

RESOURCES

Advice on talking to kids about sexting:

<http://www.common sense media.org/talking-about-sexting>

Connect Safely's advice on sext prevention:

<http://www.connectsafely.org/tips-for-dealing-with-teen-sexting/>

Advice for parents and teens:

<http://www.kidshealth.org/en/parents/2011-sexting.html>

Sexting

What a Parent Should Know

Sexting

is sending sexually explicit texts or photographs via electronic means. The word is a mash up of "sex" and "texting". When sexting involves the transmission of depictions of sex or nudity to or of a minor it is illegal and can result in very serious criminal charges irrelevant of the offender's age.

Teens and tweens sext with alarming frequency. There are no definite numbers available but in many locations it is so common as to no longer be provocative to children.

One recent ABC news article revealed how commonplace sexting is, quoting one teen as saying, "If a boy meets a girl or has a girlfriend on summer break he comes back and shows all his boys the [naked] pictures he's been sent. No one gives it that much thought really."

While this is understandably a great concern to parents, it is important to realize a few important facts:

- You cannot stop your child from sexting.
- Cell phones and online accounts are a teen's first private world. Do not expect them to voluntarily allow you access, or react positively to you forcing access.
- Childhood relationships are often reckless, impulsive, passionate and experimental: Sexting is that kind of action.

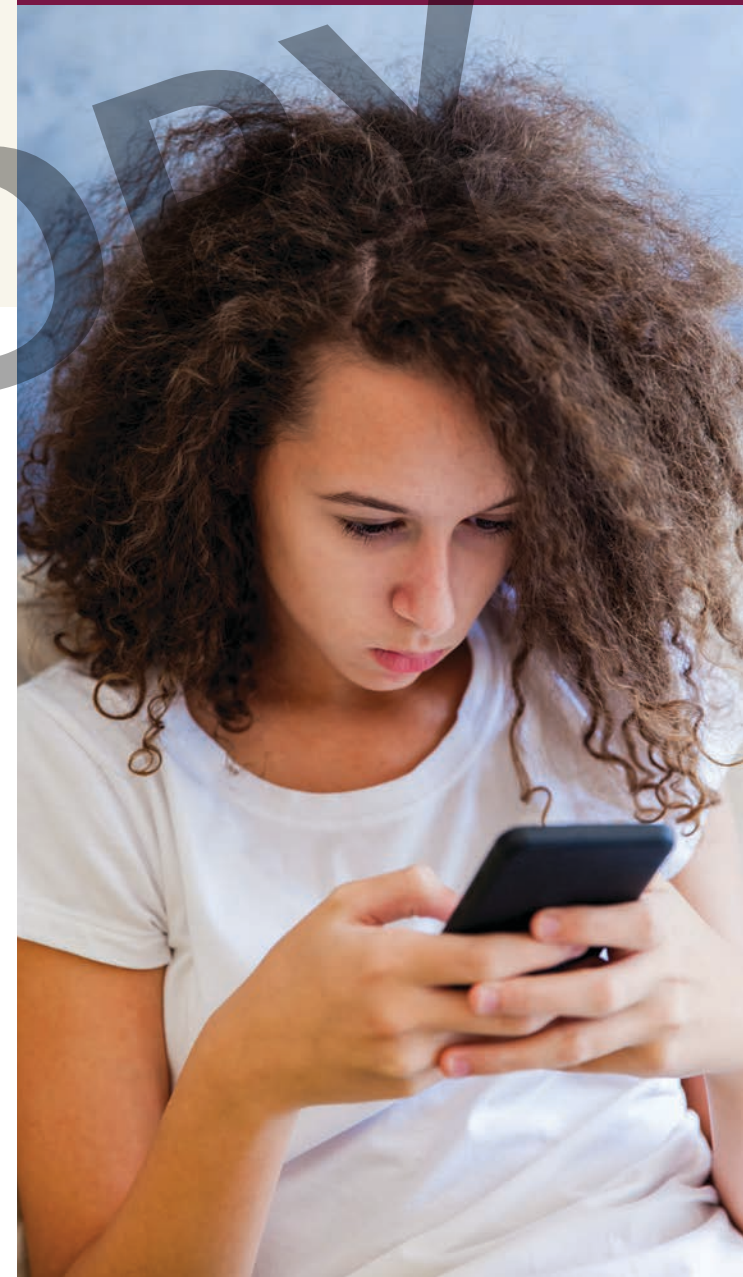
What those points add up to is this: educating your child about making a sensible choice – or even just thinking at all – will have positive results. An authoritarian stand will not.

