

SEXTING: Information for parents

What is sexting?

- **'Sexts'**- this is a colloquial term that describes sexually explicit SMS or MMS, emails, photos, videos; as well as posts or blogs on social networking websites like Facebook, Myspace or Twitter, or images or clips from Skype.
- **Sexually-explicit** is content that by societal standards is "sexually-offensive" e.g. nude or semi-nude images, material depicting persons engaging in sexual activity or in sexually suggestive poses
- **'Sexting'**- involves creating, sending, receiving, possessing or forwarding 'sexts' [1]

What should you know about 'sexting'?

- 'Sexting' is a common practice among teenagers and often involves teenagers sending topless images of themselves to a boyfriend or girlfriend
- 'Sexting' is ILLEGAL and can lead to serious criminal charges
- 'Sexting' can lead to serious health and **social** consequences for young people

How common is sexting among teenagers?

A survey conducted in 2008 found that:

- 20% of teens have sent or posted online nude or seminude photos or videos of themselves
- 39% of teens have sent sexually suggestive text messages, emails, or instant messages to others
- 48% of teens have received sexually explicit messages

Why may teenagers 'sext'?

- Research indicates that teenagers are more prone to sext someone they trust -e.g. boyfriend, girlfriend
- Many teenagers believe that their online activity is private.
- Many teenagers believe that an image, clip or post can be erased completely after it has been sent
- Many teenagers believe that their phone, email and internet activity is anonymous.

Facts about sexts

- An image or clip can be leaked accidentally
- phones and internet accounts can be 'hacked' by a third party
- An image or clip can circulate for years in

cyberspace even after it has been deleted

- An image or clip can be traced back to its source

Sexting can have serious consequences for young people

These impacts mostly occur after the 'sext' (image, clip, post) has been seen by people for whom it wasn't intended. Teenagers may feel pressured to 'sext' and they may come to regret it immediately afterwards.

What are the consequences of 'sexting'?

Emotional

A teenager may feel guilt, regret, embarrassment, or shame. They may feel isolation due to people's negative response towards them if the sext becomes 'public'

Psychological

- The emotional impacts may affect sleep and eating, their attendance and performance at school, sport and other commitments
- psychological impacts can lead to depression, isolation, anxiety, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts

Legal

- schools may take strong disciplinary action against any student they find involved in sexting
- but what many teenagers and parents don't know is that sexting is ILLEGAL!

Australian Federal Law states that:

- Anyone under 18 who is involved in sexting can be criminally charged under the same child pornography laws used to charge adults.
- Sexting among minors is illegal under Commonwealth Criminal Law, State and Territory Criminal Law and Commonwealth Civil Law

Sexts between teenagers are considered to be child pornography because:

- the sexts involve minors- children under the age of 18
- the sexts depict or describe content or acts that are classified as sexually-offensive or sexually-explicit

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Teenagers can be arrested, charged and convicted if they;

- take/create a sexy image or clip = creation of child pornography even if they take a sexy photo of THEMSELVES and send it to someone whom they wanted to send it to
- send or forward on a sexy image or clip = transmission of child pornography
- receive a sexy image or clip (whether you asked for it or not) = possession of child pornography
- ask for a sexy photo or video from another teenager = procurement of a minor

The legal consequences for teenagers involved in sexting could include:

- jail-time
- fines of up to \$1000
- a listing on the sexual offender register

Social and Reputational Impacts

- Damaged reputation
- Damaged relationships
- Can affect applications for university places and jobs
- Can restrict overseas travel- a number of countries forbid entry to people who have been convicted of child pornography charges
- May limit their future employment options

What can you do to protect your children?

- Set clear expectations about your children's behaviour when using electronic telecommunication devices.
- Educate your children about cyber-safety and cyber-responsibility.
- Get to know who your children are communicating with online and on the phone.
- Limit unsupervised use of computers and mobile phones
- Educate yourself and talk to your children about 'sexting' and its consequences
- Let your child know that you are ALWAYS there to talk about any issues
- Seek professional advice and support if needed.

References

[1] All references used in the creation of this fact sheet can be found in the accompanying fact sheet titled 'Sexting References'.

Websites for more information

- www.secasa.com.au
- www.thinkyouknow.org.au
- www.cybersmart.gov.au
- www.cybersafekids.com.au
- www.lawstuff.org.au/vic_law/topics/Sexting
- "Photograph: How to deal with the problems of sexting and cyberbullying". 2010. [DVD] Australia. Centacare Sandhurst Loddon Mallee Cyber Safety Project.