Helping Canadian adults navigate their wired world
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Hello,

The Internet provides us with amazing opportunities to explore, connect and learn. It has opened up a world of possibilities, changed the way we live and communicate and is now intrinsically linked to all aspects of our daily lives. It is important for adults to know how to use the Internet in a safe and positive manner, and TELUS takes responsibility for setting clear and simple guidelines for the technology tools we enable.

We are honoured to partner with the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto to offer all Canadian adults a hands-on guide to Internet use. The guide provides tips and insights on using the Internet for education, in the workplace and in relationships. It also touches on critical social aspects, such as the impact of the Internet on marginalized populations, online addictions and compulsions, and cyberbullying.

I hope you find this guide easy to use and I encourage you to discuss it with your friends and family.

Regards,

Andrea Goertz

Executive sponsor of TELUS WISE
Chief Communications and Sustainability Officer,
TELUS
The Internet has dramatically changed our world. A new digital landscape has been created, altering how we communicate, learn, work, give and receive help, and enjoy entertainment. We are now connected to devices 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year. The online world has become an extension of our offline world and travels everywhere with us through mobile technology. People of all ages and demographics use the Internet, making it central and influential in the lives of children, teenagers, young adults (e.g., college and university students), adults in the workforce and at home, and older adults.

New websites and platforms are developed every day, with no signs of slowing down, bringing us tremendous benefits. These changes in our communications and interactions can also carry some risks.

A wealth of knowledge exists on how children and teenagers use the Internet, along with the associated benefits and risks. The same is not true for adults. In today’s world, however, it is essential that everyone is competent in using the Internet and aware of the possible benefits and risks. This knowledge is critical for adults, so they can enjoy safe and productive Internet use, and provide guidance to younger generations.

To increase adults’ knowledge of Internet use, TELUS and the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto have created this guide. We discuss the various ways the Internet influences how adults learn, work, are entertained, and relate to friends, family, and romantic partners. Because individuals face particular issues according to their age and social location, we provide an overview of the benefits, risks and issues as well as tips for staying safe that are customized for young adults, adults in the workforce, adults who are vulnerable and marginalized, parents, and older adults.

Regards,

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Introduction

The Internet has built and strengthened connections and increased access to information. Adults of all ages use the Internet to maintain relationships with friends and family. Combining online communication with offline interactions can enhance the quality of all relationships.¹

Many young adults have never known a world without the Internet. Ingrained in their daily lives, the Internet can be particularly important for young adults, allowing them to access social support regardless of their physical location. This is especially valuable during the transition from adolescence to adulthood, when many young people leave their families of origin to pursue employment opportunities, postsecondary education, or travel. The Internet can facilitate this transition by enabling contact with the youth’s families while forging ahead independently.

The Internet benefits families with young children and teenagers, by allowing them to effortlessly coordinate daily activities and communicate even when separated.² Parents can stay apprised of their children’s educational aspirations and accomplishments by easily communicating with teachers and school staff.³ Some parents elect to make use of a global positioning system (GPS) to monitor the whereabouts and security of their children.⁴

In contrast to concerns that the Internet creates distance and isolation among family members, research indicates that families often use the Internet together and share their online experiences.⁵ Moreover, the Internet allows extended families to stay involved and connected regardless of their physical location. In addition to the clear benefits of connecting and communicating among family members, the Internet provides parents ready access to social support and resources related to the parenting experience.⁶

The Internet can be a particularly effective tool to close generation gaps and promote understanding and communication among family members of various ages.⁷ Older adults can use the Internet to communicate and coordinate with family members as well as friends, community members, and health care and social service providers.⁸ The Internet offers a wealth of resources that older adults can access in order to maximize their personal health and quality of life.⁹ Another benefit

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of regular Internet use for older adults is its association with cognitive enhancement and improved functioning.\textsuperscript{10}

