recognized young people's ambivalence about denouncing a violent partner. There are many reasons for this: fear of reprisal and making the situation even worse, shame, exhaustion and distress, hope that the situation will magically resolve itself, fear of the breakup if the victim still has feelings for the violent partner, and distrust of the police and the legal system in general.



- Even though you are worried about your child, take the time to listen to your daughter or son without judging. In spite of everything, they may still have feelings for their partner. Any violent relationship creates enormous insecurity and ambivalence that makes breaking up difficult, especially in adolescence. Remember that fear is what can keep a victim locked in a violent relationship.
- Even if it's not always easy, try not to denigrate your child's partner/ex-partner in front of them. It may feel like support, but your words will just make your child feel even more worthless, ashamed and incompetent.

Although it can be hard for a young person to denounce their partner, no one should have to live in fear and violence. The majority of parents and children know very little about the police and the legal system, which is entirely normal since most people never have anything to do with those institutions. That lack of knowledge can be a serious obstacle, however, when it comes to make an informed decision about the safety of a victim of cyberviolence. Having access to clear, accurate information is critical.

There are resources that can help you and your child clarify your emotions and understand the issues involved in reporting a situation of violence to the police. These resources can also provide you with pertinent information on police intervention and criminal justice procedures (see the *Resources* section on page 64).

- By consulting a help resource, you are not only giving your child a concrete sign of your concern, but once you have obtained reliable information, it will be easier to talk to your son or daughter about what is involved in making a report to the police and support them in their decision.
- Do not put your child's safety at risk. There are specialized resources that can provide you with information on various measures that can be put in place to ensure his or her protection.
- Remember that giving your child reliable information will make them less apprehensive when the time comes to take the necessary measures to protect them. Demystifying the concept of police intervention and the justice system will be helpful for your daughter or son.

Teens who decide to ask the police for help can call 9-1-1 or go directly to the nearest police station. A parent, relative, neighbour or friend can also contact the police. Anyone—minor or adult, victim or witness—can report a crime to the police.

If a parent or someone else close to the victim decides to ask the police for help (if the cyberviolence continues despite the warnings, for example), it is important to obtain the victim's cooperation as quickly as possible.





- If your child makes the decision to go to the police in person, offer to accompany them.
- At the police station, your child can ask the officer at the reception desk to meet with someone privately in a closed room.
- Your child may prefer to meet with an officer alone. Young people are often uncomfortable revealing certain information in front of their parents. It's important to respect their privacy. Police officers are trained to know how to listen to victims, advise them and take the necessary measures to protect them. The most important thing is that your daughter or son receive the help they need.

Meeting With Police Services

- The police officer will come in and explain his or her role to your teen.
- Your child will be asked to explain the situation, relate the facts and present any evidence in their possession, such as photos, emails received, etc.
- The officer will assess the situation with your child's help. They will check certain aspects, such as any action that has already been taken (warnings, meetings with the school principal), the nature and seriousness of the offences committed, prior criminal record, etc.
- The officer will ask your child to complete and sign a statement relating the facts as clearly and accurately as possible. This document is important. If charges are laid against your child's partner, this original statement will follow your child throughout the entire legal process. It will also be used as memory aid if your child is required to testify in court at a trial that may take place several months after the actual crime. It is crucial that your daughter or son be entirely truthful when making their statement. The police officer may prefer to make a video recording of the statement if they think it will be easier or more beneficial for your child.
- All of the information obtained, including the statement, will be compiled into a numbered event report.

- At the end of the interview, the officer will inform your child of the next steps in the legal process, and will usually provide information on resources that are available to help them.

