

A GUIDE TO ONLINE SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SAFETY ON DATING APPS AND SOCIAL MEDIA



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Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and
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THE SPECTRUM OF SEXUALIZED AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Sexualized and gender-based violence are both umbrella terms that cover a wide range of actions. While some of these actions may seem less harmful than others, they can all cause significant distress for those targeted. Many of these actions have even become normalized as everyday behaviour in our society, even those that constitute crimes under Canadian law. Here are a few common forms of violence:



- **Cat Calling** – Making unsolicited and unwanted remarks about a person's appearance, body parts, or of a sexual nature. Cat calling happens on the street and in public places but it also happens online in comment sections and in direct messaging.
- **Criminal Harassment** – This is the legal term for stalking. Stalking is something that can happen in person or can be facilitated using technology. There are applications that abusers can easily install on phones or computers that will send them a wide range information including the victim's location throughout the day, the victim's phone calls and text messages, the victim's internet history, and much more. These applications take minutes to install and are very difficult to detect once they have been installed. Using these applications to monitor a person without their consent and/or to harass them is a crime in Canada.
- **Doxxing** – When a person or people post another person's personal details (i.e. address, phone number) online with malicious intent. This is often done to encourage others to harass, intimidate, or even engage in violence towards the victim. Most social media sites have policies to stop doxxing but vary in how effective they are.

THE SPECTRUM OF SEXUALIZED AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE CONT...

- **Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images** – This is the legal terminology for sharing nude or sexual images of a person without their consent. It could also include posting these images online. Sometimes these images are taken by the victim and intended to be shared with a dating partner. The dating partner will then share these without the consent or knowledge of the victim. Other times these images are obtained by hacking into the victim's computer or social media account. This is a crime in Canada.
- **Objectification** – Treating a person as an object. This is a form of dehumanizing treatment. Narrowly focusing on a person's sexuality, perceived attractiveness, or body parts is a form of sexual objectification. This frequently happens in the comments sections of social media apps when women or girls share photographs of themselves. It is just as important to think about consent online as it is in person. Posting a photograph wearing a particular outfit or posing in a specific way is not an invitation for unwanted, sexualized, or objectifying comments online just like wearing that same outfit in person is not an invitation to be "cat called". Objectification often includes fetishizing people of particular racial backgrounds or sexual orientations. When you treat a person as a fetish, you are objectifying them.
- **Sexual Assault** – Sexual assault is any form of sexual touching, including but not limited to penetration, that happens without consent, or when a person is below the age of consent.



THE SPECTRUM OF SEXUALIZED AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE CONT...

- **Sexual Harassment** – Sexual harassment is any type of sexualized behavior or commentary that is known, or ought reasonably to be known, to be unwelcome. In other words, conduct that a reasonable person would understand as unwelcome given the context (i.e. work or school environment). It can also be a person in a position of power soliciting sex from someone they are able to confer or withhold a benefit from. An example might be a landlord soliciting sex from a tenant when that landlord has power to raise rent, evict the tenant, or even deny housing. Another example might be a manager soliciting sex from an employee when that manager has the power to assign shifts, grant pay raises, or even fire the employee. These behaviours often happen online through company messaging software, Facebook groups, or even dating apps.
- **Stealthing** – Stealthing is a term used to describe the actions of a person who has agreed to safe sex but then removes the condom without notifying their partner or lies about using a condom. This is considered a form of sexual assault under Canadian law. There are websites on the internet that explain to men how to do this and lines to say in order to feign innocence when the missing condom is discovered by their partner.
- **Trafficking** – Human trafficking for sexual purposes involves sexually exploiting a person or forcing them to into prostitution. It can involve recruitment, transportation, harbouring or exercising control over a person, influencing the movements of a person, or making money off of another person's sexual exploitation or prostitution.
- **Voyeurism** – Is the legal terminology for observing, filming, or photographing a person without their consent in a situation where that person has a reasonable expectation of privacy (i.e. a change room or public washroom). A case that went to the Supreme Court two years ago also found that voyeurism can also happen in public places where there is no expectation of privacy if a person is using electronics to observe, film, or photograph parts of the body that would not be easily visible without the aid of this technology. An example would be using high powered zoom lenses on a camera to zoom in and take photographs of women's cleavage without their consent or using a phone on a selfie stick in a public place to take photos up women's skirts.

A NOTE ABOUT CONSENT

Consent – Consent is important in many parts of our lives not only with dating or sexual relationships. Consent to sexual activity whether in person or online must be freely-given, enthusiastic, informed, specific, and present at each new stage of intimacy. If a person is too drunk or too high they cannot legally consent. A person who is passed out or asleep cannot legally consent. A relationship or marriage does not guarantee consent. Consent to one type of sexual action is not consent to every type of sexual activity. Consent cannot happen if threats have been made or if a weapon or physical force has been used to obtain the consent.



