



Webinar Series

Cyber Dating Violence:

What it Looks Like and How We Can Support Youth

In January 2021, Dr. Brett Holfeld, Assistant Professor in the Psychology Program at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland presented a webinar which discussed how the use of technology has transformed teen dating relationships and has created opportunities for cyber dating violence (CDV). He provided some background on CDV such as what it is, what it looks like, how common it is, and the impact of these experiences. He also discussed some strategies that parents and educators can use to prevent and reduce cyber dating violence among youth. [Click here to view webinar](#) | [Click here to view presentation slides](#)

Cyber Dating Violence (CDV): “Intentional use of technology to abuse an intimate partner or an ex intimate partner by implementing control and monitoring tactics, or by disseminating information, of a sexual nature or not, without consent” (Fernet et al., 2019, p.21)

- In CDV, the target can be an intimate partner OR ex-intimate partner
- CDV can be one-sided or reciprocal in nature, i.e. it is possible that both partners experience CDV

What Does Cyber Dating Violence Look Like?

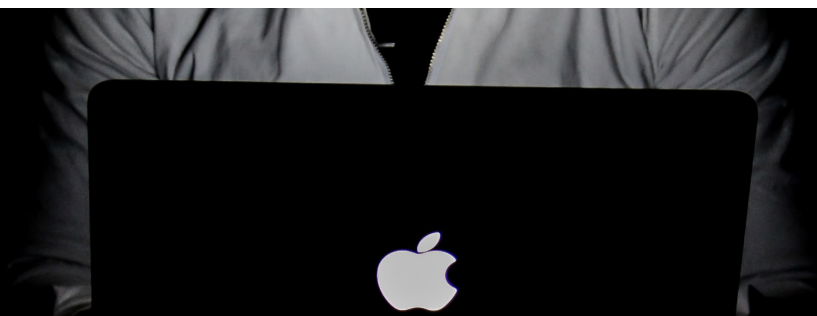
Types of CDV

Direct (i.e. private): Abuse that occurs in a private context, where no one else can witness it

- *Examples:* Stalking/control: tracking social media and locations, hurtful text messages; harassment: repeated messaging; and sexual violence (sending unwanted sexts or pictures)

Indirect: Info that is disseminated to others with the intent to harm a person

- *Examples:* Posts, pictures or videos shared about the person – may contain sexual content such as images or videos, or non-sexual content like personal or private information



Categories of CDV

Monitoring (most common)

- Monitoring where partner is, who they are talking to, what they are doing
- Making partner share passwords in order to monitor
- Monitoring is an early warning sign for jealousy and violence later on in relationships

Sexual Coercion

- Pressure to talk about sex, sext (send/receive intimate pictures), and/or pose in front of a webcam
- Humiliation
- Sharing intimate pictures or messages without consent
- Using intimate photos/videos as blackmail

Control

- Controlling who a partner can or cannot talk to online
 - e.g., Deleting or blocking others who have viewed or commented on posts
- Controlling what they can or cannot post online
 - e.g., Deleting posts or entire social media accounts

Harassment

- **Scaring** – making target afraid of potential violence if they don't respond to partner's calls or messages
- **Barraging** – constant messages or phone calls
- **Humiliation** – spreading rumours, posting derogatory messages online, creating hate pages about a current or former partner, posting images without permission
- **Impersonation** – using a person's social media account without their permission
 - Deleting contacts or comments, or messaging friends
- **Stalking** – Closely following the online activity of the target
 - e.g., Creating a fake social media account and befriend the partner to learn more about them

Prevalence of CDV

- Studies suggest 12% to 56% of adolescents experienced CDV (Stonard et al., 2014; Zweig et al., 2013)
 - 10% to 20% engaged in CDV (Peskin et al., 2017)
- **Non-sexual CDV is twice as common as sexual CDV**
- Comparisons with traditional teen dating violence
 - Rates of CDV are comparable to rates of physical dating violence
 - **CDV often co-occurs with other forms of teen dating violence**
 - Studies have found as much as a 50% overlap between CDV and teen dating violence
 - Those who experience sexual CDV are 7x more likely to experience sexual coercion, suggesting that there may be overlap in the nature of experiences



Impact of CDV

CDV can have devastating impacts on youth wellbeing and development.