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Not Just Naughty Fun

Some adults look at sexting and think, “Kids will be kids.” They will test their boundaries. They will act provocatively for the thrill. They will dismiss the consequences of their actions. But in the case of sexting, those consequences are potentially dire.

Digital images and text can be stored and shared infinitely. That means anything created or transmitted digitally is potentially searchable and shareable forever. A naked picture sent to a friend might as well be sent to the whole world.

Any sexually suggestive, explicit or nude image of a child can be considered child pornography. Taking those pictures is a crime. Having them is a crime. Sending them is a crime – even for minors. By sending someone a nude picture of themselves, a child makes the recipient a criminal.

Kids Share Sexts

40% of teens and young adults say they have had a private sext passed on to them. 17% share messages with others, and 55% with more than one person. Do not assume anything online is private.

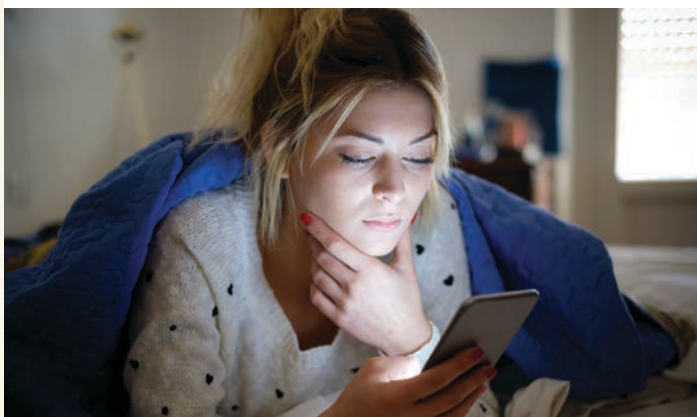
They could share it on purpose just to be mean or to show off. They could share it because they get angry. They could post it online, share it with everyone at school or send it to just one person... who could share it with everyone.

Sending an image to a social network account makes it viewable to anyone who uses the recipient’s computer or, if their privacy settings are lax, to anyone who views their page.

Sexts also get shared inadvertently because someone can view it just by being near the recipient. An accidental public post or story is not uncommon. Neither is an incompletely formatted hard drive when selling a computer, phone or tablet.

Sexting Casualties

Jesse Logan learned firsthand how easy it is to end up a sexting casualty. In love, Jesse sent a nude picture of herself to her then-boyfriend. When they had a fight and took a break he forwarded that picture to hundreds of her friends at school. Jesse was insulted and harassed everywhere she went. She started skipping school, literally afraid to go out. She went on television to tell her story with her face and voice



distorted, hoping that by sharing what happened to her that no one else would have to go through it. It didn’t do much to help her, though. Seeing no way out of her torment, Jesse took her own life.

Jesse’s case is extreme but lots of other kids have learned firsthand that nothing online can remain private long, and can have serious consequences:

- A teen couple sexted intimate images of each other to one another. The police got involved and the couple was charged with child pornography offenses.
- A 15 year old girl sent nude images of herself to an online friend. She was charged with possessing, distributing and creating child pornography.
- Three 13 year old girls took pictures of each other wearing bras and underwear. They were threatened with public lewdness and child pornography charges if they did not participate in after-school programs and probation.

And there are many more tales just like those – too many to fit. All of these kids, if convicted, become registered sex offenders. *For life.*

Why Kids Sext

Kids sext for many reasons:

- To impress a crush
- On a dare
- General peer pressure
- Pressure from an intimate partner
- Reciprocating a sext

The last thing on their minds are the consequences. Speak to your kids about the consequences of sexting. Encourage them to wait and think before they send any electronic communication.

Talking To Your Kids

Your child may receive a sext. They may be shown a sext. Speak with them before they get a cell phone or their own social media accounts. If they already have those, the time is now. Tell them sending or receiving sexts is never safe and never private. Don’t ask intrusive questions but let them know they can come to you at any time.

