

## Protecting Children Online

For children growing up in Canada today, the divide between their online work and their offline work is narrower than it has ever been. Growing up means growing up online. While the internet is a wonderful educational tool, it can be a place where tough lessons are learned if children and teens have unlimited, unsupervised access to things they may not fully understand

While parents and children can rely on safety standards and regulations to ensure safe experiences for children in everything from car seats and hockey helmets to TV shows, policies and standards for online safety have not been developed to match the central role that digital tools play in learning, socializing, and expressing themselves for children and youth.

Our current systems expect parents and youth to navigate these issues and make informed choices about consent on platforms, when typical Terms of Service Agreements are long, legalistic, and offer extremely favourable terms to the platform for data collection and use. Research has shown that young people are ill-prepared to make informed decisions about commercial data privacy. Even where parents or young people have greater capacity to understand the implications of these agreements, opting out may not be possible. The increased use of cameras and sensors in public spaces combined with facial recognition also places real limits on the effectiveness of informed consent

-the most prevalent risk of online sexual exploitation for children is the creation and sharing of child sexual abuse imagery.

-in 3 years (2016-2019) Canadian Centre for Child Protection reported the detection of 13 million suspected images of child sexual abuse

-a US study of teens found that 1 in 20 had been the victim of "sextortion," which happens when someone threatens to share intimate images that were either intentionally shared voluntarily or hacked unless something is given in return, often more photos

-Online interactions are a source of risk for grooming or luring for sexual exploitation or human trafficking. Predators can use online communication to build trust, isolate, and entrap the child for abuse. The anonymity afforded by online interaction allows offenders to use rapport-building tactics not available offline, such as desensitization to sexual topics

**If you're concerned about your child's safety online and you're looking for more information, please visit [cybertip.ca](http://cybertip.ca). If you know about a child who is in immediate danger or risk, call 911 or your local police**

Cybyertip.ca is Canada's national tip line for reporting online sexual exploitation of children. They will accept and address online and telephone reports from the public regarding:

- Child pornography
- Online luring
- Child exploitation through prostitution

- Travelling to sexually exploit children
- Child trafficking

-make sure the protection features of websites and software your children use are activated. There are tools available through your Internet Service Provider (ISP) to help you manage your children's online experience (i.e. appropriate Websites, amount of time spent online, who can and cannot contact them). It might also include other security features, such as pop-up ad blockers

-Educate your children about the risks of webcam use with people you or your children don't know. Video that's broadcast over the internet is permanently out there and can be saved by anyone for later viewing or distribution. If your computer has been hacked, another user could remotely control your webcam, so if you have an external camera, unplug it or cover your camera with a webcam cover when not in use

-get to know the online environments your children use, keeping the computer in a common area can assist in keeping an eye on the sites they're visiting

-if your child is using live text and voice chats for online games, warn them not to give personal information and to tell someone about any inappropriate behaviour or requests

-teach your children what is inappropriate material, who they can tell, and why it is important they tell someone

-minimize location data sharing which can be associated with potential stalking or other safety risks to youth

-talk to children about the implications of posting/sharing inappropriate pictures, saying disparaging things about other people and anything else that could damage a reputation or ruin a friendship

-remind children often, that the internet is a public space. Things they do and say now on social networking sites could have implications down the road when they're looking for summer employment (employers often search personal profiles for information about candidates)

-be careful about what you post about your children or activities related to them, like the location of their school, or where they are volunteering/working

-University of Skovde partnered with childhood.org to create an interactive board game called "Parkgommet" and translates to "hidden in the park" for children. The idea is to help children build safety responses to real life grooming tactics, while ensuring the game itself is free from inappropriate content.

-The LEGO Group's online platform "LEGO Live" was highlighted as an example of building on research to create a safe environment for children to learn how to communicate online and use social networking tools.

-Most tools to protect children from unsafe content rest with online service providers, parents, and youth themselves. The importance of educating children of all ages, and their guardians about online safety and privacy risks and the strategies to navigate them.

\*Experts said that Canada is far behind its peer countries in our level of research into children's online safety – a conclusion that was reinforced by the literature review conducted for the standards research on Children's Safety and Privacy in the Digital Age project, dated 2020.

There are fewer and smaller sources of ongoing funding for research to understand children's online safety and privacy in Canada compared to its peer countries. For example, while the communications regulatory body in the UK funds regular comprehensive research on digital literacy and safety, Canadian researchers cannot acquire the resources to do wide-ranging studies.

Beyond funding, there is a problem with sufficient data about children's online habits being collected by legitimate research sources, such as Statistics Canada. Beyond a certain irony - there is not enough data collected about, among other things, what data are collected – this is a problem because having insufficient data hampers research into the harms that children could encounter.

It was recommended that Canada introduce new legislation that would create a national eSafety Commissioner. This commissioner has both enforcement powers related to online safety and a mandate to promote research and resources for safe online experiences. A new office for Online Safety in Canada could be given a mandate to coordinate policy and initiatives across the different strategies and policies aimed at children's online safety and privacy and be responsible for publishing research and resources that would support safer online experiences.

### **Criminal Law Reform**

-Many online offenses related to harmful online interactions with children are prosecuted under laws that were written in the pre-internet age. The time is ripe for updating these laws.

-a new criminal offence be developed in the Criminal Code specific to non-consensual distribution of intimate images, and that some provisions related to cyberbullying be clarified.

**Thank you for your support,  
People Vs Predators Association (PVP)™**