

## Supporting Youth Survivors of Cyber Abuse

### What can we do as adult responders?

It's our responsibility to make sure young survivors and their support systems are aware of all the available options when they've experienced cyber abuse, so they can make informed decisions. It's important to understand the spectrum of options for survivors and to share that information.

If a young person has experienced cyber abuse, including the non-consensual sharing of their intimate images, and reaches out to you for support, here's how you can help:

### Interact with survivors in a victim-centered and trauma-informed way.<sup>7</sup>

- **Recognize** that not all survivors experience victimization similarly, even when they are victims of the same crimes. How a survivor reacts to abuse may be largely shaped by their age, gender, sexual identity, race, ethnicity, and previous experiences.
- **Acknowledge** that victims of cyber abuse and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images have experienced trauma like other victims of sexual abuse. While physical trauma is often visible, emotional trauma can be difficult to identify and comes<sup>8</sup> in many forms.
- **Respect** survivors' agency. Some survivors may decide pursuing a protection order is the safest course of action. Some may want civil remedies or restitution for the harm they experienced. Others may want to press criminal charges. Still, some may not want to take legal action at all. Whichever course of action survivors choose, it is essential for advocates, criminal justice professionals, and judges to respect victim autonomy throughout this process.
- **Respond** to victims in a supportive and transparent manner that recognizes their individual trauma and does not cause further harm. When victims feel they are not supported, they may experience secondary trauma and begin to distrust criminal justice professionals or other adult responders.

### Engage in safety-planning efforts.

A **safety plan** is a personalized plan that promotes victim safety in the wake of ongoing abuse or the threat of future violence.<sup>9</sup> Safety plans are tailored to fit the unique needs and lifestyle of the victim, as well as the extent and severity of the abuse. Plans may include how to cope with emotions, report abuse to friends and family, and take legal action.

### Share the options & help youth prepare

Explain to survivors all of the options available to them and provide them the resources to make an informed decision. Once the survivor chooses the option that is best for them, prepare them for what the process might be like, including the possibility of losing their electronic device to evidence collection.

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7 Kristiansson, V. & Whitman-Barr, C. (2015, February). Integrating A Trauma-Informed Response Violence Against Women and Human Trafficking Prosecutions. *Strategies: The Prosecutors' Newsletter on Violence Against Women* (13), 2.

8 National Center for Victims of Crime. (2008). How Crime Victims React to Trauma. Get Help Bulletins for Crime Victims. Retrieved from <http://victimsofcrime.org/help-for-crime-victims/get-help-bulletins-for-crime-victims/how-crime-victims-react-to-trauma>

9 The National Domestic Violence Hotline. (2013, April 10). What is Safety Planning. Blog. Retrieved from <http://www.thehotline.org/2013/04/10/what-is-safety-planning/>