

Sexting

Facts & Conversation Guide

I. THE FACTS

- ***Sexting is the use of a cell phone or other electronic device to distribute pictures or video showing nude or semi-nude images.***
- 22% of teen girls, 18% of teen boys and 11% of young teen girls (ages 13-16) report sending or posting nude or seminude pictures or video of themselves. (1)
- 37% of teen girls and 40% of teen boys report sending or posting sexually suggestive messages and 48% of teens say they have received such messages. (ibid)
- More than half of teen girls (51 %) say pressure from a guy is a reason girls send sexy messages or images, while 18% of teen boys say pressure from a girl is a reason. (ibid)
- Increasingly, private emails, sex texts and nude images are forwarded without consent to unintended parties or posted online without permission. This can result in a range of emotional repercussions for the victim such as embarrassment, shame, depression and harassment by peers. Also there have been documented cases of teen suicide in connection with private sexting made public.
- Strictly speaking, even two consenting minors exchanging nude photos via a cell phone or other electronic device are breaking child pornography laws. While there have been no minors prosecuted to date in Hawaii for sexting, youth need to be aware that it is illegal.

Tip: Avoid conveying alarm and shock about sexting to your teen. Otherwise, your teen is less likely to be open with you about sexting or other personal topics. They may stop coming to you with concerns or problems for fear you will take their cell phone or other electronic devices away. Instead, be calm and matter-of-fact as you discuss the realities and consequences of sexting.

II. THE CONVERSATION

Before the conversation –

- ✓ Review the questions below and note the ones you'd like to focus on.

1) Do you know what sexting is?

Sexting is the use of a cell phone or other electronic device to distribute pictures or video showing nude or semi-nude images.

2) Are you or people you know doing this? (don't press for an answer; it is likely they will say no or they don't know).

Let them know you are concerned about it. You may want to share the following national statistic: 22% of teen girls and 18% of teen boys report sending or posting nude or seminude pictures or video of themselves.

3) If someone sends a sex text or nude photo to someone they know, can they be sure no one else will see it? How might it go public?

by accident if someone else has access to the receiver's computer or device, because the receiver wants to show off to other people, or out of anger or spite if there is a relationship break up, etc.

To reinforce the fact that sexting often becomes public, share national stats with your child:

1 in 4 teen girls and 1 in 3 teen boys say they have had nude or semi-nude images shared with them that were originally meant for someone else.

Talk about the app called Snapchat. It's a mobile app which lets users share images or videos that disappear after a few seconds. Make sure your child knows that if Snapchat is used the receiver can take a screenshot of it before it disappears and save it. Also, experts report cases in which Snapchats have been retrieved once disappeared.

4) How do you think someone would feel if a sexually suggestive photo or video they sent privately to someone was posted for everyone to see?

betrayed, angry, embarrassed, depressed, etc.

(If your teen says some people "want" or "don't care" if it goes public, concede that may be true for very few, not most people. Ask them how they would feel?)

Discuss other consequences of sexting:

- *Minors sending or receiving nude images, even if both parties consent to it, is against the law in Hawai'i – it is considered child pornography.*
 - *The possibility of having embarrassing images existing forever in cyberspace and accessible to others, such as family members, a teacher, a coach or later in life if accessed by a college recruiter or potential employer.*
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5) Do you think some teens may feel pressured into sending nude or partly nude pictures of themselves to another person?

Share national statistic to reinforce the reality that many teens are not willingly engaging in sexting: More than half of teen girls say pressure from a guy is a reason girls send sexy messages or images, and almost 20% of teen boys say pressure from a girl is a reason.

6) If someone really cared about or respected the other person would they pressure them into sexting?

7) Besides not wanting sexting to go public, what are other reasons why someone might not want to send sexually suggestive photos or videos of themselves?

If your teen does not verbalize their own reasons, discuss reasons other teens gave when surveyed: *it's against the law for minors, wanting to keep private parts private, not wanting a boyfriend/girlfriend to think they want to have sex, being concerned that it may change how the person receiving the photo or video thinks about them, etc.*

8) Pressuring someone into sexting is a type of digital abuse. What do you know about digital abuse?

Discuss examples. *continually texting or calling someone when they don't want it, spreading rumors online, putting hurtful comments on someone's Facebook page, stealing or demanding to have another's password, etc.*

Take a few minutes to check out the website www.thatsnotcool.com with your teen. It's a popular site for young people about digital abuse. It's full of creative, practical strategies created by youth to handle the pressure to engage in sexting, and to address other forms of digital abuse.

III. BOTTOM LINE (WRAP UP THE CONVERSATION)

- Sexting can have serious consequences and is against the law for minors to do.
- Pressuring others to engage in sexting is digital abuse. It's never ok and causes harm.
- There are no guarantees that sexting between two people will remain private. Unless you want your family, relatives, college recruiters, future employees and the rest of the world to see it, don't send it.
- Never forward sexual texts, photos or videos that you may receive. Respect others' privacy.

VI. RESOURCES

- That's Not Cool (<http://www.thatsnotcool.com/>), a popular, interactive site for young people about digital abuse. It's user friendly and provides lots of creative and practical strategies created by youth to stay safe from digital abuse, including being pressured by others to engage in sexting.
- Netsmartz Workshop (<http://www.netsmartz.org>), an interactive educational site of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® (NCMEC) that entertains while it educates children (5-17) how to be safer on and offline. An excellent resources for parents and educators too.
- MTV's A Thin Line campaign (<http://www.athinline.org/about>) was developed to empower youth to identify, respond to, and stop the spread of digital abuse in their life and among their peers

(1) The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. 2008. Sex and Tech: Results from a Survey of Teens and Young Adults: http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/sextech/pdf/sextech_summary.pdf