

What is 'Sexting'?

When people talk about sexting, they usually mean sending and receiving:

- naked pictures or 'nudes'.
- 'underwear shots'.
- sexualised pictures.
- rude text messages or videos.

Unfortunately, due to the growth of mobile devices and social media this is a growing issue amongst young people in the UK.

A clear explanation of this can be found via the following link:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk33130827>

Key Information

- According to a NSPCC/ChildLine poll seen by the BBC's Newsnight programme, 60% of UK teenagers say they have been asked for sexual images or videos.
- The sending or receiving of sexually explicit images, videos or texts is known as 'sexting'.
- Many young girls feel pressurised into sending explicit images of themselves without understanding the consequences.
- Some young women feel pressure to have sex, so for some of them they think sending this type of photo puts the breaks on a physical relationship.
- Many young people fail to understand the implications of sending a sexually explicit image.
- Under British law it is legal to have sex aged 16, but it is illegal and a serious criminal offence to take, hold or share "indecent" photos of anyone aged under 18.
- Young people need understand that once an explicit image has been sent it is no longer in their control. The image may end up on what is known as a 'parasite website'. Such sites hold explicit images and videos from all over the internet -usually without the original sender's knowledge.
- Once an explicit image is online it could tarnish a young person's reputation for years to come and potential employers could view the images, long after the individual has left school.
- The Internet Watch Foundation search for explicit images and videos of under 18 year-olds and remove them.

What can you as parents do?

1). Have a conversation

- Every child is different, so your approach should be based on their character and your relationship with them.
- Outline your expectations and explain the rules of having a mobile, tablet or smartphone
- Ask them what they feel is acceptable to send to people, if they'd be happy for you or a stranger or other children to see certain photos. If the answer is 'no', explain that the image, video or message is probably not appropriate to send.
- Make sure they're comfortable saying no, that they know their body is private and being asked to share explicit images is inappropriate.
- Explain to them about the importance of trust and consent in a healthy relationship. Tell them that it's not ok for someone to make them feel uncomfortable, to pressure them into doing things that they don't want to do, or to show them things that they're unhappy about. Let them know that they can speak to you if this ever happens.

2). Explain the risks of sexting

- Tell them what can happen when things go wrong. Don't accuse them of sexting, but do explain the dangers and legal issues.
- You may find it easier to use real-life examples, such as television programmes or news stories, to help you explain the risks.
- Ask them if they'd want something private shown to the world. Talk about the Granny rule - would you want your Granny to see the image you're sharing?
- Talk about whether a person who asks for an image from you might also be asking other people for images.
- If children are sending images to people they trust, they may not think there's much risk involved. Use examples of when friends or partners have had a falling-out and what might happen to the images if this happens.

3). Make it clear you'll be supportive and understanding

- Make sure they know that you're always there for support if they feel pressured by anyone.
- Explain that they can come to you if someone asks to send them a nude picture or if they receive an explicit message.
- Let them know that you won't be angry with them but just want to make sure they're safe and happy.

One of the most useful websites you can visit for more information, including clear guidance on what to do if your child has shared an image, is through the NSPCC. The link is:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/sexting/>

Finally, we are also happy to help and you can contact the Designated Safeguarding Lead, Mrs Gill Taylor on 01752 691000