Parenting Tweens and Teens
in the Digital World

ONLINE LURING
WHAT EVERY PARENT NEEDS TO KNOW

The Internet and new technologies allow teens to: quickly connect and communicate with friends; search topics they would otherwise be too embarrassed to discuss with others; and experiment with intimacy. While these are all healthy adolescent behaviours, technology does present some risks to teens, including that of being lured online.

Adults with harmful intentions (i.e. sexually, verbally and/or mentally abusive) towards youth can use the Internet to easily gain access to and communicate with them. They may send an adolescent sexually explicit material, misrepresent themselves to extort information, or attempt to establish a personal relationship with the youth. Photography or webcams may be introduced as "fun play," and then progress to persistent requests from the adult for nude or partially-nude pictures/videos of the youth. Some offenders, under the guise of a romantic relationship, may request that a youth take a picture of her/himself and send it to them, only then to use the same image to coerce and control the child (e.g. "If you don't send me more photos I will send the ones I have to your friends.")

Youth are vulnerable to being lured or victimized online as their behaviour is less inhibited when they use technology — they are not developmentally ready to handle the complex situations that can arise on the Internet. The situation, including taking and sending a photograph, can easily spiral out of control with the youth feeling like "there is no way out." Relationships that start online often progress quickly and adolescents may say and do things online that they may not have otherwise done if they were face-to-face with the person. In some instances, youth may be manipulated into believing they are in a legitimate romantic relationship with an adult.

Online luring refers to a process through which someone with a SEXUAL INTEREST in a child prepares them for FUTURE SEXUAL CONTACT. The *Criminal Code* (Canada) defines a luring offence as someone using TELECOMMUNICATIONS to communicate with someone they believe to be under the age of 18 years in order to facilitate committing a designated offence against that child.

visit **protectchildren.ca** for more information

CANADIAN CENTRE for CHILD PROTECTION®
Helping families. Protecting children.

Important ongoing discussions to have with your teen about online contact with others:

✓ Explain that adults should not be attempting to become "friends" with or give sexual attention to teenagers. Let them know this type of boundary-breaking behaviour demonstrates the adult is using poor judgment, making it unsafe to interact with them.

✓ Discuss that it is illegal to threaten someone online or offline. Explain that threats are often used in an attempt to control the situation and get youth to comply with demands of a sexual nature. If someone threatens her/him, s/he needs to tell a safe adult (whether it be you, a teacher, a counsellor, etc.).

✓ Explain that there is no need or urgency to respond to any messages. Teach her/him not to respond to messages that make her/him feel uncomfortable.

✓ Discuss how sharing personal issues or situations online with the wrong person could leave someone open to manipulation and mistreatment.

✓ Use real life stories from the media to discuss situations that have happened to teens. Seize the opportunity to openly talk about these stories with your teen, as well as the risks, and discuss what could have been done differently. Your child is less likely to become defensive as the scenario is not about her/him personally. At the same time, it opens the door for your child to share a similar situation or concern with regard to her/him or one of her/his peers.

✓ Teach your adolescent how to get out of unwanted conversations and/or relationships. Some direct ways of getting out of uncomfortable situations include refusing to do something by saying "I don't want to" or "No thanks" or discontinuing contact by not responding to messages, and deleting or blocking the person as a contact. Indirect ways of ending a conversation include making excuses such as "I have to go out with my family." or blaming parents "My mom checks my computer randomly and would ground me."

✓ Explain the importance of seeking your help without the fear of her/him getting into trouble and reinforce that it's never too late to ask for help, even if they are embarrassed about what has happened.