While the Internet on the one hand opens up extraordinary ways to communicate and stay informed, Internet usage can also lead to a lack of involvement in the offline world, thus increasing social isolation.\textsuperscript{11} Moreover, the fewer available social cues and norms in Internet environments can increase the likelihood of misunderstanding others’ intentions and of inadvertently offending friends, family members and others.\textsuperscript{12}


\textsuperscript{12} Reich, S. M., Subrahmanyan, K., & Espinoza, G. (2012). Friending, IMing, and Hanging Out Face-to-Face: Overlap in Adolescents’ Online and Offline Social Networks. Developmental Psychology, 48(2), 356-368. doi: 10.1037/a0026980
The Internet in all aspects of our adult lives

**Education**

The Internet enriches the learning experiences of young adults in college or university through a wealth of educational resources, such as books, journal articles, and video lectures. Technology promotes interaction in classrooms and in distance learning settings, facilitating communication between faculty and students and preparing students to utilize technology in professional settings. The use of social media in distance learning has facilitated increased collaboration, communication, and interaction through online activities such as blogging, networking and tweeting. Moreover, open access online lectures and courses allow young adults across the world to engage in learning opportunities far beyond graduation.

**The workplace**

The Internet has extended the universal reach of companies and institutions around the globe, creating massive economic benefits. Individuals have benefitted through greater career opportunities made available through job search websites (e.g., Workopolis) and professional networking resources (e.g., LinkedIn).

The Internet creates greater connectivity and productivity within workplaces, facilitating instant and efficient communication among colleagues. Email, online messaging, virtual meetings, and video conferencing are just a few examples of how the Internet has forever changed workplaces. The Internet allows adults working in diverse sectors to complete tasks with greater ease and produce higher quality work.

The flexibility afforded by the Internet allows employees to work from remote locations. Flexibility benefits both employees and employers, by decreasing stress, enhancing productivity and creativity, and improving work-life balance.

The technological revolution has introduced some challenges for employees and employers through the erosion of boundaries between work and personal spheres.

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Did you know?

The Internet has created new challenges for employers and employees working in professions that demand confidentiality. For example, helping professionals such as psychiatrists, family physicians, psychologists and social workers must now take great care in considering how sensitive and confidential information can be breached while using the Internet.
The Internet facilitates endless after-hours communication regarding work matters. Many adults respond to employers and colleagues instantly regardless of the time of day and possess an “always on” mentality. Employers can use the Internet in various ways, for example to monitor employees’ online activities in the workplace. Employees may experience work overload and suffer from fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and stress, while employers may witness decreases in productivity.

The search ability of the Internet allows employers, should they so choose, to discretely gather a vast amount of personal information about potential and current employees to inform hiring, promotion, and termination decisions. This decreases employees’ control over managing the impression they exude. Employers may discover personal information about their employees even if they do not actively seek this information. In a recent example, a female news reporter confronted several men who were directing hostile comments toward her while she was on air. As a result of social media, the news clip quickly went viral and sparked widespread outrage. One of the men was identified and subsequently lost his job.

The Internet and romantic relationships

The Internet can play a critical role between adult romantic partners and can represent either a source of support or tension. Particularly beneficial for long distance relationships, it enables individuals to coordinate activities and extend important offline conversations, such as expressing care or resolving arguments.

More recently, adults have begun using the Internet to engage in sexting, or in other words to send sexually suggestive texts, images, or videos to one another. A phenomenon that has gained substantial attention in recent years, sexting occurs among youth, young adults and older adults, including married couples, dating adults, and those not in a relationship. Since 2012, sexting has been on the rise among adults and may be used as a means of sexual expression or because of a mutual interest between exclusive romantic partners.

Did you know?

Approximately one in five young adult women and three-quarters of young adult men report that they have sexted.
Sexting can be risky and harmful. Adults may pressure or coerce their romantic partners and others to send sexual content. Women are more likely to be pressured or coerced into sending intimate content via the Internet. Moreover, the risks can exist even without such pressure or intent. Whether consensual or coerced, once a sext is shared, a digital record of the sext is created. These images or videos exist permanently in the cyber world and can be shared beyond the intended audience, or may be accessed by a stranger through hacking or other means.