Procedures After the Meeting with Police Services

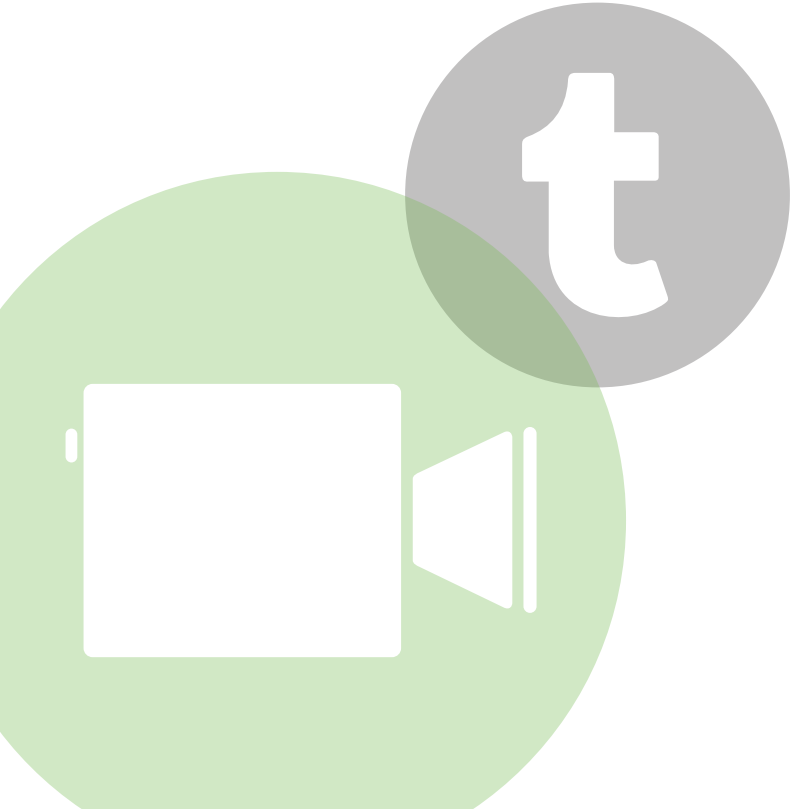
Different decisions may be made based on the analysis of the situation. Depending on the seriousness of the offence, the police may:

- arrest the victim's partner/ex-partner if they have reasonable grounds to believe that they have committed a criminal offence. They may also impose release conditions, such as prohibiting them from contacting your child directly or indirectly (no texts or messages on social media, no telephone calls or going to school, etc.).
- forward the file to the criminal and penal prosecuting attorney along with a request to initiate court proceedings (see the next section on page 44).
- along with other measures or not, direct the young offender to the Director of Youth Protection (DYP). If the police have reasonable grounds to believe that his or her security or development is, or might be endangered, they are required to report the case to the DYP.

In youth cases, the police intervention takes into account the offender's level of maturity, degree of dependency and lesser capacity for moral judgement. They examine their overall situation, trajectory of delinquency and family context to determine the most appropriate measures for their rehabilitation and social reintegration in order to avoid reoffending. For more detailed information on the police intervention, consult the *Association québécoise Plaidoyer-Victimes* guide entitled *When the Victim Is a Minor*.

The police intervention may be intimidating for your child, so your support is important at this stage in the process. By remaining calm and cooperating with the police, you will help your child to be able to deal with the situation.

Sometimes reporting cyberviolence to the police is the only way for teen victims to protect themselves. Once the report has been filed, however, your child may have to deal with the youth justice system. The next section provides a general description of the justice system as it pertains to minors and offers advice for parents on how to support their child during legal proceedings.



Key Points to Remember

Involving the police may be extremely stressful for your adolescent. Recognize your child's courage and show you are proud of them.

If there are photos or videos of your child on the Internet, he or she can ask the police what can be done to have them deleted. The police will provide your child with reliable information. There are also online resources with information for parents and teens (see the *Resources* section on page 64).

Check with your child to make sure the cyberviolence is not persisting despite police involvement. Do not make assumptions one way or the other. Your teen may find your questions annoying, but they will show that you are concerned for their well-being.

Remember that informed parents help keep children safe.

5

Supporting Your Child During Court Proceedings

Video #4



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The justice system is a source of anxiety for many young people and their parents. It's normal to wonder what will happen to your child once the law is involved. Most parents have a thousand and one questions: Will charges be laid? Will the young offender be arrested or detained during the legal proceedings? Will my child have to testify? Will we, as parents, have to testify? Is there any way we can avoid running into our child's ex-partner outside the courtroom? Is there a risk of retaliation? What rights does my daughter or son have in the justice system?*

A criminal offence, whether committed by a minor or an adult, is always serious in the eyes of the law. In Canada, however, adolescents who were between the ages of 12 and 17 when they committed a crime are considered to be "young offenders." Their offences are therefore processed by the youth justice system. This system is separate from the system that applies to adults, taking into account the relatively young age, state of dependency and lower maturity levels of adolescents. The youth justice system also has specific objectives, which include protecting adolescents' rights, protecting the general public, preventing crime and taking the interests of victims and the community into account.

For most people, any justice system is complex and intimidating. Knowing little about legal proceedings just amplifies the apprehension of victims, their loved ones, and witnesses. It is important that you know, however, that your child has rights under the youth justice system, including the right to all the support and information they need throughout the entire judicial process.



The Canadian Victims Bill of Rights gives victims of crime the right to personal safety, protection, information and participation in the criminal justice process. To find out more about your child's rights, consult the brochure entitled ***Are you a victim of crime? You have rights***, available on the *Association québécoise Plaidoyer-Victimes* website at www.aqpv.ca.

