



# What It Is.

A digital game challenging sexual violence



Most of us know someone who has been affected by sexual violence. Anyone can be sexually abused, but women and girls are most at risk. In Canada, 1 in 4 women will experience sexual assault in their lifetimes and young women are most at risk. Only 10 percent of victims of sexual violence report it to the police. Sexual violence is a big problem, but hardly anyone seems to talk about it. **Maybe they don't know what it is. Do you?**

## About the game

**What It Is.** is a unique digital game in English and French that challenges sexual assault against youth. The game is geared towards young women and young men aged 12 to 25 and is playable online and on Java-enabled cell phones. It explores:

- what sexual assault, sexual abuse and consent are;
- common “myths and realities” about sexual violence;
- needs, rights and common concerns of victims of sexual violence;
- healthy and unhealthy relationships;
- how youth can support their peers going through sexual violence; and
- resources, community services and supports available to youth victims of sexual violence.

**What It Is.** will raise awareness about sexual violence and help youth gain access to essential information about community services and resources – right from their computers and cell phones.

**What It Is.** is an initiative of the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC), funded by TELUS and the Department of Justice Canada. The game's design was guided by diverse young people, including a Youth Advisory Team.

The official media launch of **What It Is.** is on November 25, 2010,  
**the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.**

Visit [www.metrac.org](http://www.metrac.org) for information and details on how to play.

Become a fan of **What It Is.** on Facebook today.

For information, contact METRAC: [info@metrac.org](mailto:info@metrac.org) | 416-392-3135 | [www.metrac.org](http://www.metrac.org)



Department of Justice  
Canada

Ministère de la Justice  
Canada

## Game rules and goals

**What It Is.** raises awareness about sexual violence through a series of multiple choice quiz questions and key messages, posed to players as they move through scenes like a cafeteria and bus stop. Each correct answer and each discovery of a key message on screen allows players to collect points. Players who get a high score win a download code for an original song by two young urban artists from Toronto, Shi Wisdom and Myk Miranda, entitled “Zalaura” (produced by ENJ, engineered by Ron Dias, spoken word recorded by Definitive Sound). Players who get a middle score win a download code for a short teaser clip of Zalaura.

## How the game is played

### Cell phone version

A player with compatible cell phone can type the link to the game into their in-phone web browser and download it into their phone’s game folder. Required cell phone specifications are as follows:

- Screen resolution/size: 240x320 or 176x208
- GPRS enabled
- Java MIDP 2.0
- WAP enabled
- No touch screen

Examples of compatible phones include:

- Nokia C5, 2730 classic, E52, 5130 XpressMusic, 6700 slide, E66, 6600, 6681, 7650, 3660, 6620, 6630, 7610, N-Gage QD
- Sony Ericsson Zyl0, Elm, W995, Hazel, Spiro, J105 Naite, C905, C510, W705, 7210 Supernova, Yari, K800, W508, XPERIA Pureness
- Samsung C3200 Monte Bar
- Panasonic X700, X800, Z600, D710

### Online version

A player with an internet connection on their PC or Mac can type the link to the game into their computer browser and play on screen.

## Quick statistics about sexual violence

- Half of Canadian women (51%) have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16 (Statistics Canada, *The Daily*, November 18, 1993).
- In 2006, police-reported sexual assaults against children and youth was over 5 times higher than it was for adults, and assaults against youth 12 to 17 was nearly double the rate against children and youth as a whole (Statistics Canada, 2009, [www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/2008000/fv1-eng.htm](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/2008000/fv1-eng.htm)).

- Eighty-six percent of victims of sexual offences who reported to the police in 2004 were female (Statistics Canada, 2006, [www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-570-x/85-570-x2006001-eng.pdf](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-570-x/85-570-x2006001-eng.pdf)).
- Less than one in ten sexual assaults were actually reported to police in 2004 (Statistics Canada, 2009, [www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2010002/article/11292-eng.htm#r2](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2010002/article/11292-eng.htm#r2)).

## About digital and mobile games

Video game playing in general is growing. For instance, 12.3% of Canadian households used the internet for the purpose of playing video games in 2000, which increased to 27.9% in 2003 (Statistics Canada, 2001, 2004). In 2003, 40% of Canadian households owned a game console – as AC Nielson (2003, 2004) states, “video games represent a vital and fast-growing entertainment medium, competing with television, the internet, and other forms of entertainment”. Evidence also demonstrates that digital game playing is popular amongst all gender groups. For instance, according to the International Game Developers Association, women represent 40 percent of all gamers (Reisinger, 2008).

Cell phones as a medium to play games is also increasing exponentially, given the reality that cell usage in Canada is increasingly widespread. At the end of the first quarter of 2006, there were 16.8 million wireless subscribers in Canada, implying strong and sustained growth. The trend toward increased cell phone usage cuts across all income levels; in fact, the strongest growth of ownership rates has been amongst households in the lowest income quintile (Statistics Canada, 2006). Young people have the highest rates of cell phone use and ownership, and they are accessing the technology at younger and younger ages (Office of Consumer Affairs, Industry Canada, 2005). It has been estimated that the global mobile gaming industry will grow by the end of 2010 to \$20 billion, with Canada as one of the regions projected to be the fastest growing (Global Industry Analysts, 2008).

**What It Is.** is innovative as it utilizes the popular medium of digital gaming to build youth knowledge and awareness of sexual assault issues. Research on digital gaming has indicated that games are a fertile medium for learning amongst youth, particularly when it comes to poignant social issues that impact their lives. When people play games in general, they step into a “magic circle” of play; important aspects of this circle are the many choices that allow improvisation, flexibility, creativity, and a variable ending (Salen and Zimmerman, 2003). Video games are unique in their ability to incorporate the key elements of the “magic circle” into learning, and as such, can provide an engaging experience and support changes in player awareness, attitudes, behaviours and perspectives. Clay Shirky (2005), a theorist on technology and communities, says that digital games “offer the opportunity for players to change their world view rather than to impart mere information”. Further, Kurt Squire (2002), a game researcher, notes that learning about social issues through digital games is a transformative process “that occur[s] through the dynamic relations between subjects, artifacts, and mediating social structures.” While the use of games to educate youth on social issues such as crime and victimization has been growing globally, within Canada there are few examples. As such, **What It Is.** is a unique project that serves as an exciting innovation to serve and support young victims of sexual crimes.