

What is Sexting?

The act of sending sexually explicit messages or photos electronically, primarily between cell phones.

ARE KIDS REALLY DOING THIS?

Sexting is one way that some teens share inappropriate information. In addition to being careful about the kind of information they post, you want to make sure your children are being careful about the images they share. Sexting is when teens send or post nude or partially nude images, usually via cell phone.

Teens sext for a variety of reasons. They may be:

- Trying to be funny and sharing it with friends.
- Trying to impress a crush who may or may not have asked for the picture.
- Sharing sexual pictures with a boyfriend or girlfriend.

One study found that teens who engage in sexting are more likely to be engaged in other risky sexual behaviors, including unprotected sex. This suggests that sexting is part of a pattern of risky behaviors for certain teens.

4% of cell-owning teens (12-17) say they have sent nude or partially nude images.

Lenhart, Amanda. Teens and Sexting. Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2009.

WHAT ARE THE RISK?

If you take a revealing image of yourself:

- It could be lost if you misplace or lose your cell phone.
- It may be passed around without your permission. For example, an ex-boyfriend or girlfriend may share the sext to get revenge.
- People may bully or judge you because of the image. Some teens have been bullied so badly because of sexting images that they have been afraid to go to school.
- The person that receives the image might try to use it to blackmail you into sending more images.
- You may get in trouble with your school or with law enforcement, especially if there is evidence of blackmail, bullying or forwarding without permission. Some teens have been suspended from class, sports teams and other activities. Others have been charged with a crime and had to complete community service or educational programs.

WHAT ABOUT THE LAWS?

In Indiana, it is illegal to photograph or disseminate images of someone younger than 18 engaged sexual conduct, and to possess sexual images of someone younger than 16. Photographing or disseminating images of someone younger than 18 engaged sexual conduct is a Class C felony, and penalties include at least two (and up to eight) years in prison, a fine of up to \$10,000, or both. It is a Class D felony to possess sexual images of a child who is younger than 16 years old. Penalties include at least six months in jail (and up to three years in prison), a fine of up to \$10,000, or both.

Sexting is illegal under federal law.

It falls under the creation, distribution and possession of child porn and is a felony offense.

It is also a federal crime to use a computer to ship, transport, receive, distribute, or reproduce for distribution a depiction of a minor actually engaging in sexually explicit conduct, or any material that otherwise constitutes child pornography. It is another federal crime to promote or solicit sexually explicit material involving a minor. (18 U.S.C. §§ 2252, 2252A.)