

Sexting: Understanding the risks



What is sexting?

Sexting is when young people use mobile phones or the internet to send sexually explicit messages, images or videos.

There are risks involved in sexting but there are many reasons why a young person may get involved. So it's important to talk about how they can stay safe and what they can do if they feel uncomfortable.

Why do young people send nudes?

There are lots of reasons, and these include:

- exploring their sexuality
- being asked, pressured or coerced
- social acceptance or joining in because they think everyone is doing it

Sexting and the law

It is illegal to produce, possess, store or share indecent, sexual or naked images and videos of anyone under 18:

- even if a child allowed it to be taken
- even if a young person takes the explicit photo of themselves
- even if it is shared and distributed between children of the same age.

However, to help stop the criminalisation of young people, the Home Office has introduced Outcome 21. This is a new crime recording code which means sexting incidents are unlikely to be disclosed in any future DBS checks.

What are the dangers of sexting?

No control of images and how they are shared

It's easy to send an image or video but there's no controlling how it's passed on – even if they share it with someone that they know and trust.

Vulnerable to blackmailing, bullying and harm

Some young people think sexting is harmless, but it can leave them vulnerable to difficulty and harm:

• Bullying

If their school peers see the images, the child may be bullied.

• Emotional distress

If they are worried about an image being shared, they may have feelings of regret. If the image is shared, they may feel embarrassed and humiliated. If they are very distressed this could lead to severe anxiety and impact on their mental health.

• Blackmail

An offender may threaten to share the pictures with the child's family and friends unless the child sends money or more images.

• Unwanted attention

Images posted online can attract unwanted attention, particularly from those who know how to search for, collect and modify images of young people.

What you can do

How to talk to children about sexting

Children are often embarrassed or ashamed to speak about sexting. But young people have said they would like adults to talk to them in an open, honest and non-judgmental way about it.

1. Think about the best way of starting the conversation

Every child is different, so base your approach on their character and your relationship with them.

2. Explain the risks of sexting

Don't accuse them of sexting, but do explain the legal issues and dangers when things go wrong.

3. Make it clear you will be supportive and understanding

Make sure your child knows that you are always there if they feel pressured by anyone.



How to help an affected child

If your child has been sending explicit images or videos of themselves, you may feel shocked, upset, angry, confused, or disappointed. They're also likely to feel anxious about talking to you. Where possible, give yourself time to process the information and remember they'll be watching your reactions. Reassure them that they are not alone and you will do all you can to help.

If your child has...

Shared an explicit image or video

- Ask them who they initially sent it to, their age, and if they know whether it's been shared with anyone else.
- Encourage them to delete images from social media if they uploaded them themselves.
- If someone else uploaded the image, ask the social media providers to remove the image. Our **O2 and NSPCC Online Safety Helpline** can support you - **0808 800 5002**.
- If an adult requested the image, this is illegal. You can contact the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre for advice and support - ceop.police.uk

Lost control of a sexual image

- Ask them to get in touch with Childline (childline.org.uk). Alternatively you can make a direct report to the Internet Watch Foundation (iwf.org.uk). Together these organisations will try to get the image removed.



"I Saw Your Willy"

Watching our Share Aware animation is a great way to start a conversation with your child about sexting

For more information on sexting and how to manage it, visit nspcc.org.uk/sexting