

SEXTING: HOW PARENTS CAN KEEP THEIR KIDS SAFE

A dangerous new practice can have serious legal and psychological consequences for your teen. It's called sexting—sending sexually explicit text or photographs from mobile devices. The photographs are often shared voluntarily, but sometimes a young person may be coerced into taking or sending these photographs. Once the photos are sent, they can be used to bully, harass, intimidate, or embarrass victims online or via mobile devices.

Sexting can be a felony. Some teenagers who have sent or received explicit pictures have been charged with possession of child pornography. If convicted, your teen could be labeled as a sex offender for the rest of his or her life.

In many sexting situations, the photos shared between boyfriends and girlfriends are often forwarded and shared with friends and classmates. Access to technology means that one photo can reach thousands in just a few hours via websites and mobile devices.

The National Crime Prevention Council has valuable tips to help prevent your teen from becoming a sexting victim.

- Teach, don't preach. Use recent news stories as "teachable moments" to talk to your teen about your guidelines for safe Internet, cell phone, and social media behavior.
- Encourage your teen to think before he or she sends or posts pictures and other personal information. Remember that every post from your teen is an electronic fingerprint that can damage his or her college careers, future employment opportunities, and reputation with friends, family, and neighbors.
- Stay calm. If your son or daughter confesses to sending or forwarding nude pictures, be supportive but take action. Tell him or her to stop immediately and delete any such files. Explain the risks and consequences of the behavior.
- If an inappropriate photo is being forwarded without the person's permission, consider talking to the teen or the parents of the teen who is forwarding the photos. If necessary, report the situation to local law enforcement or school administrators and be mindful of the potential criminal consequences.
- Talk with other parents. Chances are other parents are going through the same struggles as you to keep kids safe. Consider sharing your situation and the tips you've learned.
- Remind teens that healthy relationships should be based on mutual respect, not just sexual attraction. Stress that boyfriends and girlfriends shouldn't pressure them into sending explicit pictures.
- Ask your teen's school to address sexting by talking about what teens can do to prevent it, the consequences for offenders, and how to support the victims of sexting.
- Get help if you suspect your teen has been a victim of sexting. Talk with local victim service providers to get the right support for your child.



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