

Common Sense Tips Sexting

Some facts

- > 22% of teen girls and 20% of teen boys have sent nude or semi-nude photos of themselves
- > 22% of teens admit that technology makes them personally more forward and aggressive
- > 38% say exchanging sexy content makes dating or hooking up with others more likely
- > 29% believe those exchanging sexy content are "expected" to date or hook up
- > Revealing photos can be resent to a vast audience
- > Sending a sexual image to a minor is illegal

Poor choices now, big consequences later

There have been plenty of examples of teens taking scandalous photos or videos of themselves and having those images end up in the wrong hands. Remember when *High School Musical* star Vanessa Hudgens sent a nude picture to her co-star/boyfriend, Zac Efron, that ended up all over the Internet? The stories can have tragic endings as with Cincinnati teen Jesse Logan who committed suicide in July 2008 after a nude photo she'd sent to a boyfriend was circulated widely around her high school, resulting in harassment from her classmates. Headlines like these make sexting an important topic to cover with your teens.

What is it?

When people take sexually revealing picture of themselves and send them as text message attachments, it's called "sexting." And recently the practice has been increasing exponentially. Kids "sext" to show off, to entice someone, to show interest in someone, or to prove commitment. The problem with that, is that the moment the relationship ends (and most of them do) someone is in possession of a highly compromising image that can be easily posted on a social networking site or sent around via email or text.

Why it matters

In a technology world where anything can be copied, sent, posted, and seen by huge audiences, there's no such thing as being able to control images. Even if a photo was taken and sent as a token of love, the intention doesn't matter – the technology makes it possible for everyone to see your child's most intimate self. And in the hands of teenagers, when revealing photos are made public the subject almost always becomes the object of ridicule and name calling. Furthermore, sending sexual images to minors is against the law, and some states have begun prosecuting kids for child pornography or felony obscenity.

Common Sense says:

- > **Don't wait for an incident to happen** to your child or your child's friend before you talk to your kids about the consequences of sexting. Sure, talking about sex or dating with teens can be really uncomfortable, but better to have the talk before the fact.
- > **Remind them that once an image is sent, it can never be retrieved** – and they will lose control of it. Ask teens how they would feel if their teachers, parents, or the entire school saw the picture, because it happens all the time.
- > **Talk about pressures to send revealing photos.** Let teens know that you understand that they can be pushed or dared into sending something. Tell them that no matter how big the social pressure is, the potential social humiliation will be hundreds of times worse.
- > **The buck stops with them.** If someone sends them a photo, have them delete it immediately. Better to be part of the solution than the problem. Besides, if they do send it on, they're distributing pornography – and that's against the law.
- > **Have your kids go to ThatsNotCool.com** (and you should go yourself). It's a fabulous site that gives kids the language and support to take texting and cell phone power back into their own hands.

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