



CANADIAN CENTRE *for* CHILD PROTECTION™  
*Helping families. Protecting children.*

# The **DOOR** that's not **Locked.**™

## Safety and the Internet:

A parent's guide for  
children ages 13–15



[thedoorthatsnotlocked.ca](http://thedoorthatsnotlocked.ca)



The web offers incredible possibilities as long as you are aware of the risks. By understanding what the online world offers, you can empower your teen with skills to help her/him engage with technology in a safe and responsible way.

This brochure includes information about the common interests of teens 13 to 15 years of age, considerations around safety, and strategies to help parents empower their teens with skills that can protect them from risks they may encounter while online. Monitoring teens at this age presents unique challenges. Typically, teens are seeking more independence and spending more time with friends.



Technology plays a central role in teens' lives. It has changed the way they socialize and interact with others. It also provides them with access to an unlimited amount of information, some of which can be informative/educational but some which could be harmful. Teens require on-going reminders about caution that needs to be taken when using the Internet.

- ✎ **Pay attention to what is going on in your teen's life.** Know how your teen is spending her/his time. If your teen appears out of sorts, let her/him know that you notice and you are available to listen if s/he would like to talk. S/he may be reluctant to share what is going on as teens are easily embarrassed, but it is important to keep the lines of communication open so s/he knows you are emotionally available if s/he needs you.
- ✎ **Discuss the public nature of the Internet.** Remind your teen that care needs to be taken when sharing information and pictures as they can be easily misused by others. Discuss how important it is to protect and be responsible with others' private/personal information as well.
- ✎ **Set the expectation that her/his activity online will be monitored.** Do spot checks on her/his computer to review pictures.

ALL WEB.  
NO NET.™

# Keeping 13- to 15-year-olds Healthy & Safe

As your teen gets older, you will notice changes in her/his behaviour and interests. While it's exciting to see your child seek more independence, there are new personal and online safety concerns that you should be aware of as well. The following section outlines common characteristics of teens 13–15 years of age.

## The Growing Personality

- ✗ Values acceptance and belonging as s/he expands her/his identity.
- ✗ Heightened focus on her/his appearance and the opinions of others.
- ✗ Believes others are always watching and judging her/him (egocentric).
- ✗ Is very sensitive, easily humiliated, and is extremely concerned about social judgment.
- ✗ Demonstrates "pseudo-maturity" by appearing to handle more than developmentally ready for.
- ✗ Seeks deeper relationships (may use the Internet to confide in others).
- ✗ Distances her/himself from parents to form her/his identity.
- ✗ Takes emotional risks in search of her/his identity.
- ✗ Explores sexuality; it's natural for your teen to be curious about sexuality, and s/he may want to look at photos and explore sexual subjects.
- ✗ Demands privacy.
- ✗ Focuses on whether her/his behaviour conforms to the behaviour of others, not whether it is right or wrong.
- ✗ Is positively influenced by the presence of safe adults.

## Online Activities

- ✗ Spends a lot of time on social networking sites (Facebook®, MySpace®, Bebo® etc.) communicating with others and sharing pictures.
- ✗ Uses Instant Messaging, email, weblogs, etc. to communicate with others.
- ✗ Plays online games with opponents.
- ✗ Uses webcams and digital cameras to take and send pictures.
- ✗ Uses cell phones (talking to friends, web surfing, taking pictures, text messaging).
- ✗ Uses peer to peer programs to download music, games and videos (e.g. LimeWire®).

## As a Parent, What Can You Do?

- ✗ Spot check what teens are posting online and reinforce expectations around posting only appropriate pictures.
- ✗ Despite appearing to be able to handle most situations, teens require and unconsciously seek adult guidance.

- ✘ Encourage open communication at home and be conscious of her/his sensitivity to social judgment. S/he may be hesitant to share personal experiences.
- ✘ Set limits around how late teens can be online. Set a time to “shut off” electronic devices.

## What Should You Talk to Your Teen About?

- ✘ Regularly remind teens about the risks they may encounter while online and reinforce that the Internet is a public place where information shared with someone in confidence can easily be misused by others to embarrass them.
- ✘ Let your teen know that you will monitor her/his online activities, as the Internet is a public place.
- ✘ Discuss respect and dignity and how image can be influenced by how s/he portrays her/himself online.
- ✘ Explain the importance of being careful with pictures posted or sent online; reinforce that once a picture is sent, control over what happens to it is lost.
- ✘ Explain how experimenting in a public place like the Internet can have irreversible, embarrassing consequences. It leaves a permanent record.
- ✘ Discuss boundaries with your teen. Explain that individuals who s/he encounters online who ask inappropriate or personal/private/sexual questions are breaking boundaries. Reinforce to your teen that these individuals should be blocked as any information shared could easily be misused. These people are likely doing this to many other teens as well. Explain that they should tell an adult if someone threatens them or tries to bribe them to send inappropriate pictures.
- ✘ Explain to your teen that it's illegal to threaten someone online or offline. If someone threatens her/him online, s/he needs to tell a safe adult.
- ✘ Discuss the inaccurate representations of healthy relationships in the media, and explain the true qualities of healthy relationships (see [kidsintheknow.ca](http://kidsintheknow.ca)).
- ✘ Advise your teen not to share her/his password with anyone. Explain that popup ads and malicious sites appear legitimate, but that email and messenger providers will never ask for your teen's username and password. This will help prevent having their account hijacked.

