

DEBUNKING THE STRANGER DANGER MYTH: KEEPING KIDS SAFE IN THE REAL & VIRTUAL WORLD



Pearl Rimer, June 29, 2017

WHY THE CHANGES IN SAFETY MESSAGES?

- Child abuse and violence statistics emphasize the importance of **primary prevention**.
- Until recently, the common terms and themes used to describe information about keeping kids safe were “streetproofing” and “stranger danger.”
- These are now being replaced with terms such as “**personal safety**” because the reality is that most children are harmed by someone known or trusted to them and/or the family.
- The Canadian & Ontario Incidence Studies of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect found that in **all categories** of substantiated abuse, family members or other persons related to the child constituted 93% of alleged perpetrators.

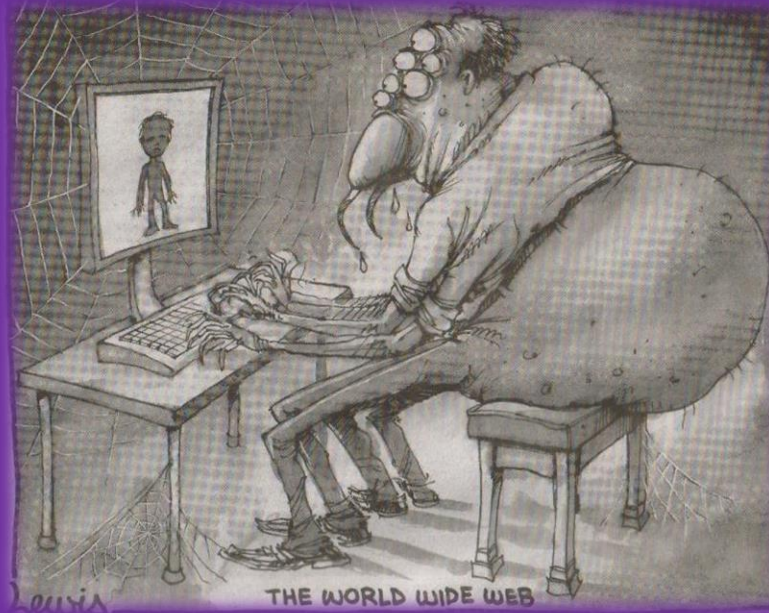
Kids' Safety Zone

Changes In Safety Messages (cont'd)

**Internet offenders:
“The creepy loner and predator”**

TRUE?

FALSE?



Changes In Safety Messages (cont'd)

- Most online sex offenders are people who know their victims from offline settings (e.g., school, church). (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2013)
- The *National Juvenile Online Victimization Study* found that 37% of offenders were family members and 36% were acquaintances with their child victims. (Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2005)
- Majority of offenders who produce child abuse media are known to their victims. (UNICEF, 2011).
- 50% of all child sexual abuse images are made by family members. (Cooper, 2007)
- In child pornography cases where the child was identified:
 - 35% of the abusers were related to the child (26% was a parent).
 - In 78% of cases, the abuser was known to the child (e.g., family friend, neighbour, coach) and had legitimate and prolonged access to the child.



(Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 2009)

Changes In Safety Messages (cont'd)

**Internet child exploitation is the
sexual abuse of children!**

**Real children in the offline world have been abused
sexually, emotionally and physically in order to make
and facilitate child abuse media.***

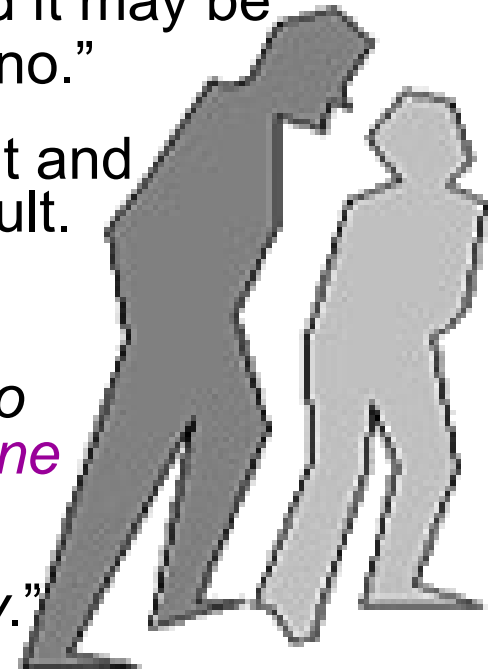
*The terms “child sexual abuse images” and “child abuse images” as opposed to “child pornography” more accurately reflect the abuse of children/youth in these circumstances. Child abuse media includes sexual material that is visual, audio or text.

