

Sexting: What a parent needs to know



Do you remember the infamous sexual education class most of us received growing up?

Usually, around the age of 11 or 12, we were separated into groups of boys and girls and escorted into different classrooms. Waiting for us were our parents and a nifty movie reel about puberty and sex. It was awkward, tense, and even hilarious at moments when the film showed curious children from the 1960's explain the birds and bees.

Looking back, we can laugh and marvel at how innocent those days were. Unfortunately, today our children are exposed to seedy advertisements, explicit songs, and racy television shows long before this important sex education begins. **Parents are faced with the fact that technology is opening our children up to a whole new world that would be completely foreign to the teens stuck in a flickering 60's movie.**

A Child's Sexual Development And Sexting

Sexual development in our children hasn't really changed over the years. Similar to our generation, children become aware of body changes, the opposite sex, and ask questions just

like we did. This interest in sex usually [develops at the start of puberty](#) and builds into the teen years.

Children now discover the answers or explore their budding sexual interest digitally with the Internet, cameras, or sexting. Parents need to understand the current trends, facts, and ways to offer guidance on sext education to protect our children's digital bodies. **In fact, many experts believe [sexting is normal](#), the only thing that has changed is the use of technology.**

Sexting By The Numbers

Our child's love of cell phones, social media, and the permanence of the Internet are breeding grounds for trouble. Sexual exploration is no longer something done behind closed doors; children are utilizing what's at their fingertips. **Here is a rundown of some startling [sexting facts](#):**

- One out of every five [teens sext](#)
- 24% of high school student have sent racy or nude photos to another person
- 30% of "[friends of sexters](#)" have forwarded sexts without approval from the sender
- 61% of sexting girls felt pressured to send the photos
- 15% of sexting teens admit to sending photos to people they have never met

Warning Signs Your Child Is Sexting

While sexting is often done far from a parent's range of sight, teens often exhibit signs that they are involved with sexting. **Here are a few behaviors to be on the lookout for in your child:**

- **secretiveness while using social media or using his or her phone**
- **dimming the brightness so you can't see the screen**
- **closing screens or browsers when you are nearby**
- **wanting to be alone while using phones or handheld devices**

- becoming sexually promiscuous

The Consequences Of Teen Sexting

With the advent of disappearing messaging apps and anonymous social media sites our children are increasingly turning to sexting. Teens often view sexting as a safe way to be intimate, because there are no sexually transmitted diseases or risks of pregnancy when only pixels are exchanged. However, our children often fail to see the very real consequences of sexting.

Children can be prosecuted for possessing or distributing child pornography. In the law's eyes, even if the sexting was consensual, owning nude photos of people under the age of 18 is illegal. If a child is found guilty of this felony, they will be labeled as a sexual offender. This will impact their future careers and places they can reside.

Sexting also increases the chances for becoming a victim of cyberbullying, suffering from depression, becoming a target for pedophiles, and being the subject of ridicule in the community. These outcomes can lead to increased absenteeism at school, failing grades, anxiety, weight loss, and withdrawal from family and friends. Severe cases can lead to thoughts of suicide and self harming behaviors.



Seven Ways To Handle A Sexting Child

Teens need to understand that there are very real risks associated with sending a suggestive selfie to a friend. Thankfully, parents can step in and help guide their child. **Here are seven tips to help handle the topic of sexting:**

- **Recommend only posting or sending items you want others to see.** Stress that a sext can last forever on the Internet and potentially can be seen by anyone- including grandparents or future kids.
- **Inform a child of his or her right to say no.** If a teen is being pressured to sext, tell them he or she will respect your decision if they really care.
- **Limit data plans.** One [recent study](#) found that this was the best deterrent to sexting.
- **Keep cell phones and other technology out of private areas like bedrooms and bathrooms.**
- **If a child has been sexting, restrict their cell phone use and open all texts/messages together.** Make sure they understand the legal consequences of sexting.
- **Monitor a child's online activity.** Be aware of their passwords, friends, favorite sites, and how they conduct themselves online.
- **Begin an [open conversation](#) about social media etiquette and include sexting.** Teach social media etiquette and how to protect their privacy when a child is young. As they age, touch on the topic of sexting. Be honest, remember to listen, and avoid judgment.

Sexting is a relatively new phenomenon that our old fashioned experience with sex education left us unprepared for. Our antiquated films never touched on social media or the Internet. Learning how to protect our children's digital body is a new experience and there will inevitably be a few hiccups along the way.