



## SUPPORTING YOUTH AFFECTED BY TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE



# Supporting Youth Affected by Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence

This tip sheet is intended for parents and caregivers of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) youth to introduce Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence (T-FSV) and how you can support CAF youth affected by such violence.

Information in this tip sheet may be unsettling for some people, and support is available to you 24/7 through the Family Information Line (English and French, free, confidential):

Canada: 1-800-866-4546

International: 00-700-771-17722

Email: [FIL-LIF@cfmws.com](mailto:FIL-LIF@cfmws.com)

### What is Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence (T-FSV)?

'Sexual violence' is an all-encompassing term that refers to acts of sexual assault and harassment that target a person's sexuality, gender identity or expression. Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence (T-FSV) is a form of sexual violence perpetrated through digital tools and technologies, oftentimes by an anonymous person but can be someone the youth knows. T-FSV includes acts such as online harassment, sharing intimate images without consent, cyberflashing, online sexual manipulation and/or coercion, and sextortion.

### Types of T-FSV:

#### Online Sexual Harassment:

- **Definition:** Using online communications (for example, texts or direct messages – DMs) to repeatedly ask for sexual interactions and/or other unwanted sexual communication.
- **Example:** Persistently sending unsolicited sexual messages or images despite being told to stop.

#### Intimate Image Sharing:

- **Definition:** Sharing sexual images without consent.

- **Example:** Sending someone's intimate photos with other people or posting the photos on social media/the internet without their permission.

### **Cyberflashing:**

- **Definition:** Sending someone sexual photos or messages without their consent, often through Bluetooth or AirDrop transfers between devices.
- **Example:** Receiving an unexpected and explicit image from a stranger via AirDrop in a public space.

### **Online Sexual Manipulation:**

- **Definition:** Convincing or pressuring someone to send something that involves sexual content (for example, messages or images).
- **Example:** Coercing someone to send nude photos by pretending to be a romantic interest.

### **Sextortion:**

- **Definition:** Coercing and/or tricking someone into sending sexual images or engaging in sexual acts online, then making a demand such as for money, more images, or other demands.
- **Example:** Threatening to release someone's intimate photo(s) unless they pay the demander a sum of money.

## **Who is Affected by Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence?**

T-FSV is a prevalent issue, but it does not affect everyone equally, as girls, 2SLGBTQIA+ and racialized youth are less likely to feel that the internet is a safe place.

### **Unique Challenges for CAF Youth**

CAF youth can face unique challenges and stressors because of the military lifestyle. Experiences like frequently relocating or separation from family can lead to loneliness, increased anxiety and fear, grief (due to loss of friends), low self-esteem and other negative effects for CAF youth.

As a result, CAF youth may rely on technology and online platforms more to stay connected, potentially increasing their vulnerability to online harm. Relocating to a new community can make it difficult to form new friendships, which may lead to youth feeling more peer pressure to share intimate photos of themselves.

Another unique challenge for CAF youth may be the "fishbowl" effect of living in a small military community where it can feel like everyone knows everyone. This may make youth hesitant to share their experiences with their parents or peers due to fear of being exposed. These feelings may be heightened for CAF youth posted outside of Canada where the military communities are especially small.

### **The Impacts of Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence**

The effects of T-FSV are often felt offline, too. Youth may deal with the impacts of what is happening online while they are at school, with friends, or during their offline extracurricular activities. Youth who experience online violence may be more likely to experience other forms of violence, such as stalking or physical and/or sexual assault.

Youth who have experienced T-FSV may feel shameful, violated, and/or depressed. They may be scared to speak out due to fear of not being believed, being labeled a snitch, and/or being bullied further.

## How to Start the Conversation

Discussing T-FSV with your youth may be uncomfortable at first, but there are many resources available to help you start this conversation. Before talking with your youth about T-FSV, it is recommended that you educate yourself about internet/online safety so that you are knowledgeable about what it is and how to best discuss this topic with your youth.

To learn more about online safety, consider contacting your youth's school, as many have resources and training on this topic. Also, at the end of this tip sheet you can find the 'additional resources' and 'learn more' sections to help you further explore online safety and T-FSV.

If you are ready to discuss T-FSV with your youth, consider the following:

As a parent or caregiver, you can provide youth with a safe environment, filled with compassion and openness, and be a trusted source of support for them. You can practice fostering a safe environment at any time with these tips:

- **Recognize** the importance that online spaces have for social interactions for youth and the impact the military lifestyle may have on them.
- **Be informed** about the range of supports, including those in the military community, available for your youth. This may include attending workshops, webinars or seminars to enhance your knowledge in supporting youth in the digital age.
- **Model positive behaviours** about using digital spaces responsibly and in a healthy way, such as respecting others' privacy and boundaries online.
- **Have conversations** about what healthy relationships look and feel like and the importance of communities built on honesty, trust, and respect.
- **Talk** about what to do when encountering harmful online content while keeping in mind that your youth may not initially turn toward you for support, as they may turn to their peers or another trusted adult first.

## How Can I Support My Youth if They Share an Experience of T-FSV?

Most youth who experience T-FSV want to talk about it, but they often fear the reactions of others. If a disclosure of T-FSV is met with a negative response, youth may feel isolated and discouraged from sharing more information. If your youth shares an experience of T-FSV, you can:

### Listen without judgement or interruption

After your youth discloses such an experience, your first instinct may be to say something like "You should have been safer with what you shared online" or "I told you using social media would end like this." However, this messaging can make the youth feel unsafe and risks them shutting down the conversation, and thus stopping the healing process.

What can you do?

- Avoid expressions of anger, even if they are toward the perpetrator, as your youth may interpret these feelings as being directed toward them and can lead to increased feelings of shame, defensiveness or withdrawal.
- Do not rush into increased control of their online activity immediately upon the disclosure. If your youth believes that disclosing this information will lead to a loss of online privileges, they may not be willing to tell you about it.

- Listen to their disclosure with openness and compassion without judgement or interruption. By doing so, you can help your youth feel safe to share and heal.

### **Validate their experience**

Talking about sexual violence breaks down barriers caused by silence, isolation and shame.

What can you do?

- Avoid asking questions like “How could you let this happen?” or “Don’t you know better?”
- Create a safe place by offering validating statements such as “I believe you,” “What happened is not your fault,” “I will support you,” and “What happened to you is not OK.”

### **Survivor-led support**

Youth face unique barriers to support as they have less agency over their own lives than adults. By assisting them in navigating their wants and needs, all while respecting their leadership in voicing these concerns, youth can reclaim some of the power they may feel they have lost through the harm they experienced.

What can you do?

- Avoid speaking for your youth and ask them what you can do together to help them feel more supported in order to help them heal.
- Ensure they stay connected to their support systems, such as their friends, family and other people who care about them which can allow them the space to heal.
- Share the **CAFKIDS** resource with them. Youth can text the keyword CAFKIDS at 686868 for service in English. The Crisis Text Line powered by Kids Help Phone is confidential and available day or night.
- Reach out to your local Military Family Resource Center (MFRC) or Military Family Services (MFS) Service Provider to learn what programs or supports may be available in your location.
- Connect with Family Information Line for support, including connections to community-based organizations.

### **Sexual violence thrives in silence - so let’s keep the conversation going.**

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*Created in partnership with Hillary Di Menna.*

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### **LEARN MORE.**