* This section provides an overview of the legal procedures involved in the youth justice system. For more information, consult the guide entitled *When the Victim Is a Minor* in *The Rights and Recourses of Victims of Crime* series published by the *Association québécoise Plaidoyer-Victimes*.

The Role of the Criminal and Penal Prosecuting Attorney

Following the investigation and the collection of sufficient evidence, the police will forward the young offender's file to the criminal and penal prosecuting attorney.

The prosecuting attorney is then responsible for analyzing the file and deciding whether to refer the adolescent toward the extrajudicial sanctions program, authorize prosecution, or close the file. Under our legal system, your child does not need to be represented by a lawyer: it is the government, represented by the criminal and penal prosecuting attorney, that prosecutes the accused before the court. Although prosecuting attorneys act in the interest of society, they are sensitive to the situation of young victims and take their rights and interests into consideration.

The Extrajudicial Sanctions Program

The extrajudicial sanctions program provides an alternative to the courts. Under the joint administration of the Québec departments of justice and health and social services, the extrajudicial sanctions program demands close cooperation between the criminal and penal prosecuting attorney, the Director of Youth Protection (DYP) and alternative justice organizations (AJOs) or the *Équijustice* network. The judicial aspect of the program is under the authority of the criminal and penal prosecuting attorney, while the social aspect is the responsibility of the Director of Youth Protection in cooperation with AJOs or the *Équijustice* network.

Various types of sanctions can be imposed on young offenders.

- **Reparation of Harm Caused to Victims**

  This type of extrajudicial sanction applies primarily in cases where the victim is known and is interested in participating in the extrajudicial sanctions program. The purpose of reparation is to take into consideration the harm the victim has suffered as well as their needs and their rights. There are several forms of reparation and redress: for example, a young offender may be required to apologize in person, write a letter of apology and explanation or have a conversation with the victim as part of a victim-offender mediation.

  Victim-offender mediation is a dialogue process between the victim and the person who caused them harm. AJOs or *Équijustice* organizations are responsible for facilitating this process:

- The consent of both the victim and the young offender is required.
- A professional mediator contacts the victim to set up preparatory meetings with the victim alone. The information exchanged during these meetings remains confidential and is not divulged to the young offender. During these meetings, the mediator explains the procedure and rules of the mediation process to the victim while establishing a bond of trust.
- Once the victim and the young offender say they are ready, they meet in person or talk to each other using some other form of communication based on the needs of the victim. For example, their dialogue may be in the form of letters or emails, an exchange of video or voice recordings, a conference call or a video conference.
- The victim is free to interrupt the process at any time to ask the mediator questions or to terminate the process altogether.



- It may prove to be helpful for your daughter or son to express what they have experienced to their ex-partner and explain the harm they caused. Mediation can give your child an opportunity to experience closure and move on.
- Mediation can be a difficult process, however, as it may revive unpleasant emotions. Your child may also be disappointed in the reaction of their former partner. Victims' expectations can sometimes be too high. Encourage your child to express his or her expectations clearly to the mediator, who will then be able to provide the appropriate information and prepare your child for the dialogue process.
- As a parent, you might be apprehensive as well. Neither you nor your child should hesitate to ask AJO or *Équijustice* representatives for any information you need.
- It is always preferable that parents be involved in the mediation process. Your child needs your support. They may not, however, require your actual presence during the mediation session, as they may be uncomfortable talking about certain subjects in front of you. It is best to respect their wishes. The mediator will never do anything that could weaken your relationship with your child.

- **Community Engagement**

  Community service is the option considered if the victim does not wish to participate in the extrajudicial sanctions program. This type of redress may be in the form of a cash donation or a maximum of 120 hours of community service.

- **Development of Social Skills**

  This option consists of a training, support or social integration activity that reflects the personal difficulties of adolescents. Based on an agreement with the Provincial Director (DYP), young offenders learn to be aware of the consequences of their actions and develop social skills.

Authorization of Prosecution

In cases involving serious criminal acts or a repeat offence, the criminal and penal prosecuting attorney will authorize legal proceedings against the young offender if there is sufficient evidence to initiate proceedings. The prosecuting attorney must also decide which specific charges will be laid.

Even if you and your child want the offender to face legal proceedings, you may be apprehensive about the whole situation.