Changes In Safety Messages (cont'd)

- Often prevention programs do not take the developmental perspective into account – prevention messages include concepts that make sense to adults, but may be difficult for young children to fully understand (e.g., the definitions of a stranger, and secrets).
- The result:
 - unrealistic expectations of children/youth
 - children's inability/difficulty to follow through with strategies when victimized
 - instead of promoting disclosure, children/youth feel to blame for not implementing strategies taught, and as a result, this has inhibited disclosure
 - inappropriate prevention messages can add to the impact of the experience of abuse

CLARIFYING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT CHILDREN & PREVENTION

- A common message given to children is, *“Say ‘no’ or ‘stop’ to anyone who is making you feel uncomfortable.”*
- However, generally, abusers are more powerful than their victims in some way (e.g., size, intelligence) and it may be very frightening or unrealistic for a child to say “no.”
- Reinforced messages – adults know what’s right and wrong; obey adults; difficult to say “no” to an adult.
- A more helpful message is:
 - *“You have the right to say ‘no’ to anyone who is making you feel comfortable, **even someone you know well.**”*
 - *“It may be too scary to say ‘no’ – that’s okay.”*
 - *“Tell someone you trust what happened, even if you couldn’t say no.”*



Clarifying Assumptions About Children & Prevention (cont'd)

- Children have difficulty distinguishing between touch that feels good, feels bad and/or is confusing.
- Children who have been abused sometimes misinterpret messages of bad touch to mean there is something bad about him/her for being involved in and perhaps even enjoying such activities – thinking they are to blame often stops them from telling someone what happened.
- Offenders typically “groom” their victims (i.e., working at getting the victim to trust him/her).
- Many children do not understand what the offender is trying to do, but they get a “yucky” or “uh-oh” feeling (what adults interpret as intuition).
- Changing the message to “*touch that makes you feel good,*” “*touch that makes you feel bad*” and “*touch that makes you feel uncomfortable or confused*” may help children connect the touch to the “yucky” feeling they are having, and prompt them to disclose.

Clarifying Assumptions About Children & Prevention (cont'd)

- Kids are typically told that no one should touch them in their “private parts” or “where the bathing suit covers.”
- However, offenders who are grooming a victim usually do not begin with such intrusive acts, and some offenders never touch children in their “private parts.”
- Children cannot be expected to understand the motives of an offender, and be responsible for avoiding them (e.g., distinguishing the difference between caring for the child versus touching for the sexual gratification of the offender).
- If the focus is only on “private parts” then many children who feel uncomfortable when someone touches them elsewhere may think that there is something wrong with them, and not disclose (e.g., “This touch is yucky, but s/he’s not touching me in my privates, so I guess there’s something wrong with me”).

Clarifying Assumptions About Children & Prevention (cont'd)

- Tell kids that, *“Only you can decide how a touch makes you feel”* and *“All touching can be talked about.”*
- These messages are not just about sexual or physical abuse – they are about teaching respect and boundaries around touch.
- A sexual abuse prevention program may be the child’s introduction to sexuality. The program should **not** present sexuality or touch negatively.
- Healthy touch is an essential part of abuse prevention for children.
- These messages (and possibly some of the other prevention messages) may be different from those that some children receive at home – cultural, religious and family values may have influence on beliefs about touch and children’s rights.

BOUNDARIES



Clarifying Assumptions About Children & Prevention (cont'd)

- Children have difficulty evaluating a situation for potential danger, and thinking through and implementing a plan of action.
- When situations are rehearsed with children, and they are asked “what would you do if...” (e.g., “...if someone asked you to help find their lost puppy?”) most of them can repeat what they have been taught (e.g., “I wouldn’t go!”; “I would scream.”; “Shut the computer.”)
- However, it is difficult to “think straight” when our emotions are triggered (e.g., thinking about a poor, lost puppy). This can be hard for adults, not just kids.
- Under these circumstances, it is not fair to assume that children can be empowered and competent enough to identify a situation as potentially dangerous, think through and take action, all within a very short period of time.
- Children and youth should **never** be blamed if unable to follow through on rehearsed strategies.

Clarifying Assumptions About Children & Prevention (cont'd)

- A prominent message is, *“It’s always okay to talk to an adult you trust, even if you feel confused, embarrassed or scared about telling.”*
- It cannot be assumed that all children have someone to go to (e.g., children who are newcomers may not be integrated into their schools and communities).
- Help children to identify at least 3 easily accessible, trusted adults they could go to for help.
- It is common for kids to identify school personnel (e.g., a teacher, office staff) as people they could go to, but these individuals are not available on holidays – it is important to repeat this exercise at those times of the year to identify other options.
- It may be difficult for a child to seek help from someone else when an adult they know and trust has been abusive. Many children take time to tell – we should **never** communicate to children that they are at fault if they did not tell right away.

MIXED MESSAGES

- Children are taught that tattling on others is unacceptable, except in emergency situations.
- Teaching children the difference between “tattling” (the purpose of which is to get someone into trouble) and “telling” (to get help for someone) is important. The statement that “tattling is unacceptable, except in emergency situations” is in itself confusing.
- For school-agers and teens, acknowledge that sometimes getting help for someone means someone else may get into trouble, but when someone needs helps, that is the most important thing.
- When children complain about a situation, do not assume that they are tattling – they may in fact need an adult’s help to sort out the situation – they are telling, not tattling.
- If you were considered a trusted adult to go to for help, but “accused” a child of tattling when help was needed, the child may hesitate going back to you again. If a child is being victimized, s/he may feel that s/he cannot go to you anymore.

Mixed Messages (cont'd)

- Children develop mistrust in their surroundings when the focus is on potential offenders instead of identifying specific behaviours.
- Educational materials should describe **specific behaviours** in others (e.g., touching, threatening, bullying, hurting,) that are inappropriate and signal possible or certain danger, as opposed to identifying potential perpetrators.
- Children can become confused if they are told that anyone can be an offender, including a helping person.
- Approaches that portray the world as mostly dangerous and most people as untrustworthy distort reality and disturb children.
- Acknowledge and discuss the positive aspects of the Internet, as well as the potential dangers.