Coercion – Using pressure through words or actions in order to get a person to do something or agree to something that they might not otherwise do or agree to. In relationships coercion might look like the following examples: 1. "If you really loved me, you would do this..."; 2. "You aren't meeting my sexual needs..."; 3. "But my ex used to do it..." or 4. Repeatedly asking the person to do something until they break down and say yes. There are many different examples of coercion that can occur in different relationship contexts. Remember, your sexual partner should never pressure you into doing things that you are uncomfortable with. You deserve to have your boundaries respected.

ONLINE APPS, DEVICES, AND TERMINOLOGY



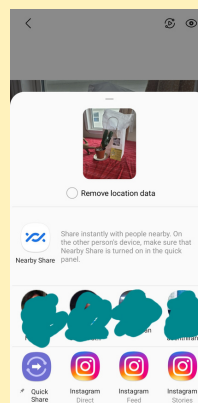
- **AirDrop** – A feature on some smart phones that allows files (such as photos, videos, etc) to be transferred from one device to another through Bluetooth. If your Bluetooth feature is turned on other devices (including strangers) can connect within a 30 feet radius. Women have reported receiving unwanted sexual images through their AirDrop feature by anonymous people in their radius. This is something that can happen in crowded public places, on airplanes or other forms of transportation, in classrooms, or other locations. **Learn how to turn off your AirDrop:** <https://www.wikihow.com/Turn-Off-AirDrop>
- **Cyber-Protection Order** – In Nova Scotia victims of online harassment, bullying, or the non-consensual distribution of intimate images have the option to apply for a cyber-protection order through the **Cyberscan program**. A cyber-protection order can forbid a person from sharing an intimate image, forbid someone from posting bullying comments, forbid someone from contacting the victim, order a person to take down or disable access to an intimate image, refer parties to dispute resolution, or offer damages to the victim.
- **Keystroke Logger** – A way to track and record which keys have been pressed on a keyboard. These can be installed on phones or computers without the person using the phone or computer even aware that it is happening. Keystroke loggers can either be software (a program downloaded onto a phone or computer) or hardware (a physical device stuck inside a keyboard usually on a computer). If they are installed on your devices it can be difficult to find them and remove them and so experts recommend getting rid of your devices completely and buying new ones (if you are able) if you know or suspect you may be stalked.

ONLINE APPS, DEVICES, AND TERMINOLOGY CONT...

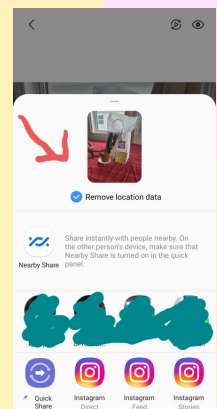
- **Location Data** – Our smart phones and the apps on those phones constantly track our location. This location data is even encrypted into photographs we take or videos we make. Some apps like Snapchat also share this data with other users (Snap map). It is a good practice to learn how to turn off the location data on your phone and to deny location permission to specific apps unless you absolutely need it (i.e. when using Google Maps for directions). Some social media sites may remove this data from photos that you post, but unless they have it written directly in their policy you can't be sure. It is important to **learn how to remove location data** from photos that you post. **For Apple products see:**
<https://www.intego.com/mac-security-blog/how-to-remove-gps-location-data-from-photos-on-iphone-or-mac/>
For Androids:



1. In your photo album, choose a photo and click share.



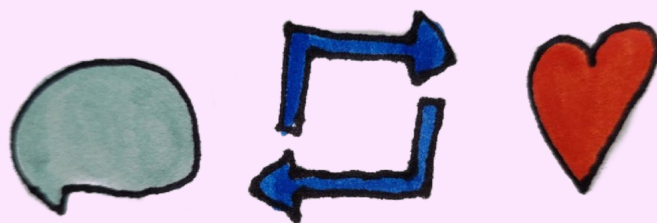
2. Before sending or sharing click the circle under photo



3. When the circle is blue, you are ready to share!

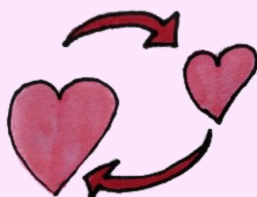
ONLINE APPS, DEVICES, AND TERMINOLOGY CONT...

