



Using Technology Safely in Dating Relationships

A Note on Language



In this toolkit, we will sometimes use the word woman/women and feminine pronouns for simplicity and to recognize the significant impact technology-facilitated violence has on women and girls. We recognize that TFGBV also impacts trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit people. We hope that all people impacted by TFGBV will find these documents useful.

Teens have the right to a violence-free relationship, online and offline.

Here are some tips to help teens use technology safely, *specifically* for experiences of teen digital dating violence. Creating a [safety plan](#) can improve safety for someone currently in an abusive relationship, preparing to leave an abusive situation, or after leaving. This resource can be supplemented by [WSC's Technology Safety Planning Checklist](#).

No matter what anyone says, the abuse is NOT the fault of the person experiencing it.

Online Safety

Most of us spend a lot of time online. Pretty much everything we do can now be done on the Internet, including accessing information, keeping in touch with others, and getting help when we need it. Unfortunately, such frequent use (and how information is collected every time we go online) means abusive partners have more ways than ever to access personal information and monitor movements and behaviours.

Remember:

- Computers, laptops, tablets, and cell phones can be monitored without one knowing
- The history of devices can never be completely erased, even if browsing in "private" or "incognito" mode
- Email can be intercepted like physical mail
- Global Positioning System (GPS) trackers and small devices like [AirTags](#) can be placed in cars or items like purses, backpacks, and cell phones
- Once something is online, it's no longer under that person's control. Encourage your teen to be protective of what they post on social media (including in their "info" section) and remind them that personal details like phone numbers, addresses, handles, previous schools or employers, and photos with landmarks can make it easier for someone to reach them.
- Encourage your teen to use a camera cover such as a post-it note or sticker to cover their device camera when they're not using it.

Internet Safety

- Always keep in mind that a computer, laptop, or tablet might be monitored when in use and encourage your teen to be careful with what they send others or post. Computers store information about the websites people visit, meaning bills paid, purchases made, and emails sent can all be retrieved.
- Using safe browsing practices (like using a VPN) can help prevent people from tracking your teen's history. Your teen can also access safe computers at local libraries or shelters, but avoid using computers and devices that are shared with the abuser when researching things like travel plans, housing options, legal issues, or [safety plans](#). Also, remind them to be careful with what they send others.
- It's essential to [document abuse](#) when it happens, especially if it takes place over the phone or online.
- Your teen's partner may admit to abusive behaviours or reference them in a message or online post, but since [digital evidence](#) is often fleeting, it's important to secure documentation quickly. Print out emails, text messages, or screenshots that contain evidence like admissions of abuse, threats of violence, or pictures your teen didn't consent to, and if possible, record voicemails onto a digital recorder with the time and date included.
- Be sure to keep everything you and your teen document somewhere that their partner can't access. It can help to create a secret email address specifically to document abuse with a password only you and/or your teen know, or to keep everything hidden in a place the abuser never goes.

Email Safety

- Email is one of the most common ways to keep in touch with trusted friends, family members, and others. Chances are that most of the people in your life use email to some degree. Abusive partners often know this and exploit it to their advantage. They may have access to your teen's account or send or delete emails without their knowledge.
- If you're concerned about your teen's safety, consider having them open a new email account that their partner doesn't know about on a safe computer and use that email for safety planning (including [documenting abuse](#)) and sensitive communications. Keep monitored accounts active with non-critical communications so their partner won't be suspicious. Encrypted email services may also offer an extra layer of security.

Alternatively, establishing several different methods of communication (email, text, instant message) to contact people can help trusted people know they can reach your teen elsewhere if an abuser is monitoring their email.

Cell Phone Safety

Many of our online actions take place from our phones. Like computers, cell phones may be monitored remotely to provide instant updates on your teen's whereabouts, habits, or activities to others, including access to call logs and text history.

If you're concerned that your teen's abusive partner may be monitoring their phone, consider having your teen use a pay-as-you-go phone to keep in a safe place for private usage. Ensure they have a password on their phone (updating it regularly) and consider taking it to a cell phone service center to check for [spyware](#).

Your teen can also use a post-it note or sticker to cover their camera when they're not using it.

Remember: Texting can be used as a way to exert power and control in a relationship.

If your teen's partner texts them too much, it can not only be irritating but also unhealthy. Constant contact can be a sign of controlling behaviour, and you should consider talking to your teen about asking their partner to give them a little space if it's affecting them. Using texts to monitor where they are, who they're with, or what they're doing is a warning sign of abuse.

If their partner asks for or sends them unwanted sexual content ("sexting") or threatens them with content they've already sent, they're acting abusively. Your teen has the right to choose their own sexual activity, and they deserve to feel safe and respected in their relationship. Sexting can also have legal consequences: any nude photos or videos of someone under the age of 18 could be considered child pornography.

If your teen uses their phone to [document abuse](#), be sure to erase evidence from the device itself. Keep it stored online in a separate, protected account or in printed form hidden away in private.

Remember: While they present their own risks to safety and security, cell phones can be valuable resources to help you or your teen reach out for support.

Social Media Safety

Using social media can be fun, affirming, and a great way to keep in touch with others, but posts on social media are never truly private – no matter how strict your teen's privacy settings are.

Once something is online, it's no longer under that person's control. Encourage your teen to be protective of what they put on social media (including in their "info" section) and remember that personal details like phone numbers, addresses, handles, previous schools or employers, and photos with landmarks can make it easier for someone to reach them.

If someone is harassing them through social media, don't respond and instead [document](#) all harassing messages, posts, or comments. Flag the posts as inappropriate.

Encourage your teen to set boundaries and limits for social media with their partner and other people in their life.

Have them ask people not to post personal information or location check-ins about them on social media if they're not comfortable with it, and check with others before posting any information about them, including photos.

If your teen is posting about a one-time event that they really want to celebrate online, wait until after the event to do so; this way, others will be less able to use location information against them. If they're unsure about whether it's okay to post something, encourage them to side with caution and not post.

If necessary, ask them to consider deactivating their accounts or doing a "super-logoff" by deactivating their accounts each time they log out and reactivating them when they log back in. While it may seem extreme, avoiding social media entirely can sometimes be the best option to stop abuse online.

Encourage your teen to adjust their privacy settings to reduce the amount of information that particular people can see on their page. Privacy settings on sites like Facebook allow the user to control how their information is shared and who has access to it.

The break-up period is the most dangerous part of a relationship. Teens never deserve to be mistreated, online or off. Your teen doesn't have to give up their devices or online presence if digital dating violence is happening to them. **It's possible to use technology safely.**

Digital Dating Violence is part of a continuum of violence that can be both online and in-person. If you or someone you know is experiencing digital dating violence, you are not alone. Encourage them to chat with a trusted adult, connect with the [Kids Help Phone](#) to create a [safety plan](#), or you can use [sheltersafe.ca](#) to find a [shelter/transition house](#) near you to discuss options and create a [safety plan](#). You don't need to stay in a shelter to access free, confidential services and support.

Adapted with permission from [Loveisrespect](#) at the National Domestic Violence Hotline, United States.

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