

VIOLENCE IS PREVENTABLE

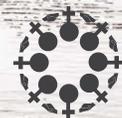
VIP

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR FACILITATORS

NAVIGATING UNHEALTHY DIGITAL RELATIONSHIPS



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BC Society of
Transition Houses



NAVIGATING UNHEALTHY DIGITAL RELATIONSHIPS

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NAVIGATING UNHEALTHY DIGITAL RELATIONSHIPS

The purpose of this guide is to support PEACE Programs in delivering the Violence Is Preventable (VIP) Program's *Navigating Unhealthy Digital Relationships curriculum*. These guidelines help lay the foundation for quality tech safety education for students in grades 6–12. This guide is intended to be used alongside the [*VIP Facilitator Guide*](#), which provides additional support for implementing VIP.

The *Navigating Unhealthy Digital Relationships: A Violence Is Preventable Curriculum* is designed for ease of use, offering modular lesson plans that can be seamlessly integrated into the existing VIP curriculum or delivered as a standalone presentation. It is grounded in the principles of healthy relationships and digital consent and reinforces that violence — whether experienced online or in person — is never the survivor's fault.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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BCSTH sincerely acknowledges and thanks the PEACE Program Counsellors who generously shared their expertise and insights to ensure this curriculum is practical, relevant, and valuable for all VIP facilitators.

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VIOLENCE IS PREVENTABLE **VIP** KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR FACILITATORS



NAVIGATING UNHEALTHY DIGITAL RELATIONSHIPS



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BCSTH gratefully acknowledges the funding and support of the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General which has also made the development and production of this curriculum possible.



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OVERVIEW

VIP'S NAVIGATING UNHEALTHY DIGITAL RELATIONSHIPS CURRICULUM

The BC Society of Transition Houses (BCSTH) *Navigating Unhealthy Digital Relationships* curriculum is part of the [Violence Is Preventable \(VIP\) program](#). It is designed to support [PEACE Program](#) counsellors in guiding students in grades 6–12 to examine how digital behaviours impact and intersect with relationships.

Through these presentations, counsellors will facilitate VIP lessons within their communities, helping students recognize the difference between healthy and unhealthy digital behaviours, understand digital consent, and learn how to seek help.

Purpose of the Curriculum

The curriculum aims to assist students to:

- **Identify Healthy and Unhealthy Digital Behaviours:** By looking at the impact of technology on relationships, students learn what healthy, respectful digital interactions are, like asking for consent and respecting boundaries.
- **Understand Digital Consent:** This is one of the big areas emphasized in the curriculum: how to know when to ask permission for the sharing of content, tracking, or messaging a partner.
- **Respond to Unhealthy Digital Behaviours:** Students learn the behaviours that constitute unhealthy digital relationships, including threats, harassment, tracking a person's location without their permission, and the distribution of intimate images without permission. They are equipped to identify and respond to such behaviours and ways to seek help.
- **Practice Safe Digital Break-Up Strategies:** Students will have tools for respectful and safe breakups online, minimizing potential risks when ending a relationship digitally.
- **Support Friends and Access Community Resources:** Help students understand ways to support friends who may be experiencing an unhealthy digital relationship. These resources are available through their community.



NAVIGATING UNHEALTHY DIGITAL RELATIONSHIPS

Key Messages of the Curriculum

The curriculum supports students to be able to make proactive, safe decisions independently while also seeking help. Messages include:

- **Violence is Not Your Fault, Online or Offline:** Reinforcing abuse, whether physical or digital, is never the survivor's fault and they deserve respect and safety in all interactions.
- **You Are Not Alone:** Let students know they aren't isolated in dealing with these challenges and that there are trusted adults, resources, and supportive friends they can turn to for help.
- **There is Help Available:** Students can be referred to counselling either locally, at school, or through the PEACE Program where counsellors can assist and help the individual student.

How to Use the Curriculum

PEACE Program counsellors are encouraged to use the *Navigating Unhealthy Digital Relationships* curriculum in a flexible, grab-and-go format, allowing them to tailor their approach to the unique needs of each school or group of students. This adaptability helps facilitators respond to shifting attention spans during presentations, enabling them to pivot from the original plan as needed.

Facilitators can deliver the curriculum as a complete series of sessions or select individual lesson plans that best suit the school community. Counsellors also have the option to mix and match lessons within the *Navigating Unhealthy Digital Relationships* curriculum to create customized presentations that address specific concerns or interests expressed by students and educators.