Sexts that are shared consensually between romantic partners can be used in harmful ways at a later point in time, such as following an argument or relationship breakdown. “Revenge porn” — also known as “nonconsensual pornography,” “cyber rape,” or “involuntary porn” — is a form of sexual assault that involves the distribution of sexually explicit images or videos without the consent of the person depicted. The original images or videos may be acquired consensually while the individuals are romantically involved. Following relationship strain or a breakup, one of the partners circulates the images or videos for the purpose of humiliating the individual depicted. Especially frightening and dangerous, this person may release the images or videos together with identifying information about the victimized person including home address, email and telephone number, with an explicit or implicit suggestion that others approach, scare, and perhaps hurt the victim offline. Males are more likely to forward sexts sent to them and to perpetrate “revenge porn,” while the vast majority of victims of “revenge porn” are female. Approximately 75–90% of victims are female.

The consequences of “revenge porn” can be severe. Victims suffer greatly, often experiencing mental health problems such as emotional distress and anxiety as well as loss of professional and educational opportunities.

The Internet extends both the positive and negative aspects of romantic relationships into the cyber context. It is important not to attribute the negative aspects solely to the Internet. Violence in romantic or intimate relationships has long been documented as a problem in societies, and with the Internet, relationship violence now also occurs in the online world.

Examples of how the Internet can be used to perpetrate intimate partner violence:
- Checking and scrutinizing a partner’s messages without permission
- Excessive monitoring of the partner’s whereabouts
- Demanding passwords to online accounts

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
Sharing private or embarrassing images or videos of a partner
Threatening a partner if she/he does not respond
Restricting a partner’s Internet use46

The Internet can extend the control of a violent partner and provide a new avenue for individuals to engage in abusive behavior.

The Internet and marginalized populations

The Internet can improve the quality of life for adults who are vulnerable and marginalized, including individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or questioning (LGBTQ), individuals living with mental or physical health challenges, and individuals with disabilities.47,48 Adults who are marginalized because of perceived or actual aspects of their identity may find support systems in the online world that are absent in the offline world, which can reduce social isolation.49,50 The support systems developed via the Internet may help them to cope with experiences of discrimination or marginalization.

Paradoxically, while vulnerable and marginalized adults can find invaluable support systems through the Internet, they can also experience online hatred and aggression. Approximately 14,000 websites have been found with hate related content, which represents a six-fold increase since the year 2000.51 Aggressive acts may be directed toward others because of their race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or other real or perceived aspects of their identity.

Examples of bias-based cyber aggression include:

- Using the term “gay” as an insult in a public Facebook post following an argument.
- Creating a racist meme that plays on stereotypes of Canadians who recently immigrated.
- Distributing an email to classmates, calling the professor an inappropriate name and wondering why the university would “hire a girl to teach math.”

In some cases, bias-based cyber aggression falls within the scope of hate crime laws.52 Bias-based aggression threatens more than vulnerable and marginalized members of our society; it undermines and thus threatens Canadian values.53

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Compulsive use of the Internet

Internet use may become compulsive if usage occurs in an excessive or maladaptive fashion. Compulsive Internet users have little control over their usage and may experience symptoms of withdrawal when access is out of reach.55

Compulsive Internet use is a relatively new phenomenon with research suggesting that anywhere between 7% and 60% of the adult population struggles with it to some degree.56,57,58 Compulsive Internet use is detrimental to one’s health and psychosocial functioning, and can cause stress, insomnia, depression, social isolation and relationship problems.59,60

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is the use of the Internet to bully someone, or in other words, to intentionally act aggressively in order to hurt another person in some way.63

Cyberbullying can take many forms and occurs through various Internet mediums (e.g., email, instant messaging, and social media).