- There are unique characteristics within the digital environment that can worsen impact of CDV, such as:
 - **Accessibility** – greater access to partner
 - **Monitoring** – greater ability to follow partner without their knowledge
 - Greater ability to abuse partner in front of a **potentially anonymous, potentially unlimited audience**
 - **Permanency** – Often difficult to remove content online
 - Opportunities to experience victimization over and over
- Overall, females report greater distress from experiences of CDV than males (Deans & Bhogal, 2019)

What Can Be Done?

Things for Educators to Do

- Challenge beliefs about controlling and monitoring behaviours
 - These behaviours should not be seen as normative. Make sure that students know that these are warning signs for worse behaviour. Try implementing anonymous surveys to address students' attitudes/perceived prevalence of CDV in their school, and then discuss results in class
- Create a safe and inclusive 'space' where youth feel like they can comfortably talk about their experiences
- Potential activities for increased awareness:
 - Could implement a sharing box (online or offline) where students can anonymously write about their relationship concerns
 - **Note:** Keep educators' legal responsibility in mind. Ethically, students need to know about teacher/counsellor's duty to report any instances of violence or abuse
 - Peer mentor model – Have senior students come into younger students' classes to discuss CDV
 - Role play and dramatization (doesn't require direct communication or confrontation)
 - Modeling through expressions – music, drawing, painting, writing etc.

Things for Educators and Parents to Do

- **Emphasize characteristics and qualities of all healthy relationships** (both online and offline), such as:

1. Trust and Independence

- Accessibility beliefs: how easy it should be to contact a partner
- Risks of sharing passwords – advise youth to change them after a relationship ends
- Privacy measures on social media
- Being willing to let your partner be involved in their own interests without being present
- Healthy boundaries



2. Communication

- Appropriate frequency of communication
 - Daily contact is considered normal, vs. every hour or multiple times per hour being less healthy
- Appropriate responding rates
 - Read features on or off?
- Discuss healthy boundaries based on individual use patterns and reasonable expectations

3. Conflict Resolution

- Discuss non-aggressive ways of working out issues
- Go through hypothetical scenarios to practice skills
- Discuss constructive or assertive coping strategies
- Make sure youths know:
 - How to block people online or how/when to end a relationship
 - How to seek help from a trusted peer or adult when faced with CDV
- **Become familiar with technology that adolescents are using**
 - How they're using it, and the language they're using to communicate with others
 - This is extremely important for adults and caretakers to be able to intervene if needed, and to gain adolescents' confidence in their caretakers
 - Can learn with tools like Cyberbullying Primus (cyberbullying.primus.ca) and Media Smarts (mediasmarts.ca)
- **Increased knowledge of what CDV is, how it works and what it looks like -> Increased student willingness to share their experiences with parents and educators as a support outlet**

Things for Educators, Parents and Adolescents to Know

1. Warning signs for CDV

- a. Associations with experiences of CDV
 - Risky online activity (sexting, greater use of social media)
 - Greater experiences of sexual violence
 - Greater engagement in CDV (suggests a cyclical relationship)
 - Related to anxious attachment style
 - Increased depressive symptoms, anxiety
 - Poorer health quality of life (physical health, wellbeing, and relationships)
- b. Associations with engagement in CDV
 - Online aggression and jealousy
 - Traditional bullying
 - Delinquency

2. How to watch for atypical behaviour related to technology

- a. Is your friend/child withdrawn from technology or upset after using technology? This may indicate negative experiences online that could be CDV

3. How one can collect evidence of CDV from a partner without them knowing (e.g., the Vault app)

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