To accommodate time constraints, facilitators can modify lessons by removing certain parts as needed. Additionally, counsellors can integrate specific lessons into the existing *Violence Is Preventable* (VIP) curriculum, enriching sessions with digital safety topics to expand on what is already covered in VIP.

This adaptable approach ensures that PEACE counsellors can effectively address unhealthy digital relationships in a way that is relevant, accessible, and impactful for students in grades 6–12. The curriculum equips PEACE Program counsellors to help students navigate digital interactions in relationships responsibly, fostering awareness, respect, and the knowledge to recognize unhealthy digital behaviours and seek support. Through these interactive presentations, PEACE Program counsellors create a safe space for open discussions, empowering students to feel informed and supported in their digital lives.

For more information on how to deliver VIP, see the [Violence Is Preventable Facilitator's Guide](#).



PRINCIPLES OF TECH SAFETY WORK

APPROACH TO DELIVERING UNHEALTHY DIGITAL RELATIONSHIPS PRESENTATIONS

Students impacted by unhealthy digital relationships are at the heart of our work. To support them, we integrate the core principles of the [National Network to End Domestic Violence's](#) Safety Net Project into our survivor-centered, trauma-informed presentation approach. The four core principles are:

1. Technology isn't the problem. Abuse is.

Technology is only one tool of many that can be used by an abusive partner or friend to exert power and control. Yet, at the same time, technology is also used by young people affected by abuse to enhance and maintain safety, decrease isolation, and empower themselves. Technology provides new tools for old behaviours of causing harm to maintain power and control. While technology can facilitate abuse, it is these deliberately abusive and unhealthy behaviours that are the problem, not technology itself.

2. Students impacted by relationship violence have a right to technology.

Taking away technology is not the solution to digital dating abuse and other unhealthy digital relationships. Keeping in mind technology is not the problem, those working to respond to unhealthy digital relationships must recognize that restricting tech will not stop abuse. It can cut off crucial lifelines and harm reduction tools, such as emergency services or a phone to stay connected to their communities. With a full understanding that technology occupies space in lives and societies, work concerning tech safety must seek to encourage safer uses of technologies that respect agency and dignity.

3. Abusive people should be held accountable.

Digital dating violence is caused by an abusive partner. It can also be confusing if a "friend" is the perpetrator of an unhealthy digital friendship. It is critical that facilitators not advise students to get rid of their technology as this can reinforce victim-blaming narratives (e.g., it's her fault for sending those pictures) and draw on shame and judgment that may (re)traumatize the young person affected by abuse or online harms. When an abusive partner or friend decides to misuse their phone to send threatening text messages or phone calls, it is illegal. The student affected by relationship violence is not to blame for an abusive person's misuse of technology.

These principles are adapted from with permission, Cahill, R.; Wong, R. & Hoogendam, R. (2024).

*["Insights Into Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: A Survey of Women's Shelters and Transition House Workers Across Canada."](#)
Ottawa, ON: Women's Shelters Canada*



NAVIGATING UNHEALTHY DIGITAL RELATIONSHIPS

4. Looking at unhealthy digital relationships through an intersectional lens.

The same power dynamics found within societies replicate themselves in digital spaces or can be expressed using technology as a tool to reproduce violence and power imbalances. That means that the way that students experience violence is intimately tied to their identity, and therefore varied experiences of violence need to be considered. Further, it means there is a need to consider gender-based violence (GBV) and in this context, digital dating violence and unhealthy digital relationships, through an intersectional lens. This lens must consider, among other components of identity, race, and experiences with systemic racism, age, geographic location, sexual orientation, class and economic marginalization, citizenship status, and experiences with colonization.

These principles are adapted from with permission, Cahill, R.; Wong, R. & Hoogendam, R. (2024).

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UNDERSTANDING

STUDENTS & UNHEALTHY BEHAVIOURS FACILITATED THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Unhealthy behaviours that might be facilitated through technology, such as tracking someone's location or sending hundreds of text messages, do not always feel particularly harmful to students. Such actions can feel like care, protection, or even normal in today's digital world - especially since our devices come pre-equipped to harass and stalk. Here are a few reasons why students may not recognize them as unhealthy:

Normalization of Cultural Connection: With social media and messaging apps, it is normal and expected for students to be in constant contact. While regular check-ins or even frequent texts may seem like a sign of affection or closeness, they often can be overwhelming and intrusive.

