



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.

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

Here are some tips to help you use technology safely, *specifically* for experiences of teen digital dating violence. Creating a [safety plan](#) can improve safety if you are 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 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. Be protective of what you post on social media (including in your "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 you.
- Use a camera cover such as a post-it note or sticker to cover your device camera when you're not using it.

Internet Safety

- Always keep in mind that a computer, laptop, or tablet might be monitored when in use so be careful with what you 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 history. You 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, remember to be careful with what you send others.
- It's essential to [document abuse](#) when it happens, especially if it takes place over the phone or online.
- Your 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 you 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 document somewhere that your partner can't access. It can help to create a secret email address specifically to document abuse with a password only you 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 account or send or delete emails without your knowledge.
- If you're concerned about your safety, consider opening a new email account you're your 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 your 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 you elsewhere if an abuser is monitoring your 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 whereabouts, habits, or activities to others, including access to call logs and text history.

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

You can also use a post-it note or sticker to cover your camera when you're not using it.

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

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

If your partner asks for or sends you unwanted sexual content ("sexting") or threatens you with content you've already sent, they're acting abusively. You have the right to choose your own sexual activity, and you deserve to feel safe and respected in your 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 you use your 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 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 privacy settings are.

Once something is online, it's no longer under that person's control. Be protective of what you put on social media (including in your "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 you.

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

Set boundaries and limits for social media with your partner and other people in your life.

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

If you are posting about a one-time event that you 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 you. If you're unsure about whether it's okay to post something, side with caution and don't post.

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

Adjust your privacy settings to reduce the amount of information that particular people can see on your 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. You never deserve to be mistreated, online or off. You don't have to give up your devices or online presence if digital dating violence is happening to you. **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, in the United States.

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This project is made possible through funding from the department of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Canada.

