

KNOW2PROTECT®

CREATING A SAFE SPACE

*Ending Victim Blaming in Online
Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*



Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) is a serious and growing threat impacting kids and teens globally across digital platforms. It is critical for parents and trusted adults to create an environment where young people feel safe to disclose their experiences without fear of shame, blame and judgement.

Victim blaming — holding kids and teens partially or fully responsible for their victimization — undermines the CSEA-prevention framework, which emphasizes protection, support and empowerment. This harmful mindset stems from misconceptions about responsibility and morality, but in cases of online exploitation, the responsibility lies solely with the perpetrator.¹ Parents and trusted adults must ensure that kids and teens who disclose abuse are heard, believed and protected.

Eliminate guilt and shame for online CSEA victims by following the **Rethink, Rework, Reword** framework:

RETHINK



- **Reflect:** How you see the victim affects how you respond. Instead of thinking the victim is weak or to blame, recognize they are vulnerable and not at fault. This helps you avoid blaming them.²
- **Shift Your Mindset:** Trust what the kid or teen tells you. Respond with empathy and without making assumptions.
- **Remove Bias:** Be aware of stereotypes or ideas promoted by the entertainment industry and social media that could influence your opinion or lead you to make assumptions.
- **Be Open-Minded:** Listen carefully and support the kid or teen who has come to you for help and advice.



¹ *Victim Blaming* | Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton

² *Communicating with children* | Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse



REWORK



- **Learn:** Understand how online child sexual exploitation happens and how predators target and manipulate kids and teens. This knowledge helps you recognize warning signs to better support kids and teens who come to you for help.
- **Stay Calm:** How you react matters. An overly reactive response, either physically or verbally, may reinforce a kid or teen's reluctance to come forward. Responding calmly helps gain trust, makes kids and teens feel safe and empowers them to come forward for help.
- **Make it Safe:** Create an environment where kids and teens feel comfortable and know they won't be criticized, blamed or judged when they come to you. Promote empathy, trust and mutual respect. Engage with them attentively, without distractions, and talk side by side. Establish a "listen first, don't get mad" rule to reduce fear and encourage them to seek help.
- **Provide Support and Reassurance:** Let kids and teens know you are there for them and they are not alone. It is important that they feel hopeful and trust that you will support them through what comes next.

REWORD



- **Watch Your Words:** Focus on what happened to the kid or teen rather than what they did; ask questions to understand the actions of the perpetrator.
- **Pay Attention to Body Language:** Your non-verbal reactions matter. Keep your physical reactions calm and supportive. For example, use a gentle tone, keep your posture relaxed and offer a reassuring smile. These actions convey empathy and support.
- **Use Helpful Phrases:** Have a few supportive phrases ready so you can respond in a caring way.



AVOID



USE

"Why did you send the picture in the first place?"	"This is not your fault."
"Why did you not say something sooner?"	"Thank you for telling me about this."
"Are you being honest with me about how this happened?"	"Tell me about how this happened."
"You should not have trusted that person."	"Thank you for trusting me with what has happened; you are not alone."
"At least it is not really you in the picture."	"I am sorry this has happened to you."

