Q: How do I know if my child is sexting?

A: No parent or guardian wants to be the last one to know that their child is sexting. Try to maintain open lines of communication with your children so that they are not afraid to talk to you if they receive inappropriate photos or are being pressured to send them.

Here are some discussion starters to help you have the "sexting talk" with your child:

- Have you ever received a naked picture on your cell phone?
- Has anyone ever asked or pressured you to send a nude or sexual picture?
- Do you think it's OK to send "sexy" messages or images? Why?
- What could happen to you if you send or forward a naked picture with your cell phone?
- How likely is it that images and messages intended for one person will be seen by others?

For more resources visit NetSmartz.org

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NetSmartz Workshop
A PROGRAM OF THE
NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN®



Tips to Prevent SEXTING for Teens

THINK ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES
of taking, sending, or forwarding a sexual picture of someone else, even if it's of you. You could get kicked off of sports teams, face humiliation, lose educational opportunities, and even face a police investigation.

NEVER TAKE
images of yourself that you wouldn't want everyone—your classmates, your teachers, your family, or your employer—to see.

BEFORE HITTING SEND
remember that you can't control where this image may travel. What you send to a boyfriend or girlfriend could easily end up with their friends, and their friends' friends, and so on...

IF YOU FORWARD
a sexual picture of someone without their consent, you are violating their trust and exposing them to potential ridicule. It's not up to you to decide who should see their body, so don't forward the image to anyone.

IF ANYONE PRESSURES
you to send a sexual picture, don't give in and talk to an adult you trust. Remember that anyone who tries to get you to do something you are uncomfortable with is probably not trustworthy.

NetSmartz.org/TipSheets

SEXTING

Questions and Answers from NetSmartz® Workshop

Many teens believe that anything they want to do with *their* bodies and *their* phones is *their* business. Young people enjoy the privacy and freedom that cell phones give them from their parents or guardians, and sometimes they use that freedom to explore their budding sexuality. Amanda Lenhart of the Pew Internet & American Life Project calls the combination of cell phones and sexual exploration "a 'perfect storm' for sexting."[1] Youths who engage in sexting, the sending or posting of nude or partially nude images, expose themselves to a variety of social, emotional, and even legal risks. The good news is that most teens do not sext—only 4% of cell-owning teens (12-17) say they have sent these kinds of images[2]—but those who do often face unexpected and unwanted consequences.

Help your children avoid these potentially life-changing consequences by learning more about the issue and talking to your children before they put themselves in a compromising position.

Q: Why do teens sext?

A: Teens sext for many reasons. They may be trying to impress a crush or trying to be funny. Some are responding to a sexual text message they've received and others willingly send nude photos of themselves to a boyfriend or girlfriend. Occasionally teens are pressured into sending sexual pictures, and in extreme cases, they may be blackmailed by someone threatening to distribute an earlier sexting image if they do not send more. Teens make these decisions without thinking about how their futures may be affected. It's important for parents and guardians to understand that as technically savvy as their children are, they often don't think about the implications of how quickly and widely digital information can spread via cell phone and the Internet.

Q: What are the consequences of sexting?

A: Sexting may profoundly affect the emotional and psychological development of a child. Trust is broken when an image is forwarded without the creator's consent, such as when a boyfriend takes revenge on an ex-girlfriend by forwarding images intended to be private. Once an image is spread via cell phone or posted online, it is impossible to get back and can potentially circulate to hundreds of people. Teens who engage in sexting risk reoccurring embarrassment, exploitation, and victimization, which could be psychologically devastating.

Teens who sext may also face social repercussions, such as being judged or excluded by their peers, communities, and families. They may become targets of mean comments, rumors, and harassment. Unfortunately, the image may follow them for a long time, damaging academic, social, and employment opportunities. For example, some teens caught sexting have lost their place on school sports teams, potentially impacting their college prospects.

In cases involving blackmail, bullying, or images being passed around without consent, law-enforcement officers may become involved, often at the request of anxious parents or school administrators. Although it is unlikely that teens will be charged with a serious crime for sexting, police investigations can be stressful for everyone, especially if there is media attention. Many teens have been ordered to attend an educational program or complete community service as a result of these investigations.

Q: What can I do to help prevent my child from sexting?

A: Make sure to set house rules for Internet and cell phone use with your children and review them often. You should also discuss the consequences for breaking those rules. For example, you might consider disabling picture messaging. If children ignore the rules, consider removing cell phones altogether; however, this should be your last resort. Technology is not going anywhere, and it's important that children learn how to use it appropriately.

Talk to them early and often about how digital information and images may travel very far, very quickly. Make it absolutely clear to your children that the moment they send a digital image of themselves from their cell phone, they lose complete control of what happens to it next.

[1] *Lenhart, Amanda. Teens and Sexting. Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2009.*
[2] *Ibid.*

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