Crime Victims Assistance Centres (*Centres d'aide aux victimes d'actes criminels* or CAVACs) have offices in most courthouses. CAVAC personnel can accompany and support young victims and their families through each step in the legal process. Most courthouses also have a room set aside for victims and witnesses, usually close to the CAVAC offices. Since you and your child will have access to this room, you will not have to worry about running into the accused outside of the courtroom.



Do not hesitate to seek help for you and your child from the Crime Victims Assistance Centre right at the outset of the legal proceedings. Parental support is vital for young victims, but parents may need help, too. Victimization affects every member of the family.

It can be reassuring to know that the criminal and penal prosecuting attorney will meet with your child within a reasonable amount of time. As a general rule, the same prosecuting attorney will be responsible for your child's case throughout the entire judicial process in order to ensure efficiency and continuity.

You must be prepared to be patient, however. Legal proceedings can sometimes extend over several months.

Closing the File

The criminal and penal prosecuting attorney may close the file if, for the protection of society and the victim, there is not cause for authorizing prosecution or transferring the file to the extrajudicial sanctions program.

A closed file does not mean that the prosecuting attorney does not believe your child or that no crime was committed. It may mean that there was insufficient evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that your child's former partner was guilty. Understanding that distinction may lessen your feelings of frustration and disappointment.



- You and your child are entitled to be informed of the reasons for the decision of the criminal and penal prosecuting attorney. Don't hesitate to ask to meet with the prosecuting attorney to obtain an explanation why he or she cannot initiate proceedings against your child's former partner. Prosecuting attorneys are generally very sympathetic to this type of request.
- If your child fears for his or her safety, tell the police investigator, who will advise your child.
- Contact the police and the person in charge of the investigation if your child's ex-partner becomes violent again.



In 2017-2018:

- Out of 14,242 cases submitted by police services to the criminal and penal prosecuting attorneys, 64% went before the courts and 19% were referred to the extrajudicial sanctions program.[6]
- 93% of youth fulfilled the extrajudicial sanction to which the had committed.[7]

The Trial and Testifying in Court

Of all the steps in the judicial process, the trial is what victims and their families find the most stressful, as the victim is usually called on to testify. In actual fact, however, very few cases go to trial. There are various reasons for this, plea bargaining and guilty pleas being the most common.

Plea bargaining is a common practice whereby the defence lawyer and the criminal and penal prosecuting attorney "negotiate a plea" for the accused and submit an agreement to the judge so that the accused will plead guilty. This bargaining can begin as early as the initial appearance and may continue until the end of the trial.

A guilty plea may be entered at any time. Although the negotiation between the lawyers takes place outside of court, the parties involved must appear before the judge to submit the agreement they consider acceptable. Should the negotiations fail, the parties will ask the judge to set a date for trial.



- Although a negotiated agreement will save your child from having to testify in court, the court may still order protective measures. Conditions can be imposed on your child's ex-partner, forbidding them from directly or indirectly contacting your child or visiting their home or school, for example.
- Many teens are relieved to learn they won't have to testify and that the accused has pleaded guilty. If you or your child is disappointed that the case will not go to trial, however, ask the prosecuting attorney for the reasons for their decision. Obtaining an explanation will help you to understand the justice system and modify your expectations accordingly.

If a trial date is set, your child will probably be summoned to testify. If so, warn your child that the case may not be tried for long time after charges have been laid and that trials are often postponed.

Your teen will have to prepare his or her testimony carefully. The criminal and penal prosecuting attorney is primarily responsible for helping victims prepare to testify. He or she will meet with your child prior to the trial in order to organize their testimony. Your son or daughter will be able to go over the statement they gave to the police with the prosecutor, who will give them an idea of the types of questions that the defence lawyer will ask. Criminal and penal prosecuting attorneys receive training in preparing young victims to give testimony; they therefore have the necessary skills and expertise to do their job effectively.



Avoid asking your child questions about the event in an attempt to prepare them for testifying or attempt to influence them in any way whatsoever. You may think you are helping and protecting them, but all you will do is confuse them and weaken their credibility on the witness stand.

In certain cases, the prosecutor will meet with the young victim several time during the days before the trial in order to re-examine the facts of the case, explain how the trial will proceed, clarify their role as witness and provide reassurance. The prosecutor may wish to meet with your child alone on these occasions in order to make sure they have their undivided attention and full cooperation. Depending on your child's behaviour and level of anxiety, however, you may be asked to be present at the meeting provided you are not a party or witness to the case. In certain circumstances, a representative of a victim assistance organization will accompany the young victim.

The trial may prove to be stressful for adolescent witnesses, who often fear they will not be believed, won't understand the questions, will have to confront the accused, or be subject to reprisals. Young people are also worried that they will sound confused, be embarrassed to talk about certain things in public or be ill at ease when they finally arrive on the witness stand. They may also feel responsible for what will happen to the accused, especially if they are a former boyfriend or girlfriend.



