

# Intimate Deepfakes of, and by, Youth



PROBLEM OF  
PRACTICE

Intimate deepfakes are AI-generated images and videos that show real people partly or fully naked, engaging in sexual acts, or both. Public and private figures have been victims of intimate deepfakes, including students both in Canada and abroad, reaching crisis proportions when deepfake functionality was added to X's "Grok" chatbot.<sup>1</sup>

Educational institutions face a critical gap between current AI policies—which often focus narrowly on academic cheating—and the ways students use generative AI for image-based sexual abuse. According to US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, digital image-based abuse "parallels the same exact intention of physical rape and sexual assault."<sup>2</sup>

- **Perspective of Affected Youth:** Victims describe finding their likeness in AI-generated pornography as an "out-of-body experience"<sup>3</sup> and feel as though they the deepfake is "a picture of an assault."<sup>4</sup> Even if the images are debunked as fake, the "impression still lasts,"<sup>5</sup> causing profound social rupture, isolation, and a loss of the ability to trust.
- **Perspective of Producers:** Among the small percentage of youth creating these images, motivations range from sexual curiosity and pleasure-seeking to revenge and peer pressure.<sup>6</sup> Many justify their actions by claiming the imagery is "not real" or merely a "legitimate sexual fantasy," often failing to see their subjects as fully human.<sup>7</sup> Making intimate deepfakes now requires little technical skill; apps for making them are widely available and there is now "an underground economy, hosting tailor-made tools and for-hire services" and providing an opportunity for makers of deepfakes to trade techniques.

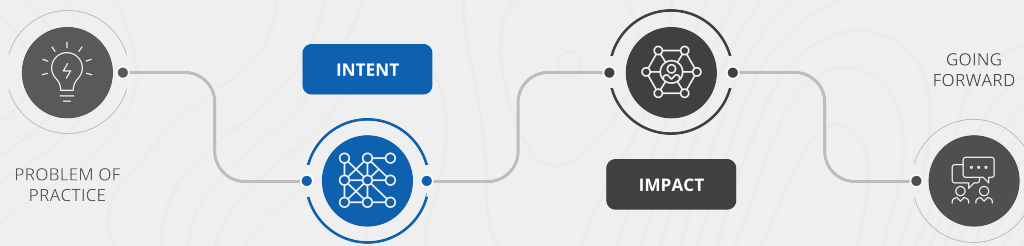


Canada's Centre  
for Digital Media  
Literacy

Organization: **Media Smarts**  
Province: Canada  
Date: **2026**  
Lead: Matthew Johnson, Director of  
Education

## Intimate Deepfakes of, and by, Youth. Media Smarts

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# Intent

MediaSmarts' initiatives to address intimate deepfakes seek to foster digital citizenship and a "digital sexual ethics" mindset. Rather than relying on ineffective deterrent-based approaches or abstinence-only messaging, the goal is to ground AI literacy in the realities of teens' social experiences.

To do this, MediaSmarts implemented a multi-pronged pedagogical framework:

## Pedagogical Approaches:

- **Deconstruct Justifications:** MediaSmarts draws on existing research into sexting and sext-sharing,<sup>9</sup> noting that youth who share non-consensual images often use the same "moral disengagement" mechanisms as those creating deepfakes.<sup>10</sup>
- **Challenge Gender Norms:** Question the double standards that often target women and girls in image-based abuse.
- **Promote Positive Social Norms and Challenge Pluralistic Ignorance:** Similar to cyberbullying and the non-consensual sharing of sexts, making and distributing intimate deepfakes is both less common and less widely accepted than many youth believe: fewer than one in 5 youth have created an intimate deepfake, and 84% agree that deepfakes cause harm to the people portrayed in them.<sup>11</sup>
- **Address "Empathy Traps":** Identify characteristics of digital media—such as anonymity and a lack of facial cues—that prevent youth from perceiving the harm they cause.
- **Promote Consent:** Teach that consent in an online context must be active, informed, and specific, rather than assumed, and that the right to give or withhold consent never goes away.
- **Empower Victims:** Provide clear, non-shaming pathways for victims to document evidence, issue takedown notices, and seek legal recourse.