Misinterpreting Control for Care: Location tracking or constant messaging is sometimes framed as "staying safe" or "looking out for each other." Students may interpret these behaviours as indicative of love or concern, rather than as precursors to controlling or manipulative patterns.

Pressure to Respond and Engage: Many students feel the need to be available and responsive online. Not responding to messages or denying location access can sometimes create tension or lead to accusations of disinterest. As a result, students may engage in or allow excessive communication to maintain peace in a relationship.

Lack of experience with boundaries: Students may not have experiences that allow them to gauge when boundaries are being crossed. They may not view constant tracking or messaging as a violation of privacy, especially if similar behaviours are shown in the media or among their peers.

Open discussions about such behaviours through VIP help students understand the thin line between healthy and unhealthy digital interactions and help them realize their right to privacy and boundaries in a relationship.



NAVIGATING UNHEALTHY DIGITAL RELATIONSHIPS

GUIDELINES

DELIVERING VIP'S NAVIGATING UNHEALTHY DIGITAL RELATIONSHIPS CURRICULUM

Preparation: Plan for logistical needs of the workshop: location, materials, audio, and internet setup. Also, plan the support that will be in place during the session. Study the material and prepare a list of local resources that students can draw on for support.

Allow Silence: The nature of some material may be difficult, and participants may want to mull over things. Aim to be comfortable with the silence, people may just need a minute for reflection before speaking.

Follow the Lead of the Audience: Engage the audience with open-ended questions. Guide their responses with follow-up questions and add examples of relevance to the community or pop culture to make the topic relatable. Present the material in your style.

Support Strong Reactions: It is normal for participants to have strong reactions to the content whether they have lived in an unhealthy relationship or not. If a participant appears visibly upset, ask what they need to feel safe, listen empathetically, validate their feelings, and offer resources in their local community.

Handle Personal Sharing Respectfully: If a participant shares a personal story, thank them for their openness, acknowledge their experience, and gently steer the conversation back to the group discussion. Follow up with the student and/or their teacher to determine if there is a disclosure that needs to be addressed.

Address Victim-Blaming Comments: If at any point someone makes a victim-blaming comment, remind the group that leaving an unhealthy or abusive relationship is often complicated and dangerous. Open a discussion by asking others to share why they think leaving might be hard or unsafe. Remind them that this workshop will help them learn how to identify the red and green flags in any relationship.

Promote Inclusivity: Make it clear that signs of an unhealthy relationship can happen in any kind of relationship, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. Use gender-neutral language and include all kinds of relationships - romantic, friendly, or familial - to show that unhealthy dynamics can exist in various relationships.

Lead with Confidence: You do not have to be a technology expert. Be prepared with a list of resources so you can refer participants to appropriate help if they have questions outside of your expertise. However, these moments can be an opportunity for engagement as students may choose to show you the phone, app or platforms they use and how they work during your presentation.

These guidelines will help in making the environment supportive, respectful, and engaging for participants while engaging in sensitive topics around unhealthy digital relationships and relationship health.



CURRICULUM

THE VIP UNHEALTHY DIGITAL RELATIONSHIPS CURRICULUM, SCHOOLS & THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & CHILD CARE'S BC CURRICULUM

Considerations for Delivering VIP to Different Grades

Even when the subject remains the same, delivering a VIP unhealthy digital relationship presentation to grade 6 and 7 students differs significantly from presenting to grade 8-12 students. Grade 6 and 7 students are typically at the stage of beginning to explore the concept of relationships. For this younger audience, the focus should be on building foundational knowledge about healthy relationships, boundaries, and respect in digital spaces. Facilitators can ask the group for examples they have come across or use examples that resonate with their experiences, such as discussing how to manage friendships online, responding to teasing, or avoiding oversharing personal information. Activities about setting boundaries in a group chat or discussing the implications of sharing a funny but embarrassing photo can help them understand these concepts in a relatable way.

In contrast, students in grades 8-12 are more likely to have been in or currently be in, romantic relationships, which means their engagement with the material tends to be more personal and reflective. For these students, facilitators can delve deeper into topics like recognizing red flags in digital communication, understanding consent in online interactions, and safely navigating breakups in a digital context. Examples might include analyzing text message exchanges to identify unhealthy behaviours, discussing the consequences of sharing intimate images or exploring strategies for blocking and reporting abusive online behaviours. This age group benefits from open discussions that allow them to share their experiences and seek advice, making it essential for facilitators to create a safe and non-judgmental environment for these conversations.