- Talk to your child about their fears; it may help just to express them. Without dismissing or exaggerating them, explain that their fears are perfectly normal. Above all, be attentive to your child's needs and offer your support.
- Parents, too, are far from immune to stress and anxiety—some react more strongly to legal proceedings than their children. Knowing that your child will have to testify in court may make you apprehensive. Be careful not to transmit your fears and stress to your child, who already has enough to do with managing their emotions and the legal proceedings themselves.

Important Facts You Need to Know

- If your child is served a summons (called a "subpoena") to testify in court, they must be at the courtroom at the time and place indicated in the document unless they have a serious reason for not being able to do so.
- Your child must tell the whole truth before the court and must answer all the questions asked by either the defence or the prosecution.
- Except in exceptional cases, the accused must be present in the courtroom for the entire duration of their trial. Their family and close friends may also be present.
- Unless you yourself are a witness in your child's case, you may also attend the trial. If you are called on to testify, you may stay in the courtroom with your child once you have given your testimony.
- Several measures are available to make it easier for your child to testify. For example, your son or daughter may testify behind a screen or outside the courtroom. Requesting such measures can help make your child more comfortable and reduce the possibility of negative repercussions. Make sure your child is informed of their rights and asks for accommodation measures if needed.

- In cases involving adolescents, the identity of your child is protected. The Youth Criminal Justice Act prohibits the publication of the identity of victims under the age of 18 and any other information that could reveal that they are victims or have participated in court proceedings. This publication ban applies to all victims, regardless of whether they testify or not. This protection is important because it protects the privacy of your child, saving them from the worry that their entourage will find out about the facts and details of the case.

The majority of adolescents are able to cope quite well with testifying in court. Even if having to testify aggravates the victim's anxiety, it will lessen over time, especially if they receive support from family and friends who keep a positive attitude.



Being subjected to cyberviolence in an intimate relationship can be a traumatizing experience for anyone. Sometimes testifying in court or running into an ex-partner outside the courtroom can cause a young victim to relive the trauma, especially if they are still very emotionally affected by the crime. If you are worried about your child's behaviour, the best solution is to have them meet with a professional such as a psychologist.

The Verdict and Sentencing

Once the trial is over, the judge must decide whether the accused is guilty or not guilty. The accused may be convicted on one, several or all charges brought against them. If the young offender is declared guilty, the judge will order a sentencing hearing to be held immediately or at a later date. The convicted offender will receive their sentence during that hearing.

If the judge is not convinced beyond a reasonable doubt of the guilt of the accused, he or she must acquit them—in other words, declare them not guilty. All charges will be withdrawn and the accused will be free to go, with no sentence imposed. Any conditions they were required to respect, such as having no contact with the victim, will no longer apply.

An acquittal does not mean:

- that no crime was committed
- that the young person was not a victim and that they did not suffer consequences
- that the judge or jury didn't believe the victim's testimony
- that the accused did not commit a crime.

What an acquittal may mean:

- that there was not enough evidence against the accused to declare them guilty of the charges laid
- that the accused was not the perpetrator of the crime.

If the accused is declared guilty, they will receive a sentence. In determining the sentence to impose on the young offender, the judge must take into account the principles established under the Criminal Code. He or she must consider, among other elements, the victim impact statement.

The victim impact statement is a written statement describing the physical, psychological and/or emotional harm as well as the material damage or economic loss that your child suffered as a result of the crime (or that you suffered as someone close to the victim). A victim impact statement is prepared using a form that your child or their representative (usually a parent) will receive from the Québec Justice Department (or from a CAVAC). The Victim Impact Statement form is also available on the Justice Québec website.

The judge will take your child's statement into account, as well as any other statements submitted (like that of parents) at the time of sentencing.

The victim impact statement gives a voice to the victims of crime and their loved ones. It also:

- tells the judge and the accused how the crime affected the lives of the victim and his or her loved ones
- informs the judge of the consequences of the crime and the harm suffered by the victim
- helps the judge decide on an appropriate sentence that reflects the seriousness of the offence.



The victim impact statement is important for your child. You may help them complete it, or your child can ask for assistance from a CAVAC. Even though preparing a victim impact statement can trigger unpleasant emotions, it is an opportunity for your child to express in their own words how the crime affected them.

