



## Tips to Prevent **SEXTING**



### **THINK ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES**

of taking, sending, or forwarding a sexual picture of someone underage, even if it's of you. You could get kicked off of sports teams, face humiliation, lose educational opportunities, and even get in trouble with the law.

### **NEVER TAKE**

images of yourself that you wouldn't want everyone—your classmates, your teachers, your family, or your employers—to see.

### **BEFORE HITTING SEND**

remember that you can't control where this image may travel. What you send to a boyfriend or girlfriend could easily end up with their friends, and their friends, and their friends...

### **IF YOU FORWARD**

a sexual picture of someone underage, you are as responsible for this image as the original sender. You could face child pornography charges, go to jail, and have to register as a sex offender.

### **REPORT**

any nude pictures you receive on your cell phone to an adult you trust. Do not delete the message. Instead, get your parents or guardians, teachers, and school counselors involved immediately.

### **Q: How do I know if my child is sexting?**

**A:** No parent or guardian wants to be the last one to know that their child is sexting. Try to maintain open lines of communication with your children so that they are not afraid to talk to you if they receive inappropriate photos or are being pressured to send them.

### **Below are some discussion starters to help you have the “sexting talk” with your child**

- Have you ever received a sexual message or naked picture on your cell phone?
- Has anyone ever asked or pressured you to send a nude or sexual picture?
- Do you think it's OK to send “sexy” messages or images? Why?
- What could happen to you if you send or forward a sexual text message or naked picture with your cell phone?
- How likely is it that images and messages intended for one person will be seen by others?

# SEXTING

## Questions and Answers from NetSmartz® Workshop

Many youth believe that anything that they want to do with *their* bodies and *their* phones is *their* business. Youth enjoy the privacy and freedom that cell phones give them from their parents or guardians. But when they use that freedom and their cell phones to explore their budding sexuality, it's easy to understand why 1 in 5 teens (13-19) reported having sent a sexually suggestive image or message.<sup>1</sup> However, when youth engage in sexting, the sending or posting of nude or partially nude images of minors, the law takes a very different view.

Help your children avoid the potential life consequences of sexting by learning more about the issue and talking to your children before they put themselves in a compromising position.

### Q: Why do youth sext?

**A:** Youth sext for many reasons. They may be pressured by friends or trying to impress a crush. Some are responding to a sexual text message they've received and others willingly send nude photos of themselves to a boyfriend or girlfriend. Youth make these decisions without thinking about how their futures may be affected. It's important for parents and guardians to understand that as technically savvy as their children are, they often don't think about the implications of how quickly digital information can spread via cell phone and the Internet.

### Q: What are the consequences of sexting?

**A:** Youth who sext may face charges of producing, possessing, and/or distributing child pornography. For example, if Sue takes a nude picture of herself and sends it to John, she may be charged with the production and distribution of child pornography. If John forwards the image to Tim, John may be charged with the possession and distribution of child pornography. As long as the image circulates, anyone with it may face charges.

Legal consequences are not the only outcomes that children face. They may face social repercussions, such as being judged or excluded by their peers, communities, and families. Youth that send the images may become targets of mean comments, rumors, and harassment. Furthermore, the image may follow them forever, damaging academic, social, and employment opportunities.

Sexting may also profoundly affect the emotional and psychological development of a child. Trust is broken when an image is forwarded without the creator's consent, such as when a boyfriend takes revenge on an ex-girlfriend by forwarding images intended to be private. Once an image is spread via cell phone or posted online, it is impossible to get back and can potentially circulate forever; youth who engage in sexting risk reoccurring embarrassment and victimization. These pictures can even find their way into the hands of those individuals who prey on children and collect child pornography. This kind of exploitation can be psychologically devastating.

### Q: What can I do to help prevent my child from sexting?

**A:** Make sure to review your house rules for online conduct with your children before giving them access to new Web-enabled technologies. Along with discussing your expectations for their behavior, discuss the consequences for failing to meet those expectations, such as limited access to Web and texting functions. If children ignore the rules, consider removing cell phones all together; however, this should be your last resort. Technology is not going anywhere, and it's important that children learn how to use it appropriately.

Talk to them early and often about how digital information and images may travel very far, very quickly. Make it absolutely clear to youth that the moment they send a digital image of themselves from their cell phone, they completely lose control of what happens to it next.

<sup>1</sup> Statistic referenced is from *Sex and Tech*, a survey by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and CosmoGirl.com.