Mixed Messages (cont'd)

- When something awful in the community happens to a child/youth, many people tend to use scare tactics because they are so anxious about keeping their children safe; however, these kinds of strategies only make children more nervous and less capable to cope.
- There are 2 key messages that kids need to hear when they become aware that something 'bad' has happened to another child:
 - most people want to help children
 - what the adults are doing to help keep them safe (e.g., keeping the doors locked, parents sleeping with their door open so they can hear if the children need them).

Staying Safe

Mixed Messages (cont'd)

“Messages conveying the idea that trusted adults might do serious harm to children undermine their confidence in relationships with adults and foster insecurity. Children who are being abused also need to be assured that there are trustworthy adults in this world who mean no harm, and whose primary interest is in their well-being.” (Berrick, 1998)

Educational materials must balance the hazards and joys of life, putting each into a realistic and not exaggerated perspective.



DEVELOPMENTAL FACTORS

DEVELOPMENTAL FACTORS: SECRETS

Young children are concrete versus abstract thinkers, which effects their understanding of concepts critical to primary prevention!

WHAT IS A SECRET?



- Adults define 'a secret' as something you do not share with anyone else.
- However, preschoolers typically define a secret as something **whispered** into a person's ear, and do not refer to the content of the secret – their focus is on the concrete action of whispering.
- As children mature, they begin to understand that a secret means something specific is being hidden, no matter how it has been told to them.

Developmental Factors – Secrets (cont'd)

Below are examples of answers children gave when asked
“What is a secret?”

“When we say while whispering in the ear, at Christmas I stayed up ‘til 12 o’clock and I saw Santa.” (preschooler)

“Something you don’t want to tell someone, unless they have done something to hurt you.”
(8 years old)

“When people are saying things like, what I was doing with my girlfriend, but I don’t even got a girlfriend.”

(11 years old – this child understands secrets and rumours!)



Developmental Factors – Secrets (cont'd)

- Abuse is done under a veil of secrecy.
- Do **not** talk about “good” and “bad” secrets. Some offenders manipulate children into believing that “this is a good/special secret between us.”
- “**Secrets** about touching should **never be kept**, even if someone you know really well tells you to keep it a secret.” “**Touching is never secret – all touching can be talked about.**”
- It is important to tell kids that, “**No one should tell you to keep a secret from your mom or dad.**”
- Young children’s limited understanding of secrets is complicated further because they are very rule bound. If you ask, “What is the rule about secrets?” they would likely answer, “you don’t tell.”
- For older kids, it is about loyalty.

Developmental Factors – Secrets (cont'd)

Below are examples of answers children gave when asked “If your friend told you to keep a touch a secret, what would you do?”

“Keep it a secret, cause I know they’re my friends and I wouldn’t tell a secret to somebody else.” (preschooler)

“I wouldn’t tell anyone because that person would be angry at me because they didn’t want anyone else to know.” (5 years old)

“I would just forget about it, because I mean, the touch is over.” (8 years old)

“Keep it a secret, but it depends on what kind of touch. If it hurt or made me feel bad, then I wouldn’t keep it a secret. If it was a nice touch, I would keep it a secret.” (10 years old)

“Tell them not to do that again, tell them to be gentle and if they did it again I would tell an adult.” (10 years old)

“Keep telling someone ‘til they believed me.” (11 years old)



Developmental Factors – Secrets (cont'd)

- Despite key prevention messages about touch and secrets, developmental factors, along with the power of the abuser, grooming tactics and factors that inhibit disclosure cannot guarantee that children/youth will tell.
- It is equally important to be aware of the role modeling of adults (e.g., it is a mixed message to children when we say things like, “Don’t tell dad we spent so much money on clothes today,” or “don’t tell mom I let you have a treat before dinner”).
- Adults often use the word “secret” when they really mean “surprise.” The key difference, surprise = something that eventually everyone gets to know about (e.g., if planning a surprise party, tell children that it is a surprise, not a secret).
- Encourage adults to use the word ‘**surprise**’ instead of ‘secret’.

Developmental Factors – Secrets (cont'd)



“The secrecy is both the source of fear and the promise of safety.” (Summit, 1983)
Children believe that the consequences will be dire should the secret be told.

SECRETS & DISCLOSURE

- Once offenders have created an emotional tie, they may use strategies such as blaming, shaming, blackmail, and/or threats to silence victims and stop them from disclosing (e.g., “partners in crime” – “if you tell, we’ll get in trouble”).
- Do not say to kids that “if anyone ever touches you, I’ll kill them.” Offenders use this to manipulate their victims into silence.
- Offenders also groom and deceive parents/caregivers by:
 - offering to give them a break from their children (e.g., provide support to a single parent)
 - taking a special interest in a child
 - pointing out when kids lie
 - making negative remarks about sex offenders
 - joining with parents in their disgust for this crime (e.g., “all sex offenders should be locked away”)
- Even when children/youth do disclose, many offenders are successful at talking adults out of calling authorities – some offenders convince parents that whatever happened was “consensual.”



