

YOUTH NCDII: WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS THE ACTING-OUT YOUTH

If your child has been involved in an incident of non-consensual distribution of intimate images (NCDII), you are likely feeling a wide range of emotions, including embarrassment, shame, anger, and a certain degree of vulnerability and uncertainty about what may happen next. You may be deeply concerned for your child and your family. Rest assured it is completely normal to be feeling all of these things and more. In some instances, you may be projecting anger towards the youth involved, which can include your child, as well as the disappointment or shock in learning that they are involved in an incident of youth NCDII.

There are some practical steps that you can take to address your child's involvement in an incident of NCDII in the short term and months to follow. Trying to anticipate the range of issues your child may encounter will be important. If your child is provided with an honest account of what may happen in the months following, you will increase the likelihood they are prepared to manage it.

As a parent, it may be difficult to receive news that your child has or may have been involved in an incident of youth NCDII. Prior to addressing the situation, take a moment to assess how you are feeling. Your initial response may range from disciplining your child all the way to minimizing their role and involvement in the activity.

The course of dealing with such behaviours varies depending on the motivation for acting out and the behaviour engaged in. If your child has acted on impulsive behaviour, the following steps can assist you to ensure a moderate and balanced approach. **However, if your child's behaviour presents as malicious in nature, the next steps may be dependent on a criminal investigation.**

In addition to considering the following steps, you may wish to seek professional support and advice about how to respond through this time.

1. Intervene immediately

It is essential that you intervene immediately. By acting quickly, you are sending your child the message that you take the situation seriously and steps must be taken to address and make up for what occurred. You may want to start with obtaining your child's version of the events. Keep in mind that their reaction can range from fully acknowledging their involvement to outright denial.

Minimize the damage: Immediately find out if the content is publicly available and whether your child still has the content on any mobile device. Take steps to ensure that your child deletes any digital representation of images or videos that are sexual in nature. **Exception:** In cases involving a police investigation, follow the direction of law enforcement regarding the handling of digital evidence.



2. Determine your child's level of responsibility

In consultation with the school, assess the level of responsibility that your child bears for the incident of intimate peer violence. Once you have a handle on the facts, walk your child through the importance of taking accountability for their actions. Recognizing that every situation is unique, remind your child that while it may be difficult to admit their role in what occurred, nothing will improve until they take responsibility for their actions. If you receive resistance, explore what your child fears most if they admit to any wrongdoing.

Conversations with your child: When speaking with your child about their involvement in the incident, consider the following:

- Errors in judgment such as this provide your child an opportunity to learn and grow.
- Accountability and ownership for the situation is an important part of the learning and healing that needs to take place. Involve them in discussions about how they are going to fix it, prevent it from happening again, and repair the relationship with the affected youth.
- Consequences for the inappropriate behaviour need to be reasonable and fit the situation. While consequences may be a developmental fear of adolescents, it should not stop parents from instituting boundaries and limits (in a loving, supportive, and communicative way) in response to a serious situation.
- Discussions about what healthy and respectful relationships look like and how others deserve to be treated should be part of the learning process. A good place to start is the Canadian Centre for Child Protection's (C3P) *Healthy Relationships* video series, available at protectchildren.ca/healthy_relationships.

3. Identify the factors contributing to the behaviour

Try and identify the factors contributing to your child's behaviour. What needs were they attempting to meet through their actions and what was the motivation behind acting out in this way?

Your child's intentions are central to figuring out how to prevent this type of behaviour from happening in the future and supporting your child in finding healthy ways to meet their needs. Focusing on healthy skill development, such as enhancing your child's ability to manage emotions — including managing feelings of hurt and anger — understanding relationship dynamics, and building your child's sense of self-esteem and confidence are all important elements in avoiding similar behaviour in the future.



4. Outline the consequences for the behaviour

It is important that your child understands the range of consequences and implications of their behaviour. In incidents of youth NCDII, there are often multiple layers of impact and harm caused by forwarding/posting sexual images and videos. This can also include the potential impact on your child as a result of this behaviour. When outlining the consequences, remember that effective discipline is not about shame or guilt, but rather about fostering acceptable and appropriate behaviour that incorporates respect, tolerance, empathy, and a consideration of the feelings of others.

5. Build empathy

Empathy is about caring for other people and having a desire to help them, as well as identifying with another individual's emotions. If your child learns to appreciate how others may feel as a result of their actions, they are less likely to act out in a way that causes harm to another. Articulating how you feel about their role in the incident of youth NCDII, explaining why you feel that way, and discussing how their behaviour may have impacted others will all promote your child's ability to empathize.



6. Reinforce the importance of friends

Your child's friends can be an important support in helping them through this time — provided that the friends do not endorse or minimize what has happened. They may be able to reinforce the steps and messaging that you are providing and can serve as a protective factor, reducing the likelihood of any bullying that may result from your child's decision to share sexual images or videos.

7. Explore restoration

A restorative practice approach focuses on addressing conflict in a manner that attempts to repair harm. Careful consideration should be given to whether your child is prepared to take responsibility and apologize to the affected youth. An apology must be based on the affected youth's willingness and ability to receive it. In consultation with the school, determine whether the affected youth would be open to receiving such an offering in writing or in person. As part of making amends, also explore having your child participate in educational activities to enhance their understanding of the issues related to their behaviour and/or participate in volunteer or other community-based initiatives.

8. Seek professional help (if appropriate)

Seek professional counselling for your child as necessary. Professional support may be particularly helpful if your child's behaviour was a result of them experiencing ongoing distress that requires attention and resolution and/or if they are being impacted by the reaction of peers within the school environment.

Your school may be able to help direct you to the appropriate service, or you may contact C3P at support@protectchildren.ca, which can help direct families to support services such as counselling/therapy or victim services that may be available in their region.