There are various types of sentence that the judge can impose on the young offender, including a fine, volunteer work, a probation order or committal to custody. Several sentences can also be combined with a peace bond or any other conditions imposed by the court, such as a ban on direct or indirect communication with your child. Your teen may be disappointed in the sentence imposed by the judge. Don't hesitate to ask the prosecutor responsible for your child's file to explain why the judge imposed that particular sentence.

The youth criminal justice system provides for specific sentences that are different from those imposed on adults. They can be issued separately or, in certain cases, combined. Probation, combined with monitoring and community service, are the sentences most frequently imposed.

Positive Repercussions

Legal proceedings demand a great deal of young victims and their parents in terms of time and energy. They can often be very lengthy, even in the youth justice system. When all is said and done, you may wonder if all your efforts were worth the trouble.

Even though the proceedings can sometimes last several months, however, they offer certain advantages in cases involving violence and cyberviolence:

A Feeling of Security for the Victim

As a general rule, adolescents accused of one or more criminal offences related to cyberviolence are required to respect certain conditions throughout the judicial process. They must undertake a peace bond (promise to keep the peace) and not communicate with the victim in any way. The victim and their family will probably feel reassured by the fact that the offender is required to respect their bail conditions. There is also a good chance that this will encourage the young victim to resume their usual activities. They may feel more supported, confident and prepared to pick up their life if they know they can contact the police investigator and the criminal and penal prosecuting attorney at any time or call on the assistance of such resources as AJO (alternative justice organizations) or *Équijustice* organizations.

Police intervention backed by the justice system is a strong deterrent, particularly in the case of young offenders who have never had a run-in with the law. Should the offender fail to respect the imposed conditions, however, police services and the justice system will react quickly in light of the ongoing criminal investigation. In spite of these safeguards, however, it goes without saying that victims and their families must remain vigilant.

A Framework for the Accused

During the legal proceedings, offenders must not only respect the conditions of their bail, but must also honour other commitments undertaken with the Provincial Director (DYP), the AJO or *Équijustice* organization and the criminal and penal prosecuting attorney. Making young people accountable for their crimes reduces the risk of reoffending.

Professional Assistance

Even when they have been the victim of violence and cyberviolence, adolescents make little or no use of resources that offer professional assistance. CAVACs have offices in all the major courthouses in Québec. In addition to support, information and assistance at every stage in the judicial process, CAVACs offer young people a space where they can talk openly and express their concerns in complete confidentiality. Since legal proceedings can be very stressful and anxiety-provoking, the young people involved are more likely to accept the assistance offered to them. The fact that CAVACs provide services on-site is a significant incentive, especially for adolescents.

No one ever wants to have to resort to legal proceedings or testify in court, but sometimes it's the only way to protect yourself. It can also help to close a difficult chapter in one's life and move on to a new phase. Taking action in a situation of victimization makes you feel less powerless and more competent and confident. Apart from seeing the accused being sentenced, participating in proceedings and testifying in court sends a clear message that there is no place for violence and cyberviolence in intimate relationships. That message alone can be a strong deterrent to the offending partner.

Legal proceedings are an exceptional occurrence in the life of a young person. So, once everything is over and done, why not "officially" recognize your child's courage at having gotten through such a demanding and stressful time in their life? It's hard for everyone! Have an official family debriefing session and organize an activity to celebrate the end of the whole process and the beginning of a new chapter in everyone's life. It will do everyone a world of good while marking an important rite of passage in your child's life.



Key Points to Remember

Make sure your child has your support and assistance during every stage of the judicial process. Your love and support are invaluable.

Try to maintain an optimistic attitude and accentuate the positive during the legal proceedings.

Reassure your child by reminding them that the vast majority of the legal actors and court officials have their best interests and their safety at heart.

Recognize your son's or daughter's courage. Make sure they know how proud you are of them and how much you love them. Even teenagers need to be reassured of their parents' love.

Remember that informed parents help keep children safe.

6

Turning the Page

The legal proceedings are over and the cyberviolence has stopped. Your child has gradually resumed his or her regular activities. So why are you still worried?

Many parents remain apprehensive after an event as disturbing as the victimization of their child. They have a million and one questions: Is the cyberviolence going to start again? Will my child suffer long-term effects? Will my son or daughter be reluctant to become involved in another relationship? Will they be able to pick up their life where they left off?

Seeing one's child suffering, frightened and trapped by a partner who has humiliated, harassed or threatened them is very shocking and upsetting for parents. It is important to know, however, that the majority of young victims manage to successfully navigate this difficult experience and regain their full potential. They function just as well, if not sometimes better, than before the event.