The Navigating Unhealthy Digital Relationships VIP Curriculum is aligned with the Ministry of Education and Child Care (MECC) [Physical and Health Education \(PHE\)](#) curriculum, [Social Justice 12 Curriculum](#), and the [Digital Literacy Framework \(DLF\)](#) and the [Core Competencies | Building Student Success - B.C. Curriculum](#) filling an important gap in existing violence prevention programs for children and students.



THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & CHILD CARE'S BC CURRICULUM

THE BIG IDEAS & CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES

- Healthy relationships can help us lead rewarding and fulfilling lives. (Grades 8-9)
- Healthy choices influence, and are influenced by, our physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing. (Grade 10)

Curricular Competencies

- Identify and describe strategies for avoiding and/or responding to potentially unsafe, abusive, and exploitative situations. (Grades 5-7)
- Describe and apply strategies for developing and maintaining healthy relationships. (Grade 7)
- Propose strategies for developing and maintaining healthy relationships. (Grades 8-9)
- Propose strategies for avoiding and/or responding to potentially unsafe, abusive, and exploitative situations. (Grades 8-9)
- Propose strategies for avoiding and responding to potentially unsafe, abusive, or exploitative situations. (Grade 10)
- Develop skills for maintaining healthy relationships and responding to interpersonal conflict. (Grade 10)
- Analyze the potential effects of social influences on health. (Grade 10)
- Create and evaluate strategies for managing physical, emotional, and social changes during puberty and adolescence. (Grade 10)
- Analyze strategies for responding to discrimination, stereotyping, and bullying. (Grade 10)

SOCIAL JUSTICE 12 BIG IDEAS

- Social justice issues are interconnected.
- The causes of social injustice are complex and have lasting impacts on society.

Social Justice 12 Curricular Competencies

- Self-identity and an individual's relationship to others.
- Make reasoned ethical judgements about controversial actions in the past or present after taking into consideration the context, and standards surrounding right and wrong.



DIGITAL LITERACY FRAMEWORK

- Digital Citizenship: Students understand human, cultural, and societal issues related to technology and practice legal and ethical behaviour.

Digital Literacy Framework Profiles

- Evaluate digital resources to determine the credibility of the author and publisher and the timeliness and accuracy of the content. (Grade 6-9)
- Select and use the appropriate tools and digital resources to accomplish a variety of tasks and to solve problems. (Grade 6-9)
- Analyze the capabilities and limitations of current and emerging technology resources and assess their potential to address personal, social, lifelong learning, and career needs. (Grade 10-12)
- Model legal and ethical behaviours when using information and technology by properly selecting, acquiring, and citing resources. (Grade 10-12)



ADDITIONAL VIP RESOURCES

- **BC Society of Transition Houses' [VIP Facilitators Guide](#)** provides VIP facilitators with information on:
 - Tips to working with schools
 - Delivering VIP Presentations
 - Feedback Surveys
 - Cultural Safety Resources and Considerations when Delivering VIP
- **Tech Safety Canada is a website** full of resources and toolkits that address technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Toolkits of interest are:
 - [Supporting Teens' Experiencing of Digital Dating Violence Toolkit](#)
 - [Teen Digital Dating Violence Toolkit](#)
- **Tech Safety Canada [Digital Breakup Tool](#)** is an interactive tool designed to raise awareness and understanding of the various digital platforms a current or former partner might have access to and provides guidance on how to secure them against potential tech abuse former partner after a breakup. Some of these steps can be used before a breakup or part of steps within your safety plan.
- **BC Society of Transition Houses' [Compass Tool](#)** is a resource guide that points survivors and those supporting survivors of non-consensual image sharing to information and possible remedies.
- **Digital Literacy Videos from the BC Society of Transition Houses** will help discuss:
 - [Securing your location settings](#)
 - [Video Screen Recording](#)
 - [How to Block Phone Numbers](#)
 - [3 Ways to increase password security](#)
 - [Securing your cloud](#)
 - [How to report abusive accounts and content comment](#)
- **[Take It Down](#)** is a service that can help remove online nude, partially nude, or sexually explicit photos and videos taken before you were 18.
- **[Take Back Your Images](#)** is the BC government website that provides information for those who have had their intimate images shared or threatened to be shared.