Some examples include:

- **Flaming:** sending rude, angry, or vulgar messages during an argument
- **Masquerading/Impersonating:** pretending to be someone and sharing information to damage the person’s reputation or relationships
- **Outing:** sharing sensitive or private information about a person to others
- **Exclusion:** deliberately leaving someone out of a group online
- **Trolling:** trying to create or encourage conflict through posting inflammatory statements for personal entertainment
- **Doxing:** researching and sharing someone’s personal details or contact information
- **Cyberstalking:** online stalking to instill fear and gain control over an individual
- **Denigrating:** damaging or defaming someone’s character online
- **Online harassment:** making false accusations and defaming/slandering another person’s character online

Like traditional offline bullying, cyberbullying results in harm or negative consequences for the victimized person. Also similar to the offline context, cyberbullying involves a power differential between the victimized individual and perpetrator. Whereas in the offline context, the power differential may be due to factors such as physical strength or social status, perpetrators of cyberbullying may be more powerful than their victims because of factors such as technological proficiency or the degree of anonymity afforded by the Internet.69,70

Individuals victimized by cyberbullying suffer consequences such as:

- Fear for emotional or physical safety
- Inability to concentrate
- Impaired interpersonal relationships
- Feeling powerless and haunted
- Diminished mental health71

Cyberbullying often feels impossible to escape. It can occur anywhere and anytime — at home, at work, at school, and in personal spaces.72 An infinite audience can witness the bullying, and a permanent digital record of the incident exists in cyberspace. When the perpetrator is unknown or anonymous, cyberbullying can be particularly frightening.73

Did you know?

- One in five undergraduate students has been cyberbullied.66
- Over 55% of undergraduate students report witnessing cyberbullying.65
- Of 120 undergraduate students in a United States university, 100% of male respondents knew someone who had been cyberbullied.66
- Within university settings, 44% of faculty and staff report experiencing cyberbullying victimization.67
- Cyberbullying rates are as high as 50% among employees in the workforce.68

The causes of suicide are complex. Experiencing cyberbullying may be a contributing factor in these tragedies. Other contributing factors might include pre-existing mental health issues, family problems, substance abuse, and/or systemic marginalization.74,75

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65 Ibid.
Tips for all adults

- Learn about emerging technologies to make sure you understand the benefits and risks of specific platforms.
- Stay up to date with privacy settings on social media websites, applications, and other programs. Privacy policies change frequently.
- Find a balance. The Internet has become all encompassing. Figure out a way that makes sense to you to balance work, school, and your personal life.
- As much as possible, restrict information to trusted individuals. An email or phone number on one website means it is accessible by anyone who wishes to access it.
- Google yourself every few months to make sure that you are content with your online image.
- Learn netiquette, or network etiquette. Demonstrate politeness, courtesy, and respect to others when interacting through the Internet. Be mindful that it is easy for others to misunderstand your intentions when using the Internet, especially because you have fewer social cues. For example, resist writing everything in capital letters or trying to convey sarcasm over text or e-mail — these can easily be misinterpreted.
- Do not let online information about personal health and wellbeing act as a substitute for advice from a physician or other helping professionals. It might be difficult to decipher the accuracy of information obtained online. Always consult with a physician or other helping professionals if you have a personal concern.
- Monitor how often you and your family and friends use the Internet. If compulsive use of the Internet is interfering with your life or the life of someone you care about, be proactive and seek help.

If you experience or witness cyber aggression, regardless of the platform

- Always disclose any questionable incidents online to a trusted friend or loved one. If unsure, contact authorities, such as the online provider, university or college administrators, employers, or the police, to discuss it with them. Silence will only empower the perpetrator.
- Experiencing cyberbullying and other forms of aggression while using the Internet can affect your relationships, social life and personal behaviours. The more your loved ones and acquaintances know, the more they can manage their own expectations and support you.
- Keep a record of everything, whether you experience or witness cyber aggression. This might be needed to talk with authorities (e.g., administration; employer; internet provider; police).
- Block the aggressor. If it is someone you know and trust, consider discussing it with them or, if it is someone you do not trust, take it to the authorities.
- Report the cyber aggression online. Websites have features that allow you to inform them of any rules of conduct being violated.
- Consult with an attorney in the event of serious incidents.
- Change your contact information — this may be a last resort, but changing your email address or phone number may be necessary in some cases.