Obviously, no one would ever wish cyberviolence on any adolescent. There are many life experiences, however, that enable young people to acquire maturity and to identify their strengths and limits. As challenging as it may be, an adolescent who has gone through the experience of being subjected to cyberviolence in a dating relationship will have learned some very important lessons that will stay with them all their lives.

- Knowing they are not alone. Realizing that the presence and compassion of parents, close family and friends will be a positive force in their future.
- Showing courage in dealing proactively with a violent situation is a source of great pride.
- Taking action in a problem situation makes teens feel less powerless and more confident in their abilities. Examples: talking about the experience to friends, relatives, school administration, calling the police, testifying in court... all of these actions contribute to putting a stop to the violence, showing that young victims are intent on protecting themselves, that they do not deserve to be treated that way and are prepared to take the necessary steps to regain control of their life.
- Overcoming a difficult situation and appropriating power. Young victims learn that they have the necessary resources to deal with very serious problems.

- Learning to recognize one's strengths and limits. Understanding, for example, that a person can't do everything on their own and that it's sometimes necessary to ask for help.
- Learning to respect themselves and command respect. Realizing that we have to respect ourselves before we can obtain the respect of others is a valuable life lesson.
- Identifying their needs in the context of an intimate relationship. Better understanding what they need in order to be happy and appreciated by another person will prove very useful when they are ready to embark on a new relationship.

It goes without saying that every situation is different and adolescents don't all react the same way. It is normal for parents to seek reassurance regarding their child's well-being. As we mentioned earlier, your child's behaviours and attitudes are reliable indicators of how they are feeling. As a parent, you know your child, so keep your eyes open. Rely on concrete evidence to avoid interpreting situations in a way that just reflects your own anxieties and insecurities.

Trust what you observe from day to day and be alert to any changes—positive or negative—in your child's behaviour or attitude.

☐ **Going Back to School**

Does your child seem relaxed or anxious when they leave for school in the morning? How does everything go when they return from school? Are their marks better, the same or in free fall?

☐ **Resuming Sports and Social Activities**

Has your child gone back to playing their favourite sport? Are they actively participating in cultural activities?

☐ **Activities With Friends**

Who is in your child's social circle? Have they resumed contact with their old friends or made new ones? Do you know who their friends are?

- ☐ **Daily Habits**

  Is your teen home or out more often than they used to be? Have they changed their style of dress or redecorated their room? Has their drug or alcohol use decreased? Increased? Do they always come home late at night or intoxicated?

- ☐ **Participation in Family Activities**

  Is your child taking part in activities with the rest of the family? Or are they isolating themselves in silence?

- ☐ **Attitudes and Moods**

  What is your child's general mood (good or bad)? Are they behaving rudely or, on the contrary, displaying respect and patience?

- ☐ **Eating Habits**

  Does your child have a good appetite? Have you noticed any significant weight gain or loss?

- ☐ **Sleep**

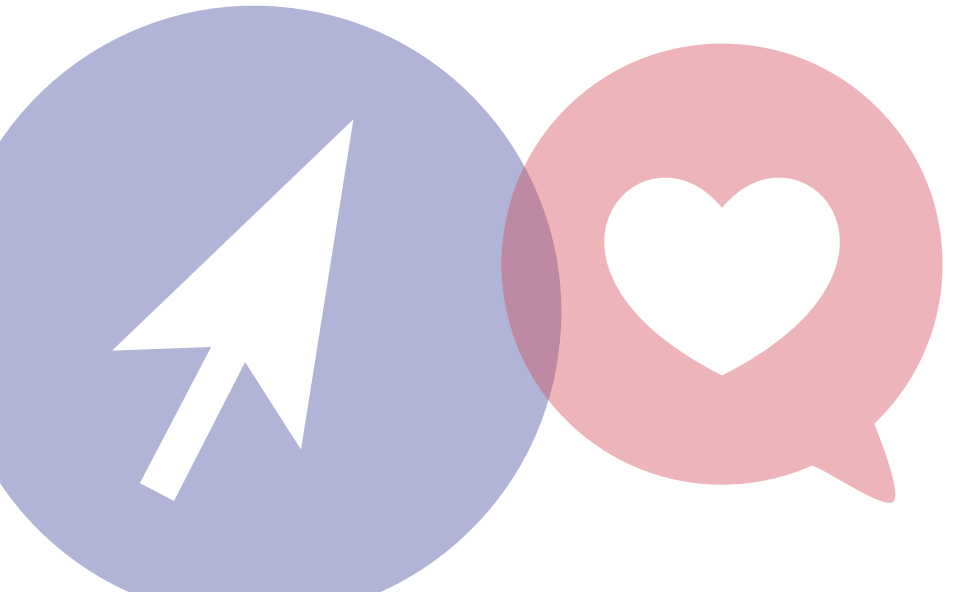
  Is your daughter or son showing a tendency to get up late? Have you noticed any unusual fatigue or lack of energy?