Secrets & Disclosure (cont'd)

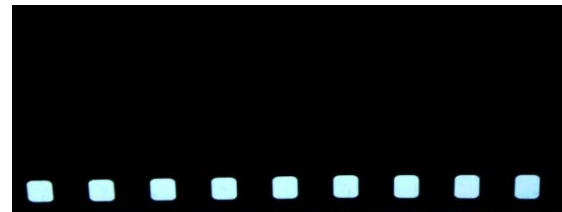
INTERNET SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

- Child sexual abuse images posted on the Internet are a permanent record of a victim's abuse.
- The continuation of this record/victimization is completely out of his/her control – it never ends.
- There is no control over disclosure – victims cannot choose when/how/what to disclose and to whom.
- Disclosure is further complicated if the victim was forced to smile, or the image is altered to show the victim smiling – victims may feel others believe they were willing to participate or “allowed” the abuse.

Secrets & Disclosure (cont'd)

INTERNET SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (cont'd)

- Offenders may show the victim the picture and threaten to show others if the secret is not kept.
- Fear of being recognized.
- The images may be discovered/seen by parents, peers and others involved in their case.
- Fear of police involvement/criminal charges.



Secrets & Disclosure (cont'd)

ONLINE EXPLOITATION: VICTIM-BLAMING/JUDGEMENTS

- Do not blame:
 - How did s/he get your information?
 - How did you know to write such explicit sexual details?
 - How could you have touched yourself?
- Try to understand:
 - What could have happened that the child was manipulated into doing what s/he did?
 - The offender had control beyond the computer.
 - The images/chat logs do not show the whole story (e.g., threats; victim crying before “s/he did it”; self-harming).

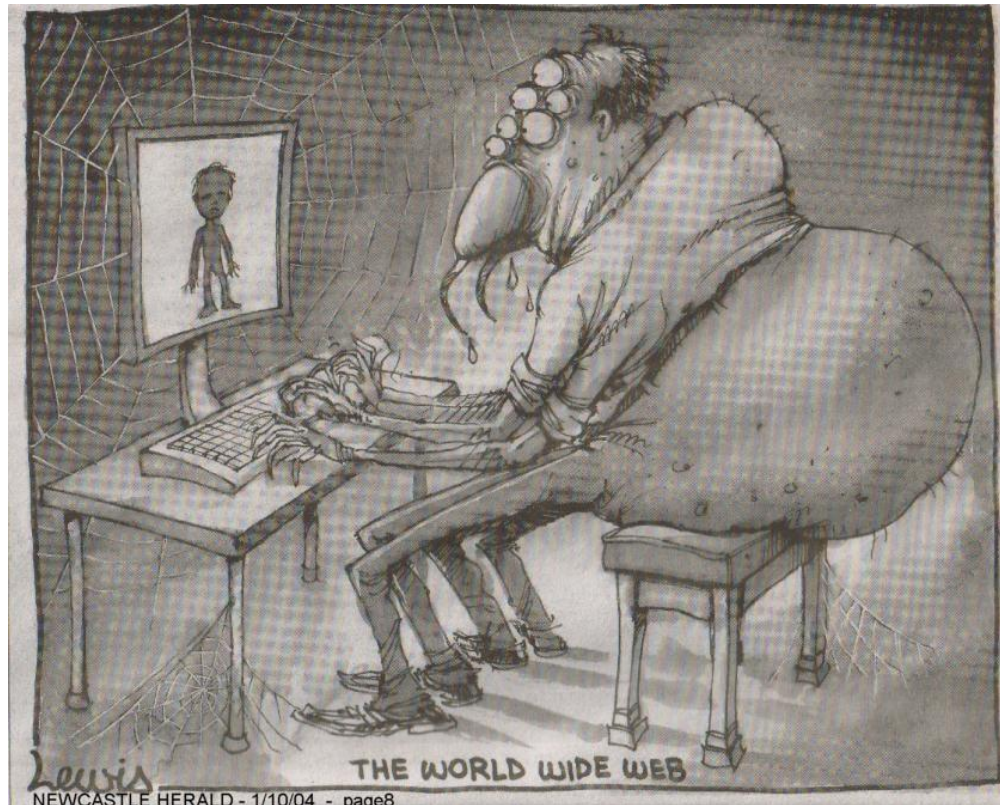
DEVELOPMENTAL FACTORS: STRANGERS

Developmental factors have a significant impact on how children perceive strangers.

- Adults define ‘a stranger’ as someone you don’t know.
- Children decide if someone is a stranger based on 3 key things:
 - how someone looks (children usually describe strangers as men, and someone who looks “scruffy” or creepy);
 - how often the child has seen or had contact with him/her; or
 - parental/caregiver interaction with that person.
- If someone knows a child’s/family name, the child will likely answer any of the person’s questions (e.g., if a child answers the phone and it is someone who asks to speak to a parent using his/her name, the child will probably answer the person’s questions (e.g., my dad isn’t home)).
- The person knew the family name and therefore, a child does not perceive him/her as a stranger.