# Quick Facts – Your Teen’s Online Interests

## Cell Phone Text Messages

Short Message Service (SMS), more commonly known as text messaging, allows users to communicate with other users through brief, typed text. These messages can be easily deleted, leaving no trace of the message sent, or saved and distributed by malicious users.

## Instant Messaging (e.g. Windows Live™ Messenger, Yahoo!® Messenger, AIM®)

Instant Messaging is electronic communication that involves components of both chat and email. After downloading the IM software, users maintain lists of “buddies” or “friends” and are notified when their contacts are online. Short text messages are sent back and forth, and some IM programs also include file transfer, webcam viewing, voice chat and other applications.

## Peer to Peer Programs (e.g. LimeWire®, BearShare®)

Programs that allow users to establish a connection and have direct access to shared files on each other’s computers. This communication network allows the exchange of images, videos, music files, etc. without utilizing a centralized server.

## Social Networking (e.g. Facebook, MySpace, Twitter®)

Social networking deals with the relationships between individuals, and the various social areas that connect them. Many websites on the Internet offer this type of communication whereby people are encouraged to post personal information (pictures, thought, etc.) and chat with others in real time.

## Webcam

A webcam is a video camera that is usually attached directly to a computer.

## Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG)

A MMORPG is a type of online game where a large number of players interact with one another in a virtual/fantasy world (e.g. RuneScape®, World of Warcraft®).

## Video Gaming Consoles

A video gaming console is an interactive computer or electronic device that uses a TV or monitor to display the video game. It hooks up to the Internet so multiple players can interact online. While players can talk to each other through these games, no history of conversations can easily be saved with these devices (e.g. PlayStation® 2 or PlayStation® 3, Nintendo Wii®, Xbox®).

## Avatar

An avatar is a digital expression of an individual. It may take the form of an animal, creature or person, and is often used in chat forums, games, and personal profiles.



# Common language used by teens online

Do you know what your teen is saying?

ABBREVIATION	MEANING
asl	age/sex/location
bf   gf	boyfriend   girlfriend
brb	be right back
cam   kam	webcam
g2g   gtg	got to go
h/o	hang on
jk   jks	just kidding   jokes
kk	ok cool
lol	laugh out loud
noob	new individual
nvm	never mind
omg	oh my god
pic	picture
plz	please
ppl	people
sxy   sexi	sexy
ttyl	talk to you later
ty	thank you
ud	you would
ur	you are

**TIP:** Sounding out the string of letters may help you understand the word or words. Also try adding letters to a string of text to figure out the word.



# Risks to 13- to 15-year-olds on the Internet

It's important to teach your teen strategies that will make her/his online experiences safer.

## Content

### Exposure to Sexually Explicit Material

It is common for teens to be curious about sexuality. There is an unlimited amount of information available online, some of which can be informative but some which is harmful and/or illegal. Discuss the importance to think critically about information they read online. Discuss qualities of healthy relationships: what they look like, sound like, and feel like.

## Contact

### Building Relationships Online

Teens use the Internet to connect, often creating an online persona. Behaviour tends to be less inhibited online, so teens may engage in behaviour that they would not engage in offline. As a result, they can quickly find themselves in situations they think they can handle, yet do not always have the experience to deal with. It's important to stay emotionally connected to your teen, and to pay close attention to any significant changes in behaviour. Explain how individuals can manipulate emotions to try to get teens to send inappropriate photos or information that they may regret having sent. For more information, see [kidsintheknow.ca](http://kidsintheknow.ca).

### Threats and Coercion

Individuals seeking to exploit teens may use threats or coercion to increase compliance that could result in the teen sending a naked image of her/himself. Talk to your teen about the use and illegal nature of online threats. Explain that s/he should never comply with threats, and to seek a safe adult for help.

## Conduct

### Public Nature and Permanence of the Internet

Teens are using the Internet to test limits and experiment with identity, often underestimating the public nature of the online world. Teens engage in private conversations and share private information, unaware of the lasting consequences of their behaviour. Teach your teen that once material is sent online, control over what happens to the material is lost, and subsequent exposure can be devastating.

### Lack of Boundaries

Boundaries are quickly crossed online. Individuals looking to exploit teens quickly turn conversations sexual, asking personal questions about puberty and development. Make sure your teen knows s/he can tell you if s/he experiences such an interaction, without fear of getting in trouble.



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**The Canadian Centre for Child Protection** is a registered charity dedicated to the personal safety of all children. It operates [Cybertip.ca](http://Cybertip.ca), Canada's national tipline for reporting the online sexual exploitation of children, the Kids in the Know safety education program, and the Commit to Kids child sexual abuse prevention program.

## **The Door that's not Locked — All web. No net.**

The web is a wonderful place for kids, if you understand the dangers. The Canadian Centre is committed to helping parents, teachers, and anyone else who would like to better understand the good, bad, and ugly about the web. We're here to help keep kids safe while exploring and enjoying **The Door that's not Locked**. To learn more, visit us at [thedoorthat'snotlocked.ca](http://thedoorthat'snotlocked.ca).

To report the online sexual exploitation of children, visit [cybertip.ca](http://cybertip.ca).

### **Founding Partners:**



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More information on child safety is available at [protectchildren.ca](http://protectchildren.ca)  
or by contacting us at:

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