

Sexting – Protect Your Teen

Question? Would you walk up to your boyfriend or girlfriend in a popular food court, stand in front of them, look them in the eye, and take off all of your clothes?

Observations How does that idea make you feel?

Brett Lee I use this example in school presentations. Some students look embarrassed to even talk about public displays of nudity. Some look confused because the idea is ridiculous to them. Others laugh because the idea is inconceivable. But some appear to be reflecting quietly.

Parents How would you feel if your daughter or son did this?
How would your daughter or son react if you presented them with this scenario?
The truth is, many of them have done this.

Sexting makes these very private words/images public, free to be shared many, many times and almost impossible to delete once shared (sharing quickly spreads across platforms; e.g., text to webpages). It is not normal to display your nudity (or partial nudity) publically. Empower your children to know this is not normal, that data is permanent and not private, and to trust their instincts. Many children, when asked, disclose that they felt sick after sending the images and wished they hadn't.

You can help. Use this fact sheet to understand sexting and help your children avoid making a mistake that may haunt them for years.

“Sexting is the transmission of a sexually explicit image of oneself to another user or received from another user via information communication technology.”

It is a **CRIMINAL OFFENCE** when this practice is engaged in by those **under** 18 years of age. The production or creation of these images in itself is **ILLEGAL** as this material falls within the definition of ‘child abuse/exploitation material’.



AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL CRIMINAL CODE

DEFINITION IN GENERAL TERMS

Child Abuse Material – Image, drawing, video, or a description of a person that is or appears to be under the age of 18 in a sexual context or engaged in sexual activity

(This is a general outline only and should only be used as a guide. For further information and an expanded definition, clarity, or if unsure, seek advice from an official source.)

It is illegal for any person in our community, 10 years or older, to possess, produce, or distribute this material.

The term child pornography is a slang term and should not be used when referring to this material. Pornography in many forms is legal and is used for the pleasure of some adult individuals. Just placing the word ‘child’ in front of this term does not denote the seriousness of this material.

The possession can be in the following forms:

- Printed material
- Handwritten material
- Video, DVD, etc.
- Technology – laptops, computers, phones, iPods, tablets

WHY DO CHILDREN SEXT?

- Peer group pressure
- Acceptance – by peers or by the gender they are attracted to
- A feeling of maturity
- Instant gratification
- Conditioned to feel everybody is doing it so it must be normal
- Belief that the material will remain private and only one person will ever see it, placing unrealistic trust in the receiver

- Being pressured by another party
 - Maybe a boyfriend or girlfriend insisting on this as proof of love
- Blackmail
 - If you don't, I will harm you, or make your life difficult, or tell a secret.

CONSEQUENCES OF SEXTING

1 – Criminal offence – dire consequences – employment, possible register of offenders, and future travel

Other ways sexting can impact our children's and our families' lives include:

- Humiliation amongst family, peers, and communities.
- Bullying or blackmail.
- Employment opportunities.
- Enhancement of self-doubt or low self-esteem.



88% of self-generated images have been collected and put on other sites.

Sexting should never be normalised. This practice never has been, is not, and never will be normal when young people are involved.

PREVENTION – ACTIONS FOR PARENTS

TALK TO YOUR TEENS – have the 'sext' talk

Points to reinforce as regularly as necessary:

1. Sexting has serious consequences, both criminally and socially.
2. They never have to send an image they are not happy to share.
3. Sexting does not align with our family's ethical and moral code.
4. Sexting relates to an individual's self-respect, boundaries, and privacy.
5. Sexting is not normal, no matter what influence to the contrary they receive online or from peers.
6. Apply the 'Grandma' rule. How would you feel if Grandma saw the material? The reality is that many people may see it: family, grandparents, other students, enemies, and trusted teachers. Once it leaves your device, it is permanent and shareable.

7. Privacy and control when dealing with technology is an illusion. An image sent to one 'trusted' person can be shared and spread across many devices and many platforms quicker than they can imagine. Teens may feel safe as programs promise the image will self delete. The recipient need only screenshot the image, and it is permanent and on their device. The sender has no idea about how it is used in the future.
8. Images sent today can resurface in 5, 10, or 20 years.



USE FILTERING OR MONITORING TOOLS/PROGRAMS

Filtering and monitoring of devices and programs can enable you to identify if this practice occurs and gives you an opportunity to deal with it in the early stages. Look online for a suitable filtering product for the devices your child uses.

For example, maybe you identify that your child is requesting images from other children or others are requesting from them. Stop it before it occurs.

Most children, when confronted by an adult or if they believe an adult is aware of what they are doing, will proceed no further.

Interestingly, a principal recently explained to Brett that some of the students had been caught sexting. They were less worried about the school and police involvement. They were most worried about telling their parents and having them see the images. Stay involved. It matters. (For further case studies based on Brett's experiences, see the fact sheet in the last module.)

Filtering tools to consider;

Norton Family Parental Control: <https://onlinefamily.norton.com/familysafety/loginStart.fs>

Net Nanny Parental Control: <http://www.netnanny.com>

Both products are commercial and have a cost associated.