**Tips for young adults**

**Be mindful of your online presence**
- Google yourself and carefully examine the search results. Keep an eye out for anything embarrassing or unprofessional that may give others a negative impression as you enter university, college, or the workforce. Take steps to remove or block the content.
- Develop and maintain a professional web presence. When someone Googles you, make sure it is your professional identity that is the first content they come across.
- Consider creating a professional web presence that is separate from your personal web presence. This may mean having separate social media accounts and email addresses for different purposes.
- Be conscious of who you are communicating with on social media. Interacting with professors, teaching assistants, employers and colleagues might be appropriate in certain circumstances, but inappropriate in others. Boundaries between your personal life and your professional life become important as you enter post-secondary school and the workforce.

**Sexting**
- Sexting is an increasingly common component of romantic relationships. Be prepared for this to come up in your current or next romantic relationship. Reflect on how you feel about sending and receiving intimate text, images, and videos.
- Know yourself. Learn to recognize when you feel distressed, uncomfortable, unsure, or pressured. If you feel this way when someone asks you for a sext or sends you an intimate text, image, or video, listen to your feelings. Only engage in sexting if you feel completely comfortable doing so.
- Releasing private photos without consent is illegal and unethical. If you receive a sext from someone, that does not give you the right to show it to anyone else. The person has not given consent for you to circulate it more broadly. The same applies to anyone you send a sext to. If you have not provided consent for it to be circulated, then it is illegal for the receiver to do so.
- Before sexting, consider that the image will be nearly impossible to completely erase. Ask yourself a few questions:
  - Are you feeling threatened, pressured, or coerced into sending the sext?
  - What is your relationship to the person who will receive the sext? Do you trust the person to keep the image or video private?
Using the Internet to access information

- Be critical of the information you come across online.
  - Some of the information you find might not be trustworthy. Moreover, it can be difficult to determine the accuracy of information online.
  - If you are using the Internet for school or work assignments, ensure that you use trusted sources for high-quality information. Only use these sources and remember to cite the original author.

Tips for adults in the workforce

- When working from home, ensure you have an area to work that is separate from the space you typically use to relax and spend time with family and friends.
- Find a way to switch off and psychologically detach from work. This is necessary in order for adults of all ages to develop a healthy distance from work, maintain health and well-being, and sustain performance capabilities.
- Make sure you take care of yourself to balance the demands of work. Find an activity that helps you relax and disengage from work matters.
- Many adults are required to sit for a large part of the day while working on a computer or meeting in person or via teleconference. Physical activity is vital for maintaining health and mental health. Try to get up from your desk throughout the day to stretch and walk around. When you return home, consider doing a physical activity to relax (e.g., a walk) rather than relaxing with the Internet.
- Cyber aggression can occur in the workplace. Report any incidents to a trusted colleague, human resources, or management. Consider approaching your union, where applicable, or seeking legal advice if the aggression continues.
- Maintain a record of any work-related emails or cyber communications that make you feel upset, uncomfortable, or threatened. The Internet allows you to easily save proof of any troubling interactions. This proof will be important should you decide to report the issue.
- Remember that all of your Internet-facilitated communications with colleagues, employers, and employees can be saved in perpetuity. Be mindful and ensure that you do not write anything that could be construed as mean-spirited, sarcastic, or aggressive. Even if someone sends you something hurtful or offensive, do not respond in kind.
- Be aware of any policies that your workplace might have regarding appropriate use of the Internet. Ensure that you read and fully understand the policies. Advocate for change if you feel the policies are outdated or irrelevant.

