



FOR PARENTS

Sexting

Answers to questions about sexting and resources.

What is sexting?

Sexting is the transmission of sexually explicit images or videos between digital devices such as smartphones or tablets.

Should I be concerned?

As children continue to develop socially, emotionally and physically, they also face peer pressure, begin to explore their sexuality and enter a risk-taking period of maturation. These changes, coupled with curiosity and access to technology, can serve as a gateway to sexting without recognizing the reality of their actions. Sexting is not limited to romantic and established relationships; youth seeking attention or affirmation from any audience may also engage in sexting.

Sexting is not only an issue with teens, but also with elementary and middle school children. Regardless of the child's age, there are social, emotional, disciplinary and possibly legal consequences to this act. However, the shame and isolation within peer groups caused by the widespread distribution of a sexting image or video often takes the greatest toll.

How do I prevent my children from participating?

Communication is essential when addressing any online behavior. Prior to giving your child access to technology with a camera, discuss your definition of appropriate pictures and videos to produce and share. This conversation should be ongoing and discussed as your child reaches various milestones of development, such as when they get their first social media profile. Likewise, as your child approaches the age of entering romantic relationships, the conversation should evolve to include what a healthy relationship looks like offline and online. Values and expectations of relationships should be discussed with your child to empower them when faced with pressure from peers and/or significant others.

My child received a sexually explicit image. Now what?

Review the received content and ask your child who sent it. If they do not know the sender or the individual in the image, it's time to block this online "friend." Consider making a report to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's CyberTipline at cybertipline.com if the content is blatant child pornography and then delete the file.

If your child does know the sender or individual in the image, it's time for further conversation. Discuss what is occurring—the betrayal of trust in distributing another person's image, the harm to someone's reputation, the distribution of illegal content (child pornography) and the consequences of knowingly forwarding the images to others. As an adult, consider speaking to the parent of the child victim and perpetrator. If you plan to report this incident to law enforcement, take the device to them, so that they can retrieve the imagery. Do not take a screenshot of the image.

My child sexted. Now what?

Sexual curiosity and peer pressure can influence youth to make poor choices. Support your child if they disclose the issue to you themselves or if you are told by another parent, the school district or a school resource officer. While disappointment is a given, your child needs your support now more than ever. Inquire as to whom the images were sent—someone they know, or someone they met online. Working with a social worker or counselor may also be beneficial for your child.

Sexting Resources

Illinois Law Addressing Sexting Between Minors

<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/documents/070504050K3-40.htm>

Illinois Law Addressing Child Pornography

<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/fulltext.asp?DocName=072000050K11-23>

<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/documents/072000050K11-20.1.htm>

Additional Information

<https://www.missingkids.org/netsmartz/topics/sexting>