



Information for Parents/Carers

Sexting: What you need to know

So let's start at the beginning.... What is 'sexting'?

This information aims to help parents/carers to understand the concerns associated with 'sexting' in order to better equip them to discuss the topic with their child.

'Sexting' is the exchange of self generated* sexually explicit images and message, through mobile picture messages, web-cams over the internet. Some young people also refer to this as cybersex, sending nudes, dirty pics or naked selfies.

Sexting has become an increasingly common activity among children and young people, often considered by them as 'normal' harmless fun or flirting; what they fail to see, understand or are unaware of, is the risks and potential consequences that come with this activity. **taken by themselves*

Reasons why young people say they are likely to 'sext':

- See it as a 'normal' part of sexual exploration in modern teen culture
- Peer pressure- being directly asked to send
- Fear of being laughed at or bullied if they don't
- Expected in a relationship - if they refuse, their partner will break up with them for someone who will send images
- Used as trophies - the more pics on their phone, the more popular or admired they are by their friends
- To get the attention of someone they liked, wanting to be noticed
- Body image - seeing pics of others, thinking it can go wrong, or 'it won't happen to them'
- Perceiving it easier to engage in nudity, sexual flirting and sex online than face to face.
- Trust in the person they're sending it to, likely to be partner.
- Thinking that what they send can be erased completely after it has been sent.

What are the risks to my child/young person?

Online sexualised activity has increased among young people due to reasons such as the ones listed above. Unfortunately, what they don't always understand or consider when getting involved in this type of behaviour, are the risks, consequences and impact sharing and posting sexual content of themselves can have when things get out of hand and goes wrong.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

Describes when children and young people are sexually exploited by an adult who engages them through the internet, social media or in person, with the aim of forming trusting friendships/relationships with them for the intention of exploiting them for sex or sexual content.

Adult perpetrators play on young people's naivety and vulnerabilities, tricking them into believing they care for them, love them and can trust them; using this trust to manipulate and coerce young people to send sexual content of themselves, and in cases, content of their friends too.

Online exploitation has increased with advances in social media technology, alongside an increase in the trend among young people to have 'older partners'.



Secondary/FE: Sexting: Sending & Sharing Naked/Sexual Pictures Online

What is the Law?

Young people need to be aware that **taking, possessing, sharing, showing and distributing** indecent images of a child U18 is an offence and offences against a child U18 can be committed by a child.



Prosecution

The law recognises that most cases of sexting happen because of the growing trend of taking 'selfies' and how it forms part of online sexual exploration in a modern digital society; sharing pictures with boyfriends and girlfriends has become part of their social and sexual development. With awareness of this, when dealing with reported cases of sexting, police will:

- Not treat this as a criminal act in the sense of the young people involved committing sexual harm to a child, creating child pornography or having a sexual interest in children.
- Always avoid prosecuting and criminalising young people for sharing content of themselves in cases where it is 'experimental' – meaning it has happened within a consensual, age-appropriate relationship.
- Always look to safeguard young people first and foremost, avoiding formal action and using alternative approaches to protect, educate and intervene.

In cases where there are 'aggravating' factors, it may be necessary for the police to take formal action with the young people involved, meaning they could be charged with an offence. Aggravating factors include wide age gaps, blackmail, and threats.

It is important young people know this as a criminal record can impact their future as explained below.

Future Employment and Travel

When a case is reported to the police, investigated, a crime is confirmed to have happened and a young person is charged, they will have a criminal record which will be disclosed on a DBS check in the future.

If charges are not brought against the young person, it is important they know that details of the case will still be recorded as a crime with no formal action taken, and will be held on police record.

Although a police record is not a criminal record, enhanced levels of vetting in the future may still disclose details to future employers or travel departments.

- ✓ **Repercussions:** Young people don't always recognise the possible effects that posting or sharing their images online can bring; commonly, people can get nasty and cause them additional distress, examples are:
 - Blackmail (extortion):** An offender may threaten to share the pictures with the child's family and friends unless the child sends more images, videos, money or images of others.
 - Bullying:** Images are sent to, or seen by internet peers or friends at school; this leads to them being bullied
 - Unwanted attention:** Images posted online can attract the attention of sex offenders; they know how to engage young people, search for, collect and modify images.
 - Emotional distress:** Children and young people can be left feeling embarrassed and humiliated, made worse in situations where they are bullied or blackmailed; can lead to depression, self harm and in some cases suicide.

What can I do to protect my child?

- ✓ **Talk to your child:** It's not always easy to have discussions of this nature with your child and may feel a bit awkward, but as a parent/carer it's important to ensure they understand the risks of 'sexting' advise them about staying safe, future impact and reassure them they can talk to you if something ever makes them feel uncomfortable, worried or things go wrong for them. The NSPCC provides guidance for parents on how to approach the conversation.





- ✓ **Learn together:** There is a wealth of advice and support online for young people and their parents about the risks and dangers online – from speaking with strangers to sending naked images. CEOP has produced some excellent videos for young people and parents to watch, these can be found on the **Thinkuknow** website, so why not watch and discuss these together.
- ✓ **Reassure your child:** Let your child know that you are always there to support them if they feel worried or pressured by anyone, or if a situation they get involved in gets out of hand they can come to you.
- ✓ **Take control:** Set up parental controls and safety apps on your child's devices whenever you can to help keep your child safe. It's important to be supportive and trusting of your child and their internet use, however, it helps to know how to set controls if you need to block access to certain sites or monitor your child's activity; below is a list of sites and tools to help you.

Hampshire Police

Call 101 for non emergency help and advice or call 999 if a child is in immediate danger

[Click here](#) to visit our 'Alice's Diary' Child Sexual Exploitation webpage

NSPCC

CSE: [Click here](#) for advice and support

Sexting: [Click here](#) for advice and support

Call 0808 800 5000 – help for adults concerned about a child

Web: www.nspcc.org.uk

CEOP - ThinkuKnow - www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents

Nude Selfies: **Understanding Why** - A video from a parents perspective

Nude Selfies: **Talking to your child** - How to start a conversation about sex and relationships

Nude Selfies: **When should I be worried?** - This film will help you understand the different contexts in which images can be shared and how to respond.

Nude Selfies: **Where to get help** - Find out about organisations which can help you and your child

Mobile Phone Networks

O2

Have joined forces with NSPCC to provide parents with skills and tools to keep their children safe online

Click [here](#) to visit the Net Aware homepage

Vodafone

Digital Parenting Resource to provide parents with skills and tools to keep their children safe online

Click [here](#) to visit the Digital Parenting homepage

EE

Provide step by step guidance on how to set up your child's phone and make it safe with their 'Set Up Safe' service. Click [here](#) to find out more.

Three

Three offer a guide to staying safe online, which included top tips to keeping safe. You can find out more [here](#).

Other Resources

Parent Zone

Parent Zone provides advice, knowledge and support, to shape the best possible future for children, as they embrace the online world. Click [here](#) to discover more

Apps for your child

Zipit - this app has been designed in partnership with Childline and is designed to help young people take control of their chat.

