

Truth about Sexting

While parents may never have heard of it, surveys show that twenty to sixty percent of teens are “sexting”. While this troubling trend continues full speed ahead, parents, teachers and lawmakers are now struggling to react appropriately to the phenomenon that puts kids at risk for exploitation, harassment, and even felony charges.

You’ve heard of “Sexting...Sexting is a combination of the words “sex” and “text messaging”. “Sexting” is the sending of sexually provocative messages or visual images to and from cell phones and computers. It is important to understand that kids as young as nine-years old may be doing it all the way up to older teens.

Texting is amazing! It’s one of the many ways that cell phones and the internet have made it easier for people to stay in touch and share ideas and images.

But, “Sexting” can put you at risk! It means sharing sexually explicit text messages or sexual photos of yourself or videos- of yourself or others- using a cell phone or the Internet. (Sharing includes sending, receiving or forwarding the content.) It may sound fun and harmless, but it can cause serious problems. (“Sexual” generally means nude, semi-nude or showing sexual activity)

Why is “Sexting” unsafe? Once you post or send a “sext” you cannot control it. Privacy is not guaranteed! A sext meant for just one person can easily be seen or shared with others.

This may happen when:

1. A relationship ends
2. Others get access to a friend’s phone, computer or accounts.

A “sext” can cause embarrassment and humiliation-by accident and on purpose. Information can last forever online. It may be copied or re-posted and viewed for years to come.

More dangers of “Sexting”; it can:

Change people’s opinion of you: you may end up with an unwanted reputation, for example. Or, someone may expect more from you (sexually).

Cause bullying: A “sex” that gets into the wrong hands can clearly be embarrassing. It can also lead to painful bullying, in person or online. That’s one stress in your life you don’t need!

Hurt your future: Schools and employers often search online for information about applicants. A “sex” you thought was long gone could still be on the Internet- and could cost you a big opportunity.

Get you in serious trouble: For example, students caught “sexting” may be suspended or expelled, or have notes added to their school records. Some have even faced serious legal charges. (“Sext” that involves minors may break child pornography laws in some states.)

Attract sexual predators: Think “sexting” someone you know online is safe? Not so. With just a few details from your online profile, a predator may be able to find you in person.

Communicate safely! Think before you share any messages or images! Ask yourself:

1. Would I want this posted on my school bulletin board?
2. Would I want my parents, teachers, or coach to see this? Or a future college or employer?
3. Would I feel comfortable saying or showing this in person or in public?

Treat electronic communications like postcards- many eyes will see them.

Rise above the pressure. You don’t have to give into any pressure to sext! You could:

1. Just say “No!”
2. Give a reason- “It’s not worth the risk.”
3. Send a different message- one you feel is OK

Also be sure to know and follow- your school’s rules for using cell phones and the Internet.

If you get “Sext”, know the do’s and don’t’s!

Don’t respond! Whether or not you know the person, never respond to any inappropriate message.

Don't pas sit on! Remember, forwarding a "sext" can also get you in trouble. It can make you as responsible for the "sext's" content as the person who first sent it. It may even be considered a crime.

Do tell a trusted adult right away! Tell a parent, teacher, or counselor. He or she can help you decide what needs to happen next and when it's OK to delete the message.

"Sexing" can hurt you now- and haunt into your future. Spread the words to your friends.

If you would like more information on Internet Safety please contact Channing Bete at 800-628-7733 (the above information was retyped and published for educational purposes only). The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at www.missingkids.com, or the Pembroke Pines Police Department's Community Affairs Unit at (954) 435-6538 or 436-3274.