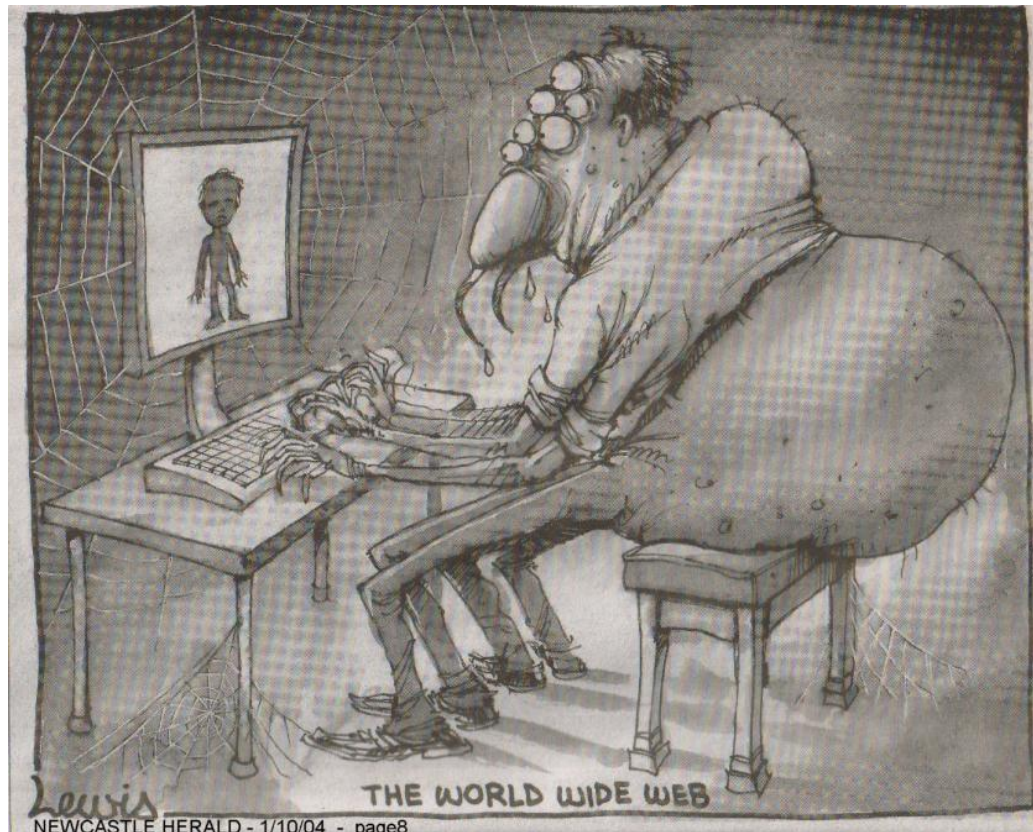
Developmental Factors– Strangers (cont'd)

The image below is an illustration of how adults typically refer to the possible dangers when trying to educate children/youth about speaking to “strangers” over the Internet – the person you are talking to could be a “predator” or “monster.” Should we be using this terminology?



TERMINOLOGY: “PERVERT” “PERPETRATOR” “PEDOPHILE”

Be careful of using the terms pervert, perpetrator and pedophile, as online victims often see themselves as perpetrators, and judged by others.



Developmental Factors– Strangers (cont'd)

- The perceptions of who is a stranger **persist into adolescence**.
- Feeling alone and different often drives children to the Internet for companionship.
- Once a child/teen is talking to someone on the computer, s/he no longer considers the person a stranger.
- From a child's perspective, someone goes from stranger to "a friend," "someone I know well/love" very quickly.
- Although they may not have met in person, they "know them well." They will "tune out" if you refer to the person as a predator or monster.
- On the Internet, children's internal defense mechanisms that exist in the physical world are not present – because the child cannot see or hear the other person, the social cues that exist in the real world are absent.



Developmental Factors – Strangers (cont'd)

- Like other forms of sexual abuse, victims of Internet sexual exploitation often have risk factors that are taken advantage of by offenders.
- Victims of Internet exploitation are more likely to:
 - be teenagers (as they are more mobile, independent, sexually curious, and have independent Internet access)
 - be girls
 - have poor self-esteem and emotional issues
 - have a problematic relationship with their parents/poor parent-child communication
 - have higher levels of depression
 - be victims of prior sexual or physical abuse
 - be gay or questioning their sexuality
 - have higher rates of Internet use than youth not victimized

Developmental Factors – Strangers (cont'd)

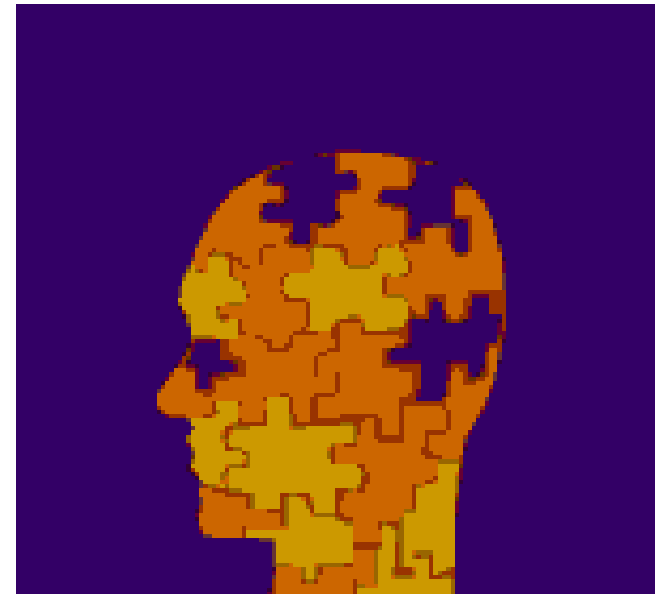
- Do **not** threaten kids with taking away their computer or cell phone – this will inhibit disclosure, and is putting the blame on them for something the [possible] offender has done (including passing on pictures).
- Researchers Ybarra & Mitchell (2008) note:

“...help parents understand that it is less the technology and more a child’s psychosocial profile and general online behavior (e.g., harassing others, meeting people in multiple different ways online, and talking with people known online about sex) that is influential in explaining the likelihood of online interpersonal victimization.”



THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN

- Between childhood and adulthood, the wiring of the brain becomes more complex and more efficient, especially in the brain's prefrontal cortex (near the front of the brain).
- The prefrontal cortex is responsible for “executive functions”:
 - planning
 - organization
 - reasoning
 - judgement
 - impulse control
 - decision-making
- The prefrontal cortex does not fully mature until the **age of 25!**



The Adolescent Brain (cont'd)

- Teens are not particularly focused on, or fully equipped to assess the consequences of their behaviour and choices.
- They also have a need to be accepted and a sense of belonging; are curious about sex; interested in romantic relationships.
- This has noticeable effects on adolescent behaviour, including:
 - difficulty holding back or controlling emotions
 - a preference for high excitement and low effort activities (video games)
 - poor planning and judgement, not thinking of negative consequences
 - more risky, impulsive behaviors, including experimenting with alcohol/drugs/sex
 - a “it will never happen to me” mentality

SEXTING

What is sexting?



Sexting (cont'd)

- Sexting is the sending and receiving of messages with sexual content using some form of technology.
- Sexting can include: words, photos, videos.
- Examples:
 - message with sexual language
 - photos/videos of a nude or semi-nude person, body part, sexual act
 - photo/video recording from a live webcam chat

SEXTING

Why do people send sexts?



Sexting (cont'd)

- Sexting is a way to:
 - explore sexuality
 - express or prove intimacy/love/commitment
 - flirt/attract attention from someone liked
 - show trust
 - feel safer than “real” sex
 - test boundaries
 - bully, humiliate
 - threaten, blackmail (sometimes called “sextortion”)
 - get revenge
- Many people are pressured into sexting by others.

SEXTING – SHARE AWARE VIDEO

(Willy; National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children:

<http://www.nspcc.org.uk>)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sch_WMjd6go

Alternate Link:

<http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/share-aware>

The Adolescent Brain (cont'd)

- Therefore, kids need the understanding, patience and guidance of adults, and reminders of possible consequences of options, risks and choices.
- Parents do **not** need to understand how technology works to discuss prevention and safety.
- Understanding technology and the Internet is a challenge as trends continually change.
- Making parents feel technologically inadequate may inhibit their efforts to try to keep their children safe.

“Parents are encouraged to recognise that although their adolescents may be the ‘computer/internet’ experts in the home, they are novices when it comes to intimate relationships and still need parental guidance and protection.” Wurtele & Kenny, 2017

The Adolescent Brain (cont'd)

- Contrary to popular belief, research has shown that the majority of offenders who use the Internet to engage youth are up front about their age and interest in sex, but they present it in a positive light – they want to be understanding and supportive and turn the interaction into a romance and adventure.

(Finkelhor & Wolak, 2009; Wolak et al., 2008; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008)

- Many victims are deceived “with false promises and claims of friendship or love. In many cases, victims become attached to the offenders (whether the communication is deceptive or not), do not see themselves as victims, and may resist treatment.”

(Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2004)

- This can have implications for criminal proceedings – the victim is “in love” with the accused, and refuses to cooperate with the investigation and/or be an agreeable witness.



The Adolescent Brain (cont'd)

- For teens, one of their developmental “tasks” is exploring romantic relationships.
- The offender manipulates the victim into the “consensual piece” (e.g., saying that others are trying to put “rules on our love”; it is normal for teens to rebel against rules).
- These kids “in love” are devastated by the **loss** of this relationship – for many of them, this is their first love relationship.
- Many of these children/youth have suffered other victimization and they are **very vulnerable**.
- If you put the offender down, it increases the **risk** of the child/youth self-harming: *“Finally someone loves me, and now you say it’s not real.”*
- Initially, do not challenge the nature of the relationship; **support** the loss but do not condone it.

(Eliav, personal communication)

The Adolescent Brain (cont'd)

“The increasing use of Internet-enabled ‘smartphones’ for going online will limit the ability of parents to restrict, monitor or control what their children access and therefore will increase potential risks to children and young people. Mobile phones carry with them an immediacy that simply does not exist when the device being used is in a fixed location, where supervision is easier.” (UNICEF, 2011)



KEY PREVENTION MESSAGES

“...prevention programming would be more successful if it were generic and about life skills rather than about technology...But it may be that the most effective prevention skills for safety and health both on and offline are about conflict management, empathy promotion, emotion regulation, consequence anticipation, refusal techniques, bystander mobilization, and help-seeking...A much more prudent and promising strategy is to take existing evidence-based safety programs and add components to them that address specific technology issues and that illustrate use of generic prevention skills in the technology environments.” (Finkelhor, 2014)

The key prevention messages pertain to both
the offline and online worlds.

Key Prevention Messages (cont'd)

It is **not about strangers**. Parents/caregivers do not want their children going anywhere **with anyone** unless they have permission.

The message to kids is:

The **4 important rules** that a parent or the person looking after you has to know:

1. *Where you are – all the time*
2. *Who you are with – all the time*
3. *What you are doing – all the time*
4. *When you will be back*



The rationale for these simple rules is **not** to control youth, or invade their privacy or developing independence, but to **emphasize respect and safety**.

Parents/caregivers can **build trust** with youth by **reciprocating** and keeping open communication with their children.