Tips for adults with children

- Be aware of what your children are doing while using the Internet.
- Engage in open and honest communication about the Internet giving equal weight to the pros and cons involved.
- Watch the television shows, YouTube videos, and movies that your children watch. Be conscious of how their Internet use is depicted in these media and how the characters respond to troubling situations online. This is important as
there are more and more shows that depict potentially risky Internet use (e.g., sexting) as common and without consequence.

- Work to find a balance between vigilantly monitoring children’s Internet use and allowing your child the freedom to engage in age-appropriate autonomous use of the Internet.
- Help your child understand how to identify trustworthy, credible, and positive content online, and ensure they understand both the benefits and risks of certain forms of the Internet usage. Simple “dos” and “don’ts” are insufficient.
- Talk to them about the importance of respecting the privacy of others and never sharing information beyond the intended audience.
- Be a non-judgmental safe haven for kids. Although it can be quite difficult, you want your children to come to you if they or someone they know is involved in cyberbullying or other high-risk situations in some capacity. You also want your children to come to you if they make a mistake and do something inappropriate while using the Internet. Take an interest in how your children and their friends use the Internet and try to stay non-judgmental.
- Speak the language and stay current. Be knowledgeable about the latest social media platforms and devices. Notice the language children and youth use when talking about Internet use and the meaning they ascribe to certain interactions.
- Consult with your children as much as possible to see what they think about the Internet and check in about the ways using the Internet use makes them feel.
- The Internet offers many resources for parents (e.g., TELUS WISE). Take advantage of the support and assistance you can get in the online world while being vigilant regarding the trustworthiness of the source.
- Always speak to a professional about your child’s health, developmental, and mental health issues rather than solely relying on information you retrieve online.

Tips for adults who are vulnerable and marginalized

- Seek out supportive online spaces. Take advantage of online platforms such as forums, blogs, and online groups to connect with other individuals who have similar experiences and concerns. This can decrease social isolation and improve health and well-being.
- Remain cautious of the websites you are visiting and people with whom you are interacting. Do not release any personal or identifying information about yourself, especially if the connection is new.
- Websites with hateful content may be difficult to avoid. If you come across hurtful material, talk to trusted friends and family about how this makes you feel, and consider reporting it to the appropriate authorities. Avoid responding to hate content in an angry and combative fashion.

Tips for older adults

- Try to increase your familiarity and competencies with the Internet and keep up with the always-changing nature of technology.
■ Be aware of scams that target older adults. These may appear in your email or web browser. Identify someone in your life with whom you can consult regularly to determine whether content is trustworthy and safe. Being Internet-savvy will help you differentiate between scams and legitimate content.

■ It can feel impossible to learn how to use the Internet when you haven’t grown up with it. Believe in yourself! The Internet is surprisingly user friendly. Take advantage of the time you spend with younger family members and friends to learn about the Internet. This will not only enhance your knowledge but may also strengthen your relationships.
Additional resources

- For an ongoing resource on how to keep you and your family safe online, please visit [TELUS WISE](https://www.telus.com/wiseguide) (Wise Internet and Smartphone Education).
- Book a free 1 hour session with a [TELUS Learning Centre Specialist](https://www.telus.com/services/learning-centres) for you and your child to learn all of the safety features and functionality of your smartphone.
- There are a number of additional TELUS WISE guides that you may find of value, including:
  - TELUS WISE distracted driving guide
  - TELUS WISE helping our kids navigate their wired world
  - TELUS WISE privacy matters
  - TELUS WISE helping our kids use their smartphone safely
How you can participate in TELUS WISE

- Visit us at [telus.com/wise](http://telus.com/wise) if you have any questions or if you want to book a free in-person TELUS WISE session for you child’s school and/or parent group.
- Contact us at [wise@telus.com](mailto:wise@telus.com)
- Join the conversation online with [@TELUS](http://twitter.com/TELUS) on Twitter and using [#TELUSWISE](http://twitter.com/hashtag/TELUSWISE)