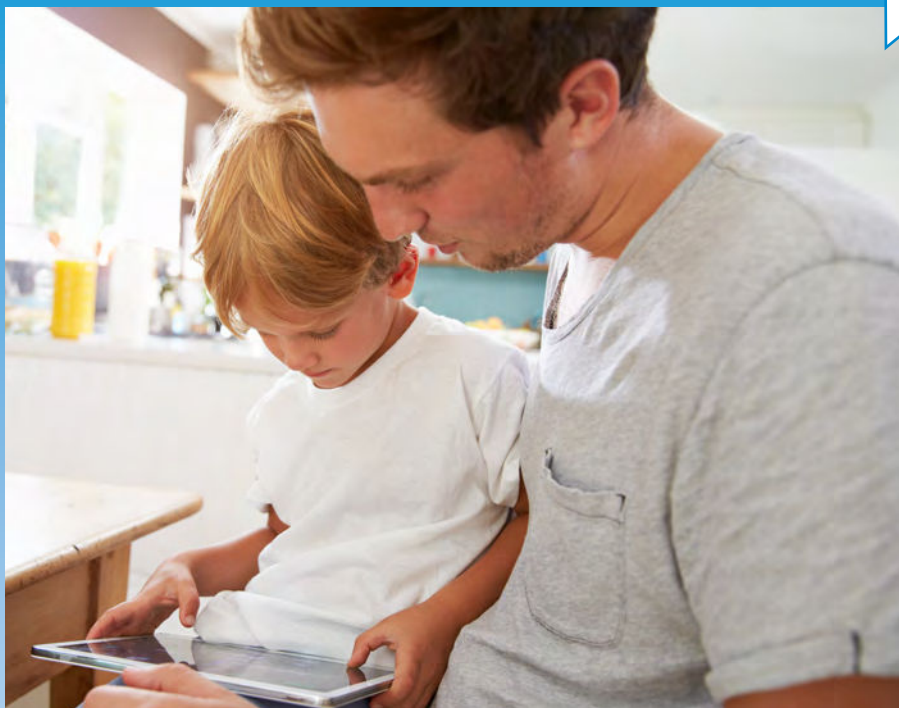


# STAYING SAFE ONLINE

## A PARENT & GUARDIAN'S GUIDE TO PREVENTING EXPLOITATION



**AWARENESS IS PROTECTION.  
START THE CONVERSATION.**



Victim Services Huron Perth  
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# RECOGNIZING VULNERABILITIES & VALUES

## WHY THIS MATTERS

Youth who feel unsafe, unloved, or misunderstood may look for connection online, where predators often take advantage of unmet needs.

## WHAT ARE VULNERABILITIES?

Someone at risk of physical or emotional harm.

## COMMON VULNERABILITIES

- Social isolation
- Low self-esteem
- High social media use
- Family conflict
- Bullying
- Under 18
- No access to own money
- Desire to be loved or accepted

## WHAT ARE VALUES?

*One's judgment of what's important in their life.*

## WHAT YOUTH VALUE

- Love, connection, and trust
- Safety and independence
- Respect, family, friends, pets
- Financial freedom

## HOW TO HELP

### **Talk openly about values and feelings:**

"These are some things that are important to me. How about you?"

"I feel uneasy when I don't know what's happening in your life. Can we talk about what's going on?"

### **Help them identify vulnerabilities:**

- Encourage them to reflect on times they've felt isolated, pressured, or unsure.
- Talk about online situations that didn't feel right and explore why.
- Reinforce that needing help is normal and that asking for it is a strength.

### **Build a strong sense of self-awareness and safety:**

- Help them identify people they trust.
- Teach them to listen to their gut when something doesn't feel right.
- Empower them with phrases they can use to say "no" or to leave a situation.

# COMMUNICATION, CONNECTION & SIGNS

## HAVING EXPLORATORY CONVERSATIONS

Use curiosity, not control. Ask open-ended questions and listen with empathy.

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

- “What’s your favourite app right now?”
- “Have you ever been messaged by someone you didn’t know?”
- “What would you do if someone online made you uncomfortable?”

## TIPS

- Avoid judgment
- Be calm and supportive
- Reassure them that they can talk to you about anything

## STAY CONNECTED BY

- Making time for regular check-ins
- Being available and present
- Creating a home environment of trust and respect

## SIGNS OF ONLINE GROOMING

Grooming involves building trust and making a connection with the intention to trick, pressure or force them to do something sexual or illegal. It means using trust against people; it can be hard to recognize when it is happening.

- Secretive behaviour online
- Sudden mood changes
- Gifts or money from unknown sources
- Mentioning new online friends
- Increased privacy needs
- Being asked to keep secrets
- Switching to another app to communicate to keep conversations private
- Sending lots of messages but avoiding phone calls and video chats.
- Requests to send sexual images or messages

People can be groomed by someone they know, by a stranger, or by someone they met online.

# RESPONSE & RESOURCES

## IF A YOUTH DISCLOSES

- Stay calm and listen
- Avoid blame or shock
- Say: "Thank you for telling me. You're not in trouble."
- Ask how you can support them
- Do not delete texts or interactions. Screenshot the items or turn the phone to airplane mode, then contact police.
- Do not reply to messages or threats

## WHERE TO TURN FOR SUPPORT

- Cybertip.ca – Report exploitation
- NeedHelpNow.ca – Youth resource site
- Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-833-900-1010
- Victim Services Huron Perth: 519-600-4108
- Local Police – 911
- Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868; Text 686868

## QUICK TIPS

- Keep devices in shared spaces
- Use parental controls
- Teach about healthy boundaries
- Remind them: "You can come to me about anything."
- Become familiar with the apps, games and websites your child accesses.
- Review privacy settings, ensure all your family members have private accounts
- Discuss who the trusted adults are in their lives.
- If you don't know the answers to the next steps, be honest and share that you will figure it out.



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