Key Prevention Messages (cont'd)

Apply the same way of thinking to online activity:

When children receive their first cell phone/tablet/computer, talk about rules and expectations (e.g., apps they can download, costs).

1. *Where do you go online?*
2. *What are you doing online?*
3. *Who are you chatting with?*
4. *How much time are you spending online?*

Online or offline, building healthy, trusting relationships with open parent-child communication is key.

Acknowledge to teens that we know kids sometimes “flirt” over the Internet, but if they begin to feel “creepy” or “weirded out” by what someone is saying, tell an adult they trust.

YOUR PHOTO FATE

Your photo fate

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiGfpt2hjAE>

Key Prevention Messages – “INTUITION”

- ✓ Many children do not understand what an offender is trying to do during the grooming process, but they get a “yucky” or “uh-oh” feeling (what adults interpret as intuition).
- ✓ Focus on **simple rules** rather than telling young children to problem-solve, use their judgment or follow their intuition – it takes time for intuition to develop.
- ✓ As children develop intuition, they often refer to that ‘uh-oh’ or ‘yucky’ or ‘weirded/creeped out’ feeling:
 - That feeling is telling us that **something doesn’t feel right**.
 - It’s there to **help keep us safe**, and we need to follow it.
 - When we get that feeling, we need to **talk to an adult we trust**.

★ INTUITION ★



Key Prevention Messages (cont'd)

- ✓ Sometimes people touch children in ways that are not okay – children have **the right** to say 'no' to **any touch** that makes them **uncomfortable**: *"I can say 'no' to any touch I don't like!"*
- ✓ It may be **too scary to say 'no'** – that's okay. *"Tell someone you trust what happened, even if you couldn't say no."*
- ✓ If a child feels uncomfortable about a touch, it is **always** okay to **tell** a **trusted adult**. *"Only you can decide how a touch makes you feel."*

Key Prevention Messages (cont'd)

- ✓ Secrets about touching should **never be kept**, even if someone you know really well tells you to keep it a secret – **touching is never secret**.
- ✓ All touching can be **talked about**.
- ✓ Talk to someone, even if you **feel confused, embarrassed or scared** about telling – *“If you need help: ASK!”*



**All touch can
be talked about.
No secrets!**

Key Prevention Messages (cont'd)

- ✓ Remember that **kids break rules** (and so do adults!). Children/youth often find themselves “in trouble” because they were somewhere they should not have been, with others they were not supposed to be with, or have done something they were not supposed to.
- ✓ They often think that if they have done something wrong, they cannot go to a parent.
- ✓ One of the **most important messages** is: *“You can come to me no matter what – even if you broke a rule and something happens, don’t worry about that. We know kids break rules – your safety is the most important thing!”*
- ✓ Help parents/caregivers to understand that if they use harsh physical or emotional punishment, it will be **unlikely** that children will come to them if they did something wrong – they will be **afraid** of being punished, and may go “underground” with their experiences/difficulties, making it **hard to help keep them safe.**

Key Prevention Messages (cont'd)

- ✓ Help children to **distinguish** between **tattling** (to get someone into trouble) versus **telling** (to get help).
- ✓ Empower children to **get help** for themselves and others by encouraging them to **keep telling** until someone helps them.
- ✓ Children need to know that angry feelings are okay, and problems can be solved without hurting one another.

Three things I have learned from Sharon about being a "Great Little Kid".



I have learned about

good and bad choices.

I have learned about
telling and tattling.

I learned about
appropriate touch.

Key Prevention Messages (cont'd)

- ✓ Teach children and youth about **consent**:
 - **getting** and **giving** consent in real online and offline situations
 - discuss and challenge **gender-based** double standards, and victim-blaming
 - practice positive communication to **actively and clearly** say “no”
 - understand the **difference** between consent and pressure/coercion, as well as active versus passive consent



CONSENT

What does it mean to “give consent?”



Consent – to voluntarily give permission or agree to something.

Consent (cont'd)

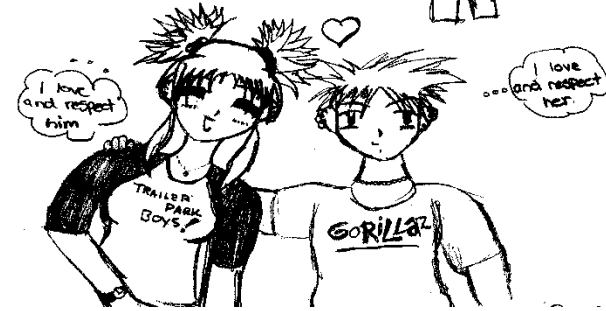
- Giving consent implies that a child understands what s/he is agreeing to and the possible positive/negative consequences.
- Children do not understand the implications of sexual activity on the physical, psychological and emotional levels.
- Children do not have equal power in their relationships with adults, and cannot truly consent.
- Consent should not be confused with compliance, where a child participated in sexual acts because of pressure, threats, fear of consequences or trickery.
- Children do not have the option of saying no to a trusted parent/caregiver/adult.

“Yes doesn’t mean anything if no isn’t one of your options.”