- ☐ **Relationships**

  Is your child seeing someone new? Have they told you about it? Has the new romantic interest been invited to your home?

- If anything you observe gives you cause for concern, talk about it directly to your son or daughter. Do your best to keep the lines of communication open. Some teenagers may need to see a therapist.
- Violence and cyberviolence can have long-term consequences. Your child will be more likely to accept professional help if you yourself are comfortable with the possibility.

Finally, something we've already said many times in this guide but can never say enough: your child needs you. They need your presence, your guidance and your love. Parents' affection and support—during adolescence more than ever—are essential for preparing young people for adulthood.



Key Points to Remember

Be forgiving of yourself and your child. You both went through a difficult time. You must take the time to rest and appreciate the little things in life.

Spend quality time with your teen. Do activities together that you both enjoy.

Show your child that you're interested in them as a person. Go to meetings with their teachers, attend school performances they are involved in, sports events, etc.

Get into the habit of talking to your child simply and asking questions about things that concern you.

Ask them to tell you about their new girlfriend or boyfriend. Suggest that they invite their new love interest over to the house.

Make a point of recognizing their achievements and successes. They will need self-confidence and self-esteem to develop projects for the future.

Find out about various resources that might be able to help them if the need arises.

Smile. Keep your sense of humour. But we already said that, too.

Remember that informed parents help keep children safe.

Resources

Many resources exist to help you and your child deal with cyberviolence in the context of an intimate relationship. Feel free to contact them!

Here a just a few:

- ***LigneParents***

  LigneParents is a confidential service provided by professionals to parents of children aged 0-20 in Québec. Available 24/7 and at no cost, *LignesParents* offers parents support as needed to solve problems, answer their questions, and deal with crisis situations.

  1-800-361-5085 www.ligneparents.com (in French only)

- ***SOS violence conjugale***

  SOS violence conjugale [SOS domestic violence] is a helpline providing support and referral services for victims of domestic violence, their children and other family members. These services are confidential and available 24/7 throughout Québec.

  1-800-363-9010 www.sosviolenceconjugale.ca (in French only)

- **Crime Victims Assistance Centres (CAVAC)**

  CAVACs provide front-line services to victims of crime everywhere in Québec. Services include: information on rights, recourses, and legal procedures; accompaniment to court; help with filing for compensation.

  1-866-532-2822 www.cavac.qc.ca



- **ProtectKidsOnline**

  ProtectKidsOnline.ca is a website designed to help parents/guardians stay on top of the digital world their children are engaging in. You will find information about the ever-changing online interests of young people, the potential risks they face and proactive strategies to help keep your child/adolescent safe while online.

  www.protectkidsonline.ca

- **NeedHelpNow.ca**

  This website provides assistance to youth aged 13-17 when an intimate photo or video has been posted online. It offers practical advice to help them regain control over the situation and explains how to contact Internet sites and services to ask them to remove a photo or video.

  www.needhelpnow.ca

- **Get CyberSafe**

  Created by Public Security Canada for parents and young people, this website provides information, advice, and tools on cyberbullying and the distribution of intimate images online without consent.

  www.getcybersafe.gc.ca

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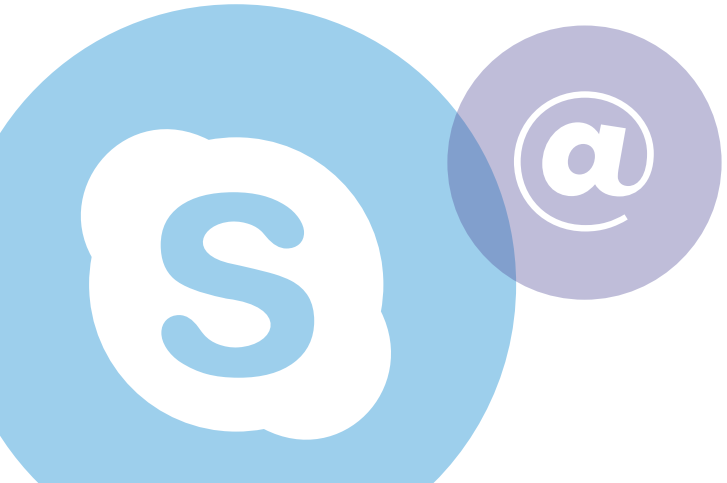
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