- **OnlyFans** – A social media site where people can sell images or videos. The content sold on OnlyFans is often sexualized, nude, or pornographic. OF is sometimes advertised online as a way for young women to make extra money. However, content posted to the site can and has been stolen and posted on other pornographic websites without the consent of the victims. There are also users who are dedicated to doxxing or finding and posting the personal details of the creators who are meant to stay anonymous. This makes it easy for people to stalk the victim both online and in person. Another very common form of online harassment happens when online bullies steal non-sexual images from a young woman's Instagram account and use them to create a new, fake Instagram account along with a fake OnlyFans account. This is done to make money off of the young woman's image and/or to cause damage to her reputation by making it appear as if she has an OnlyFans account.
- **Sexting** – This is a term used to describe in flirtatious and/or sexually explicit talk via text message, direct message, or other online platforms. Sexting is a type of sexual activity that some people choose to engage in because it comes with less risk than physical sexual activity in regards to sexually transmitted infections or when in a long distance relationship. However, there are still risks that come with sexting. Sexts can be screenshotted or recorded without the sender's knowledge and then used later to blackmail the sender or posted online without their consent. Just like sex in person, sexting requires enthusiastic, free, and prior consent.



SAFETY TIPS FOR DATING APPS

- If you are able to sign up with an email address rather than a facebook account or Instagram, this will help to maintain privacy.
- Carefully consider which information you share both in your written profile and in chats.
- Take a close look at your photos and make sure that they do not include any background information (such as a house address or vehicle license plate) that can be used to identify or track you down.
- It's wonderful to be proud of your children and good to be up front with potential partners about having children. However, it is best not to post photos of your children and to be cautious about when you disclose your status as a parent since there have been cases of predatory men using dating apps to target single mothers in order to get to their children.
- If you do agree to meet in person, meet in a public place during day light hours. Come to the first date with a plan to leave at a designated time and an excuse as to why you must leave (such as plans with a friend, homework, a dentist appointment, etc...). It is also important that you have your own transportation to and from the date.
- If you do agree to meet in person, tell a friend or loved one about your plans. Share all the information that you have about your date including their name, where you will meet them, at what time, and at what time the date will finish.
- Be cautious of people who are reluctant to meet in public or who try to change plans in order to disorient you (i.e. suggesting a place that you don't know well, changing the meeting time to after dark, insisting on picking you up/dropping you off). It is important that your date respects your boundaries.
- Always remember that predatory people are very skilled in finding ways to get around any and every precaution you take. These suggestions can only lesson risk, not get rid of it completely. It is important to know this so that you do not blame yourself if something does happen. Even if you weren't able to use all of these precautions, you still have a right to safety, privacy, and dignity. No one has a right to harm you or push past your boundaries.



A NOTE ABOUT VICTIM BLAMING



Victim Blaming – ideas or attitudes that place increased and unwarranted scrutiny on the victim of sexual violence, harassment, or dating violence. By focusing on the behavior of the victim, the predatory behavior of the perpetrator remains unquestioned. These ideas are very common and many victims internalize them and turn them towards themselves. Victims will say things like, “I should have known better than to try online dating”.

It is important to remember that the only person or people responsible for violence are those who perpetrate violent acts. It is difficult to remember to take all of precautions listed above. Some might not be practical. It is also normal to trust other people. If someone harms you or pushes past your boundaries, it is not your fault! You do not deserve blame, scrutiny, or criticism.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE

- <https://techwithoutviolence.ca/dating-apps-without-violence> - A website hosted by the Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW) that explains in detail the links between dating apps and gender based violence.
- https://iheartmob.org/resources/safety_guides - A website that provides downloadable and detailed safety guides for a number of popular social media sites including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.
- <https://iheartmob.org/> - A website that provides resources for people who are experiencing online bullying or harassment. This site includes information on how to protect yourself, where to go for help, and how to engage as a bystander when you witness online bullying or harassment online.
- <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/notetoself/articles/privacy-paradox-tip-sheet> - The privacy paradox tip sheet offers a number of ways to increase your privacy online.

WHERE TO GET HELP

- <https://novascotia.ca/cyberscan/> - A service run by the Nova Scotia government to support victims of online bullying, harassment, and the non-consensual distribution of intimate images. Through this service you can obtain a Cyber Protection Order.
- <http://awrcsasa.ca/> - A women's support worker at the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association can help you find support, access legal options, and more.
- <https://www.canadianhumantraffickinghotline.ca/> - Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline. Includes a list of resources for survivors, referral to local resources, and a place where you can submit an anonymous tip.

Please follow [@wavesofchange.ns](https://www.instagram.com/wavesofchange/ns) on Instagram to learn more about sexualized and gender based violence