## Educational Resources:

- **The Parent Network Workshop:** Provides parents with strategies to discuss influencer-style parasocial tactics and set healthy device boundaries.
- **Talking to Kids About AI tipsheet:** Encourages "joint inquiry" where parents and youth explore AI tools together to de-mystify the technology.
- **Resilience Through DigitalSmarts:** Supports survivors of technology-facilitated violence against women in dealing with a range of related issues, including intimate deepfakes.
- **Specific lesson plans like "There's No Excuse" and "Online Relationships: Respect and Consent"** deliver the educational messages identified above, integrated into broader discussions of sexting and consent.

## 2. | Intimate Deepfakes of, and by, Youth. Media Smarts

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# Impact

Parent resources were promoted on the first annual Canadian AI Literacy Day, while classroom resources have been integrated into MediaSmarts' Digital Media Literacy Framework and included in resource packages for school boards and ministries of education across Canada. Outcome data and classroom feedback provide early indicators of a shift in school digital culture:

- **Reach:** Guidance on addressing intimate deepfakes has been delivered to more than 1000 parents as part of the "The Parent Network" workshop.



More than 48 practitioners were trained in the Resilience Through DigitalSmarts resources and 87 workshops in that series have been delivered, reaching over 110 survivors. An evaluation of the latter program found that it increased knowledge and/or skills in 98% of survivors and led to behaviour change in 92%.<sup>12</sup>

- **Empowered Reporting:** Students become aware of their rights and pathways for help.
- **Social Norming:** Making youth aware that most of their peers agree that deepfakes cause harm helps educators challenge the minority of producers by showing their behavior is not a socially accepted "prank."
- **Identifying "Sneaky Excuses":** Through educational videos like *It's Real to Me* and *She Knew the Risks*, students become proficient at identifying and countering the four common excuses used to ignore consent: denying harm, justifying harm, shifting responsibility, and blaming the victim.
- **Implementation in Multiple Settings:** As well as being delivered in our standard PDF lesson plan format, the lessons are delivered through our new online textbooks on the Pressbooks platform. Customized versions have been created and delivered for specific school boards.

 <b>IF KIDS SAY...</b>  "Making a deepfake of someone isn't a big deal. It's not like it's a real picture."	 <b>YOU CAN SAY...</b>  "Not everyone who sees it will know that. And even if they do, it's still hurtful and humiliating to have a picture like that made of you."
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### 3. | Intimate Deepfakes of, and by, Youth. Media Smarts



# Impact

## Professional Learning insights

### What Worked Well:

- **Role-Playing and Perspective Taking:** Resources that allowed students to see from the perspective of a victim of intimate deepfakes helped to challenge moral disengagement mechanisms.
- **Collective Resilience:** Participants described how the interactive format of the resources created space for shared experience and discussion, which not only deepened understanding of the program material but also strengthened survivors' sense of safety and connection.
- **Media Creation:** Resources for both students and survivors of technology-facilitated violence against women included media-making through *digital storytelling*. This was highly engaging for participants and helped to promote a sense of empowerment.

### What Could Be Improved:

- **Administrative Guidance:** Teachers report "inconsistency and uncertainty" in handling incidents due to a lack of clear guidance from school boards.
- **Gendered Drivers:** There is a need for more explicit deconstruction of "toxic geek masculinity" and gender-related double standards that portray girls as being responsible for the consequences of their online presence.



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# Going Forward

GOING  
FORWARD

The project aims to scale by integrating deepfake literacy into standard technology and communication courses.



## Next Steps

- **Digital Storytelling:** Scaling the use of the **Digital Story Maker** tool to allow students and survivors to create their own narratives about digital consent and respect.
- **Chilling Effect Mitigation:** Investigating how image-based abuse discourages women from entering public professions and developing strategies to protect their **participation in society**.

## Additional Resources/Links

- [Online Relationships: Respect and Consent](#)
- [Navigating Digital Media Literacy](#) online textbook
- [Resilience Through DigitalSmarts](#)
- [Talking to Kids About AI](#)

## Footnotes

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9. Johnson, M., Mishna F., Okumu M., & Daciuk J. (2018) Non-Consensual Sharing of Sexts: Behaviours and Attitudes of Canadian Youth. MediaSmarts.
10. (2025) Deepfake nudes & young people. Thorn.
11. (2025) Deepfake nudes & young people. Thorn.
12. MediaSmarts. (2026). Building Resilience through DigitalSmarts: Methods, Outcomes and Lessons Learned from Developing and Delivering a Trauma-and Violence-Informed Digital Media Literacy Program.

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