

## TEENS AND SEXTING - WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

Today's teens and tweens are connected to one another, and to the world, via digital technology more than any previous generation. A recent survey conducted by MediaSmarts involving 5,400 Canadian students, revealed that 25% of children aged nine and ten possess a cellular phone, and this number increases to 90% among older students.

The ever increasing usage of smart phones among young people has also brought about a new phenomenon: Sexting – a combination of the words “sex” and “texting”. Sexting is generally defined as youth creating, sending or sharing sexual images and/or videos with peers via the Internet and/or electronic devices.



Recent statistics released by the Ottawa Police Department show that one in two teens has received a text message of a sexual nature and that one in five has already sent one. Youth are sexting for many reasons that may include: expressing sexual feelings, seeking and/or maintaining attention from someone they may be interested in, or bowing to peer pressure, threats, bullying, and sextortion.

Sexting can become an issue if an image or text is shared with others or online. The Missing Children's Network recommends that parents openly discuss this issue and its impacts with their children.

- Encourage your child to never post or reply to a message while angry, but rather to “walk away” from the situation and wait until they've cooled down.
- Talk about what constitutes a healthy and caring relationship: be sure your child understands that it's never appropriate to harass, embarrass, isolate or control his partner.
- Discuss appropriate ways of showing you care for someone: children may think that sharing a nude or sexy photo with a girlfriend or boyfriend – or someone they hope to be involved with, shows their love or trust.
- Encourage your child to question himself before posting or sharing images online:
  - Is this how I want people to see me?
  - Could somebody use this image to hurt me in any way? Would I be upset if it was shared with others?
  - What's the worst thing that could happen if this image was posted or shared?
  - Can this image cause me prejudice in the future when applying for scholarships, interviewing for jobs, etc.?
- Remind your child that he always has the right to say NO! to any situation that makes him feel uncomfortable and this includes feeling pressured to share inappropriate content. If someone truly cares about you, they will respect your choices.

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### Think Before You Post or Share

Sexting involves sharing sexually explicit messages between two individuals. The instant such a message is sent, the sender has little, if no control, over these messages being made public. Unfortunately, the snowball effect generated by the multiple sharing of these messages can have devastating consequences.

- Encourage your child to ask himself the following questions when someone sends him an intimate image:
  - Did the person in this photo intend for it to be shared?
  - Does the person sharing the image have permission from the person featured in the photo?
  - How would I feel if someone shared my photo with others?
- Impress upon your child the importance of never sharing any content that may embarrass, ridicule or cause harm to someone.
- Remind your child that it is okay to say **NO**. A lot of people – especially boys – get pressured by their friends to share nude photos of their partner. It can be difficult to stand up to peer pressure, but it is important to always consider the damage and prejudice it may cause the person.

Finally, remind your child that he should always seek assistance from a safe adult if he finds himself in a situation where he has shared a sexually explicit photo of himself and is now being threatened to share more photos of himself. The creating and sending of nude or sexually explicit photos and/or videos of young people under 18 years of age is illegal and in violation of our current Canadian laws regarding the possession and distribution of juvenile pornography.

#### Sources :

ottawapolice.ca  
habilomedias.ca  
justice.gc.ca

