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# Sexting - A Guide for Parents

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E-safety Support



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Sexting, sometimes referred to Youth Produced Sexual Imagery (YPSI), has become popular amongst young people and children over the past five years.

## WHAT IS SEXTING?

Sexting is the exchange of self-generated, sexually explicit images and messages, through mobile device cameras and webcams using apps or video streaming services.

Many young people refer to it as:

- Dirty pics
- Rude dares
- Nude selfies or sending nudes
- Cybersex

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S ATTITUDE

Why do young people share inappropriate images? There is no single reason for doing this, but for some it is a way of trying to gain attention or a way of 'flirting'. Others also copy some of their role models who post pictures on certain social media sites, not fully understanding the consequences of their actions.

## THE LAW

Under the *Sexual Offences Act (2003)* it is: 'an offence to possess, distribute, show and make indecent images of children under the age of 18'

It is important for your child to know that being charged for an offence under the 2003 Act could have serious repercussions for them later in life. If they decided on a career path that needed a Disclosure Barring Scheme (DBS) application, a caution or criminal charge could mean that they might be stopped from working with children and vulnerable people.

The police work with schools to try to minimise the problem and deal with incidents on an individual basis. All forces see it as a safeguarding issue and young people need to know that, in certain circumstances, they could be charged with a criminal offence.

## CONSEQUENCES

There are a number of dangers from sharing inappropriate images on the Internet which include:

- **Exploitation** – There has been a rise in criminal gangs using the Internet to try to blackmail young men into sharing indecent images. This usually involves the young man being groomed by an 'online mule', typically a young woman who asks the young man to perform an indecent act on a webcam, in return for the young woman doing the same. However, once this has been completed, the young man is told that a video has been recorded and, if he does not pay a sum of money to the gang, the video will be shared with family and friends.
- **Child sexual exploitation** - The sexual exploitation of teenage girls has made the national headlines in recent years with cases in Rotherham and Rochdale. Young people don't realise that they can be targeted by individuals and gangs if they share inappropriate images on the Internet.





- **Broadcast apps** – Software apps on smartphones and tablets such as Live.ly and ooVoo have become increasingly popular over recent years. They give the opportunity for users to video chat with others. However, this also leaves children and young people open to being groomed, with several recent cases of children being asked to perform indecent acts.
- **Mental health** – The repercussions of a young person uploading an inappropriate image on the Internet can be immense. The problem is that they no longer have control of the image, and knowing that this image can be seen by others (including family) can cause serious mental health issues. It can also lead to bullying by other individuals or members of the school community which is often known as 'slut shaming'.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

The most important action is for parents and carers to talk to your child. This must start at an early age, so children know that there are rules about using the Internet. In addition, as they start using photo sharing apps such as Snapchat at primary school, parents must talk to their child about oversharing information on the Internet.

As a parent, you can also take actions to minimise the chances of your child sending or sharing images on the Internet. All devices come with parental controls and you can set these so that your child cannot use certain functions. Also, on certain apps there are privacy settings, meaning that you can only share images with certain people. For more information about the different ways you can do this, go to <https://www.internetmatters.org/>

Finally, if your child has sent an inappropriate message, you must be able to deal with it in a calm and constructive manner. You need to listen and reassure them and look at the ways you can minimise the impact of the images that have been shared. Talking to the safeguarding lead in school may help. Also, your child can talk to trained counsellors on Childline.

### USEFUL WEBSITES

**Think U Know** – <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

**Childline** – <https://www.childline.org.uk/>

**NSPCC (Share Aware)** – <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/share-aware/>

**SWGfL – So You Got Naked Online** - <http://swgfl.org.uk/products-services/online-safety/resources/So-You-Got-Naked-Online>

