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Talking to  
Your Child/Teen About

# Sexting



## BACKGROUND

It seems as if the stories in the media are becoming more and more frequent. Teenagers at a local high school caught up in a sexting scandal. These stories may make us wonder, “Just how common is this?” Nearly 40% of all teenagers have posted or sent sexually suggestive messages, and this practice is more common among boys than girls (11 Facts about Sexting). Chances are, your child will encounter this at some point in their life, either by unwittingly receiving a sext, feeling pressured to send one, or actively sending one. This is why it’s so important to talk to our kids about this growing and dangerous trend.

## PREPARATION

- Review the objective of the lesson and understand why it is important to talk to your child about sexting.
- Read over the lesson first, and try to anticipate what your child is ready for and what questions your child might have.
- Familiarize yourself with the glossary terms.
- Read one or both of these articles:

[6 Reasons Why Kids Sext](#)

[8 Dangers of Sexting - and What Parents Can Do](#)

## OBJECTIVE

Define sexting and why people engage in it. Discuss the concept that nothing is ever really deleted from the internet. Explain the legal ramifications of sending and/or receiving a sext. Formulate a plan for what to do if your child/teen sends or receives sexually explicit messages or photos, or even just a request for such a photo.

It should be explained that asking someone for a nude or semi-nude photo of them is demeaning and is NOT meant to upgrade or esteem a person.

## WHAT IS SEXTING

Sexting is sending sexually **explicit** messages or pictures via electronic means, most typically by cell phone.

## WHY IS IT DANGEROUS?

There are many reasons sexting is so dangerous for kids and teens. First, in many states sexting can actually constitute possession and distribution of **child pornography**. Even if your child has unwittingly sent pictures, they can still be held legally responsible. Also, many kids and teens mistakenly think the person they send a sext to will keep it private. Whoever gets the picture can do whatever they want with it--whether it is sent via text messaging or through an app like Snapchat or Instagram.

Deleting a picture isn't a perfect solution either. There is no way to know how many people have saved or shared the photo. Sexting can also lead to **bullying** (including sexual harassment), and many kids don't reach out for help because they are embarrassed or afraid of getting into trouble. Another concern is that sexting can be used as a **grooming** tactic by sexual **predators**. Furthermore, when someone willingly sends a sexually explicit picture, they are **self-objectifying**. The person in the image is no longer seen as an actual human being; instead they become a thing that is used for the sexual gratification of another.

**It should be explained that asking someone for a nude or semi-nude photo of them is demeaning and is NOT meant to upgrade or esteem a person. It is not a compliment for a person to want to look at or pass around a nude photo of you. It is meant to objectify you and turn you into an object without feelings, thoughts, or intelligence. It can also sometimes be predatory for a person to share their nude photo of himself unsolicited with you.**

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CHILD

- Have you ever received a sexually explicit message?
- Do you see or hear about sexting frequently at school or among your friends?
- How do you think someone feels who has been asked or pressured to send a nude or semi-nude photo?
- How do you think people feel if they have received an unasked-for sext message?
- How do you think people feel when their nude/semi-nude photo has been shared, which often occurs?
- Is there anything positive about sending a sext message?
- What will you do if you receive a sext message?
- What will you say to the person who sent it?
- What can you say to someone who asks you for a picture of you naked or partially clothed?

## WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

- Talk with your child about your family's values, rules, and expectations.
- Have discussions with your kids, and set CLEAR rules and consequences regarding sexting.
- Establish rules for cell phone use, preferably with input from your child.
- Educate yourself on the apps out there and what apps are on your child's phone, specifically apps that allow messaging. Do a nightly or weekly check in; review their texts and downloads.
- It's important to never **shame** your child when having these discussions, even if you find out they have participated in sexting.

## ACTIVITY

Try role-playing. Help your child know what they can and should do if they are asked for or receive a sexually explicit message from ANYONE. Help your child formulate the words they will use if they ever encounter this situation in real life. Revisit this often to remind them of the plan.

## FOLLOWING UP

- Remind your kids of your expectations.
- For younger kids, practice the plan for when your child is asked to send or receives a sext.
- Think of ways to help your child build their self worth. A child who knows they have value is more likely to be able to say no when asked for a sexually explicit photo.
- Be aware of who your child is texting, how often they text, and at what times.
- Check their phones frequently.
- Be conscientious of any changes in your child's behavior. This could be a sign that something is amiss.
- This will not be a one-time discussion; you'll want to reiterate these principles continuously.

## RELATED DISCUSSIONS

All of these can be found in [30 Days of Sex Talks, Empowering Your Child with Knowledge of Sexual Intimacy](#).

Self-Esteem and Sex

Respecting Others

Unwanted Sexual Attention

Liking Yourself

Social Media/Sexting

How Predators Groom Kids

## MORE INFORMATION FROM OUR SITE

[6 Reason Why Kids Sext](#)

[8 Dangers of Sexting - and What Parents Can Do](#)

### GLOSSARY:

**Bullying:** The use of force, threat, or coercion to abuse, intimidate, or aggressively dominate others. The behavior is often repeated and habitual.

**Child Pornography:** The use of anyone under the age of 18 in the portrayal of explicit sexual content for the purpose or intent of causing sexual arousal.

**Explicit:** Content that contains sexual material that may be considered offensive or overtly graphic.

**Groom:** To prepare or train someone for a particular purpose or activity. In the case of sexual predators, it is any willful action made by the offender that prepares the victim and/or victim's support network to allow for easier sex offending.

**Predator:** A predator is technically an organism or being that hunts and then feeds on their prey. A sexual predator is someone who seeks to obtain sexual contact through "hunting." The term is often used to describe the deceptive and coercive methods used by people who commit sex crimes where there is a victim, such as rape or child abuse.

**Self-Objectifying:** When people view themselves as objects for use instead of as human beings.

**Shame:** The painful feeling arising from the consciousness of something dishonorable, improper, ridiculous, etc., done by oneself or another.

#### Citations:

11 Facts about Sexting. (n.d.). Retrieved June 15, 2016, from <https://www.dosomething.org/us/facts/11-facts-about-sexting>

Bullying. (n.d.). Retrieved June 15, 2016, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bullying>

Self-objectification. (n.d.). Retrieved June 15, 2016, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-objectification>