

A Parent's Guide to School Safety Toolkit

3.5 Sexting



Sexting is the sending, receiving, or forwarding of sexually explicit messages or images, which occurs through text message, video, social media applications, email, webcam, or other avenues via the internet. Concerns regarding sexting began to emerge in the last decade as media and research began highlighting the possible long-term consequences.

Although sexting may appear harmless when it occurs between two consenting adults, it can result in serious criminal charges when it involves minors. Texas law identifies this activity as electronically transmitting sexual depictions of children. As technology has evolved, it has also become apparent that bullying and harassment can be both a cause and effect of sexting.

It is against the law for anyone, including a minor, to send a sexually explicit or suggestive image of someone under 18 years of age. This includes images of the sender, recipient, or another minor child.

What Parents May Think About Sexting:

- My child knows better and would never do that.
- I check my child's phone, so I would know if they are engaging in it.
- Only promiscuous kids do that.
- I talk to my kids and they would tell me if they were sexting.
- My child does not even think about sex yet.

- My child is too young to sext.

What Young People May Think About Sexting:

- It is just flirting.
- What is the big deal? Everybody does it.
- He/she loves me; I know he/she will not share.
- They will think I am hot when they see this pic.
- If I do not send this, she/he will break up with me.
- If he/she did not want people to see it, he/she would not have sent it.

Sexting is a Safety Issue



Revenge Porn

Once photos and videos are shared with another person or posted online, they usually get spread around. Images and videos can be forwarded or posted as revenge; for example, for breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, for perceived rejection or offense, as blackmail, due to bullying, or to increase the status of the poster. This is labeled as “revenge porn.” These images or videos can end up online, and as discussed earlier, once something is on the internet, it never truly goes away. Texas has a law addressing revenge porn and other unlawful disclosure of intimate images. The penalty for this offense is a state jail felony.

Sextortion



Images can be obtained in various ways: criminals hacking into cloud accounts or webcams; boyfriends or girlfriends sharing images which are then spread around; or by revenge porn. Once videos or images are obtained, they can be used to manipulate or coerce the person in the photo or the person who took the photo to obtain additional or more graphic images. This is called “sextortion” and it is one of the fastest-growing global crimes. Both young people and adults are potential targets, usually for money, but victims of sextortion have also been forced into sex or committing crimes, and it has pushed some people to (falsely) believe suicide is the only way to escape the humiliation, bullying, or extortion caused by an obtained image.

It is critical that you, using age and developmentally appropriate language, speak with your child about not taking, posting, or sharing sexual images or videos of themselves or others, and about the laws that are in place.

It is against the law:

- To solicit a minor online for sexual contact or sexual communication.
- To pretend to be someone else, without their consent, with the intent to harm or threaten that person.
- For a minor to engage, promote, possess, or send another minor sexual images which depict minors.
- To send electronic visual material which shows a person engaging in sexual conduct or exposing intimate parts, which is not requested or consented to by the recipient. This applies to all online platforms, text, and email.

What Should My Child Know?

When having these conversations with your child, remember that the goal is to have an open dialogue, rather than a lecture, and it is best to have these conversations on a regular basis rather than once.

Although it may be uncomfortable, the following conversations are important to have with your child:

- What constitutes sexting.
- Sexting is a **safety issue**.
- Sexting is often used to **bully, blackmail, and exploit**.
- The **permanence** of posting or sharing; once shared, it cannot be taken back.
- Once images are obtained, they almost always get spread.
- The **legal consequences** that can result from sharing visual images of self or others.
- **Possible long-term consequences**, other than legal, that may result from participating in sexting.
- **Sexting is not necessary to engage in for a relationship.** (Section [3.6 Dating Violence](#) has more information on healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationships.)
- **Predators exist online**, and hackers can access cloud accounts and webcams, so it is best practice to avoid taking sexual images, and for laptops to be closed when not in use.
- If your child makes a mistake, or they have already engaged in these behaviors, ensure they know that they can tell you. Remind your child that you are on their side and that you can work together to minimize the damage. **There is never a “too late,” and it is important to never lose hope.** (Suicide is never the answer.)
- **These laws exist to protect your child and others.** Do not allow laws to discourage you or your child from involving law enforcement if your child is a victim. **Law enforcement can investigate and minimize the spread.**
- **The importance of never forwarding sexual images**, including viral images, if they receive them. Let law enforcement know so they can investigate and minimize the spread.

Resources:

- [Sexting Safety Agreement](#)
- [TxSSC Before You Text: Bullying & Sexting Prevention Course](#) (for young people aged 12+ as it covers mature content)