(Finkelhor, personal contact)

AGE OF CONSENT

♥ HEALTHY ♥ RELATIONSHIPS



Criminal Code of Canada:

- ✓ 16 is the age of consent to sexual acts (enacted May 1/08).
- ✓ Children who are 12 and 13 years old may consent to sexual involvement that is mutual, if there is **no more than 2 years** age difference between them.
- ✓ Children **under 12** can **never** legally consent to sexual acts.
- ✓ Children who are 14 and 15 years old may consent to sexual involvement that is mutual, with a person who is **a maximum of 5 years older**, and **not in a position of trust or authority**.
- ✓ The Code further tries to protect teens 16 & 17 years of age from sexual exploitation by a person who is in a **position of trust or authority** (including child pornography offences).

Consent, Sexual Abuse Images – the *Criminal Code*

- Sexual images may meet the legal definition of child pornography* if the individual in the picture/video:
 - is under the age of 18 or *looks* under the age of 18!
 - is engaged in a sexual act; or
 - shows a sexual organ/anal region for a sexual purpose
- This includes taking and sending a sexual picture/video of oneself.

* The terms “child sexual abuse images” and “child abuse images” as opposed to “child pornography” more accurately reflect the abuse of children/youth in these circumstances. Child abuse media includes sexual material that is visual, audio or text.

Consent, Sexual Abuse Images – the *Criminal Code* (cont'd)

- Making child pornography is illegal.
- Accessing, distributing or posting a child pornographic image is illegal.
- Once a sexually explicit image is distributed, the individuals who receive it may be in possession of child pornography, which is illegal.
- Keeping or saving (i.e., storing) child pornography on any type of device (e.g., a computer, phone, cloud) is possession and is illegal.



Consent, Sexual Abuse Images – the *Criminal Code* (cont'd)

- As of March 9, 2015, there are additional *Criminal Code* offences that address “intimate images” that do not meet the definition of child pornography (i.e., under 18 years old).
- An intimate image: a visual recording where the person is:
 - nude; or
 - exposing genitals/anal region/breasts; or
 - engaged in explicit sexual activity; and
 - the person has an expectation of privacy.
- Distributing/posting/making available an intimate image of a person without his/her consent is illegal.



Consent, Sexual Abuse Images – the *Criminal Code* (cont'd)

Will the police get involved when sexual images (photos and/or video) are shared?



- Unlikely if all of the circumstances below apply:
 - the age of the people involved falls within the legal age of consent;
 - the person freely chose to create the image;
 - there is consent between two individuals to send the image;
 - there were no threats/blackmail involved;
 - there is no physical or sexual abuse or assault depicted; and
 - the image remained private between the person who made it and the person to whom it was sent.

Consent, Sexual Abuse Images – the *Criminal Code* (cont'd)

Criminal lawyer David Butt (2013), discusses the necessity of adolescents understanding the potentially serious consequences of distributing sexual images that meet the definition of child pornography.

“Much offending and victimizing behavior online is an undesirable by-product of the poor judgment that often permeates teenage life. This poor judgement is usually transitory, and thus can be effectively addressed through education, awareness and empathy building at home, in schools and through media itself.”

“While parents and their children should be aware of the law, we need to ensure that young people do not end up scared to report online abuse incidents for fear of getting themselves or their friends into trouble.”

NSPCC, 2016

“Cyberbullying”

- Exploitation over the Internet is not limited to sexual contexts.
- Cyberbullying includes any use of technology (e.g. emails, text messages) intended to hurt, harass, embarrass, humiliate or intimidate another person (e.g., spread rumours, post insults, pressure to send sexual images/messages).
- Depending on the nature of the incident(s) and age of children involved, cyberbullying may cross the line to abusive or criminal, including a message/content that:
 - is indecent/obscene in nature
 - constitutes “hate material”
 - is knowingly false
 - impersonates someone
 - harasses
 - threatens
 - creates fear
 - counsels suicide

Involvement of police and/or a child protection agency is required.

CONSENT: IT'S SIMPLE AS TEA

(Consent: It's Simple As Tea)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGoWLWS4-kU>

WHO WILL YOU HELP?

(Ontario Government: Who Will You Help?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=opPb2E3bkoo>

Alternate link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2ZSZrGc-O8>

Key Prevention Messages (cont'd)

- ***The dynamics of child abuse suggest that children who are targeted are often chosen for the qualities that prevent them from saying “no” or telling.***
- ***Vulnerable children, with low self-esteem, poor communication skills and a lack of understanding about how and where to get help are at greater risk of abuse.***
- ***There is no replacement for good supervision of children!***

KEY PREVENTION MESSAGES

Children should **never** be given the message that they are responsible for protecting themselves.

Parents/caregivers, educators and staff should **never** expect a child to protect him/herself.

It is the responsibility of adults to protect children.



IT'S **Natural** TO **GUIDE**

When a baby duckling is born, its mother will lead it to water for food and will stay with her offspring until it can fly. When it's time to migrate, the flock will guide the ducklings south.

If children are our responsibility, why are so many being harmed?

Parenting is a *communal* commitment. Make a promise to our children:
To *Teach, Guide* and *Protect*.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Pearl Rimer,

Director of Research & Training

Boost Child & Youth Advocacy Centre

416-515-1100, ext. 59230

416-258-4993 (cell)

rimer@boostforkids.org

www.boostforkids.org

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RESOURCES

<http://www.kidshelpphone.ca/Teens/InfoBooth/Sexting/Sending-a-sext.aspx>

<http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/14_plus/

<https://needhelpnow.ca/app/en/>

<http://www.connectsafely.org/>

<http://www.net-aware.org.uk/networks/?order=title#>