USING TECH SAFELY
in Dating Relationships

Teens have the right to a violence free relationship, this includes within digital spaces. Sometimes, taking the time to consider how to use technology in a safer way may be needed if their partner becomes abusive online.

Here are some tips to help teen's use technology safety, *specifically* for experiences of teen digital dating violence. This resource can be supplemented by BCSTH's Technology Safety Planning Checklist.

No matter what anyone says the abuse is NOT your fault. Creating a Safety Plan for experiences of teen digital violence can help to improve safety while experiencing abuse, preparing to leave an abusive situation, or after one leaves. If you or your teen would like to develop a safety plan for their dating relationship, please contact a PEACE Program Counsellor in your community or check out the Kids Help Phone's Dating Violence: How to Make a Safety Plan Web Page.

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 the ways in which information is collected every time we go online) means partners who are abusive have more ways than ever to access personal information and monitor movements and behaviors.

Remember:

- Computers, laptops, tablets and cell phones can be monitored without one knowing it.
- 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 your car or in items like your purse, backpack or cell phone.
- Once something is online, it's no longer under your 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 camera when you're not using it.

Internet safety

- Always keep in mind that a computer, laptop or tablet might be monitored when you use it and be careful with what you send others or post. Computers store information about the websites you visit, meaning bills you pay, purchases you make, and emails you send 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 shared computers when researching things like travel plans, housing options, legal issues, or safety plans. Also 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 behaviors 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 for the purpose of documenting abuse with a password only you know, or to keep everything hidden in a place they never go.

Email safety

- Email is one of the most common ways to keep in touch with trusted friends, family members, and others: chances are most of the people in your life use email to some degree. Partners who are abusive 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 that your partner doesn't know about on a safe computer and use that email for safety planning (including documenting abuse) and sensitive communications.

Try to establish several different methods of communication to contact people so you'll know if they tried to reach you elsewhere.

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.

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 partner may be monitoring your phone, consider buying a pay-as-you-go phone to keep in a safe place for private usage. Keep a password on your phone (updating it regularly) and consider taking it into a cell phone service center to check for [spyware](#).

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

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 behavior, and you should consider talking to your partner about giving 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 a safer place.

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.

Once something is online, it's no longer under your 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're 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 not sure about whether it's okay to post something, side with caution and don't.

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Leaving an Abusive Relationship

If you're in the process of leaving an unhealthy relationship, start by blocking your ex on social media. Adjust your privacy settings to reduce the amount of information particular people can see and avoid posting private details to other people's pages that may not have as strict of privacy settings.

If necessary, consider deactivating your accounts or doing a "super-logoff" 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 be the best option to stop abuse online.

We recommend you don't check-in your location to online social networking sites or apps -- you don't want your ex or their friends tracking your movements.

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. Teens 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.

If you know someone who is experiencing digital dating violence, encourage them to chat with a trusted adult or seek help from one of the following organizations to develop a safety plan, access counselling services or get an order of protection and other ways to protect your teen

- PEACE Program for Children and Youth
- Kid Help Phone
- Victim link
- KUU-US Crisis Line Society
- Society for Children and Youth BC Child and Youth Legal Centre

Spark Teen Digital Dating Violence Project