



Teen Sexting

“Sexting” usually refers to teens sharing nude photos via cell phone, but it’s happening on other devices and the Web too. The practice can have serious legal and psychological consequences, so – teens and adults – consider these tips!

It’s illegal: Don’t take or send nude or sexually suggestive photos of yourself or anyone else. If you do, even if they’re of you or you pass along someone else’s – you could be charged with producing or distributing child pornography. If you keep them on your phone or computer you could be charged with possession. If they go to someone in another state (and that happens really easily), it’s a federal felony.

Non-legal consequences: Then there’s the emotional (and reputation) damage that can come from having intimate photos of yourself go to a friend who can become an ex-friend and send it to everyone you know. Not only can they be sent around; they can be distributed and archived online for people to search for pretty much forever.

Not just on phones. Sexting can be done on any media-sharing device or technology – including email and the Web. Teens have been convicted for child porn distribution for emailing sexually explicit photos to each other.

Many causes. In some cases, kids are responding to peer pressure in a form of cyber bullying or pressure from a boyfriend or girlfriend (they break up, and sometimes those photos get sent around out of revenge). Sometimes it’s impulsive behavior, flirting, or even blackmail. It’s always a bad idea.

The bottom line: Stay alert when using digital media. People aren’t always who they seem to be, even in real life, and sometimes they change and do things to hurt others. Critical thinking about what we upload as well as download is the best protection.

Parents: Talk with your kids about sexting in a relaxed setting. Ask them what they know about it (they may not have heard the term, so “naked photo-sharing” works too). Express how you feel in a conversational, non-confrontational way. A two-way dialog can go a long way toward helping your kids understand how to minimize legal, social and reputation risks.

- If your children have sent any nude pictures of themselves, make sure they stop immediately. Explain that they’re at risk of being charged with producing and distributing child pornography. If they’ve received a nude photo, make sure they haven’t sent it to anyone else.
- The only way to ensure complete deletion of an image is to do a factory reset on your electronic device. At minimum, this needs to be done to ensure the images are destroyed forever.
- Either way, the next most important thing is to have a good talk. Stay calm, be supportive and learn as much as you can about the situation. For example, see if it was impulsive behavior, a teen “romance” thing, or a form of harassment.