



The dangers of sexting

Recognising the signs and practical
tips

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for IAPS



How to talk to your child about the dangers of sexting

What is sexting?

Sexting is when someone sends a sexually explicit photograph or video of themselves via their mobile phone or online. It can also refer to written messages.

Why is sexting so common amongst young people?

Teenagers often have their own smartphone now and can send images or videos freely. Many adolescents believe the image will disappear immediately due to certain app's features, but images can be saved easily.

Many adolescents do not realise sexting is violating UK law, by sending or being in possession of sexually explicit photos of a minor. Young people can be impulsive, managing fluctuating hormone levels, emotional and sexual feelings and peer pressure. Often, young people 'sext' hoping to start a relationship or gain positive comments. They may be pressurised into it too.

What are the consequences of sexting?

If their image is made available to others, it can cause a high level of distress for a young person. This can lead to 'coping' in unhealthy ways such as self-harming, self-isolation, and restricting food intake. It can also lead to high levels of anxiety and the development, or exacerbation of, depressive symptoms.

If adolescents don't get the response they wished for, this can have a negative impact on their self-esteem and body image. They may also experience bullying, and are more likely to engage in other risky sexual activity. Some young people are coerced or blackmailed into more sexting, and this can lead to trauma. Images that young people have sent could also reappear on websites years later.

Why should you discuss sexting with your child?

Tips on how to talk to your child about sexting:

1. Select a time when your child is not in an emotional state but is calm, rational and not distracted
2. Tackle the issue at a young age. Do not wait until they are in the midst of a group of friends who do 'sext'
3. Set out the rules of mobile or internet access when they are first given this in an unsupervised manner
4. Make sure that your child knows what is not acceptable regarding sending photos and that their body is private and they should never be forced to share it with anyone
5. Talk to them explicitly about how being asked to 'sext' is inappropriate and illegal for minors and how often young people are pressured into this

6. Explain to them it is ok to stand out from the peer group and not follow the crowd
7. Talk to your child about real life examples where private images or videos have been shown to the world and the consequences
8. Reinforce to your child they can talk to you about any pressure they receive and you will be supportive and non-judgemental.

What should you do if you think your child is a victim of sexting?

1. React calmly if your child tells you this is the case. Listen to them and offer support, validate how distressing it must be for them. Try not to place guilt on your child
2. Find out details of who the image was sent to and keep evidence if you can
3. If the image was shared on a website, contact that website to report it
4. Consider changing your child's phone number
5. If your child was forced into sexting, contact your local Police force
6. If your child shared their image willingly, talk to your child again about the dangers and consider discussing the issue with the parents of the receiving child
7. If the image was sent to an adult, report this to the Police or the Child Exploitation & Online Protection Centre
8. Inform your child's school so they can monitor the situation if it involved peers
9. Offer your child support. Let them know of confidential helplines they can talk to such as Childline or the NSPCC. If you are concerned they are not coping see your GP and consider a specialist referral for mental health input.

If young people know the boundaries that you accept as parents, from the moment they first have a mobile phone, they are more likely to accept these rules.

IAPS is working in partnership with Priory to deliver a teacher conference on Mental Health, 20 March.

For more details on the full range of Priory Services visit www.priorygroup.com, call **0800 086 1188** or [click here to make an enquiry](#).

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