

Sexting – Parent Information

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Sharing sexual imagery online (commonly known as sexting) is illegal for anyone under the age of 18, but some children still do it. Here's what parents need to know.

What is sexting?

- Exchanging images of a sexual nature with a boyfriend or girlfriend.
- Sharing images of a sexual nature with someone you like.
- Passing on images of a sexual nature to groups of friends with or without permission.

What should you be concerned about?

Not many of us can look back at our teenage years without cringing. But our coming-of-age mistakes weren't recorded for posterity. These days young people record their lives on a minute-by-minute basis. The images they create can be copied, manipulated, posted online and sent to other people in a matter of seconds. Ex-partners have been known to pass on images after a relationship has come to an end, as a means of revenge.

- Sexting can be used to bully the recipient, who may not want to receive images of a sexual nature and is made to feel uncomfortable.
- If the subject of the image does not want the image shared, this is known as [revenge porn](#) and is a criminal offence.
- If the subject or recipient of the image is under 18, that is also a criminal offence. Your child is breaking the law by taking, holding or sharing indecent images of a minor, even if your child is under 18, the image is of them and they took it of themselves.
- If these images are stored on a family computer, you, as a parent, could be implicated. Any image of a person under-18 sent may constitute an indecent image of a child, in legal terms, and be prosecutable under the Protection of Children Act 1978.
- The police are concerned that sex offenders search for these kinds of images and may use them to blackmail the subjects.

What can you do?

- Talk to children about the fact that images, once online, are there for all time, and you have no control over what happens to them.
- Urge your child to think before they post.

- Warn them against passing on images of others.
- Remember that it's normal for teenagers to do unwise things. How daft would you have been if you'd had a smartphone in your pocket?

It's important to make sure your child is aware that:

- It is never acceptable to pressure someone to send a 'sext' or 'nude selfie'.
- If they are being pressured, this is not ok and they should speak to someone they trust for support. There is a [helpful Q&A](#) on the Disrespect NoBody website to help answer some common sexting questions.
- If they have sent something and they are worried, there is help on hand. Tell them they can always come to you for support, or explore the other adults they could tell or places they could gain online [support](#).
- Taking, possessing or sharing a sexually explicit picture or video of someone under 18 is against the law. It doesn't matter if they gave you permission, someone else sent it to you, you've never met them before, you are under 18 too or it's a selfie. You and anyone else involved could be investigated by the police, and this could even affect your future education and employment.

How are people pressured into sending nude or explicit pictures?

Those pressuring them may:

- Make them feel like everyone is doing it.
- Call them names like 'frigid' to bully them into sending one.
- Subject them to emotional pressure so they feel guilty if they don't want to. This can include being told things like 'if you loved me you would' or 'I sent you one so you owe me'.
- Threaten them with consequences if they don't. For example, threatening to 'out' someone as gay or bi-sexual if they don't send a pic.

What are the potential consequences of sexting?

Once an image or photo has been shared, it can be difficult to control what then happens to it:

- Another person could share the photo with other people, or post it online, which means anyone could see it (e.g. family, friends, teachers, even future employers).
- In extreme cases, it could be used to blackmail the sender into sending more photos or videos.

- If the relationship ends, the images could be shared, as a way to humiliate the former partner.
- It could lead to a range of other consequences, including bullying or unwanted attention from others.
- Legal consequences under the Protection of Children Act 1978 and/or the Criminal Justice Act 1988.

What does the law say about sexting?

- If your teenager (under 18 years old) is taking, sending or sharing explicit images, they are breaking the law:
 - *If you have any indecent images or videos of somebody who is under the age of 18 you would technically be in possession of an indecent image of a child, even if you are the same age. This is an offence under the Protection of Children Act 1978 and the Criminal Justice Act 1988.*
 - *Sending sexual photos or videos: if you are under 18 and you send, upload or forward indecent images or videos onto your friends or partner, this would be breaking the law, even if they are photos of you.*

However, the law is not intended to criminalise children when this is not in the public interest. If your child has been involved in consensual image sharing with another young person, you can be confident that you can seek help without this leading to criminal charges.

How can I keep my child safe?

Get the knowledge you need

- Learn about the apps, services, games and websites your child uses.
- Know what's risky, and how to get help.

Don't wait for something to happen before you talk to your child

- As soon as you feel they're old enough (and remember some children have shared risky selfies while still in primary school) talk to your child about the risks of sharing revealing selfies.
- Make sure your child knows that it is not a good idea to send a revealing selfie, and that they should tell you if anyone ever tries to pressure them to do so.
- Remind your child that when they meet people online, they can't be sure who they really are. It's not safe to share personal pictures or info with anyone they have only met online.
- Make sure your children know that they can always come to you if they are worried about anything, that you will understand, and that you will not be angry or blame them.

If you do find out that your child has sent or shared a revealing selfie online

Stay calm

It can help to find someone who will listen and support you – like a partner, close friend or family member.

Talk to your child

When you feel calm enough, talk to your child about what has happened. Try to understand it from their point of view. Make sure they know that you are not angry and do not blame them. Remember they are probably feeling very anxious.

Together, make a plan

NCA-CEOP's Nude Selfies films give lots of information about how to get photos taken down online, and where to get help if you need it. You can watch the films at <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/Nude-selfies-a-parents-guide/>

Where to get help

Here are some key sources of support for young people whose revealing image has been shared:

- Report to NCA-CEOP if you have any concerns about grooming, sexual abuse or exploitation, at www.ceop.police.uk.
- Contact your child's school so that they can support your child and follow up the incident with other students who might have seen or shared the photo.
- Report the image to social networks it appears on, so that they will take it down quickly. Find out how to do this on some of the most popular sites at www.thinkuknow.co.uk/14_plus/help/contact-social-sites.
- Report the image to the [Internet Watch Foundation](http://www.internetwatchfoundation.org.uk) (iwf.org.uk) if you need their help removing it from a site without a 'report' function.