



Sexting Factsheet

What is Sexting?

Sexting (often called nudes) is the act of sending or receiving sexually explicit content such as a text, video or an image. This often happens via digital devices such as mobile phones, tablets or laptops.

Sexting often takes place on social media networks such as Snapchat, Whatsapp and the images can be shared between people in relationships, friendships or strangers. Sexting most commonly happens between two people in a relationship, but is also considered a method of flirting if the participants are not yet in a relationship.

Whilst sadly there are cases reported where children have been forced into sexting through grooming, harassment or peer pressure, a majority of sexting cases involve young people who have sent sexually explicit pictures or videos of themselves without any pressure on them at all.

Does Sexting Really Happen?

Yes it does. In fact it is probably a lot more common than you think.

A recent study undertaken by Thames Valley Police found that when asking young people, groups varied in terms of their views about the frequency of incidents in schools; some said this was 'every few weeks' and others felt it was far less frequent. As this became apparent, the consultation was modified to ask participants confidentially about whether they had actually seen an explicit image, and 61% of those asked said they had seen an image. For many young people, sexting appears to be normalised and isn't viewed as a 'big deal'

What are the consequences of Sexting?

If a child has sent any sexually explicit content and is in control of who sees it, or wasn't pressured into sending it, some say it can make them feel more confident, it can boost self-esteem and make them feel sexy. These are often their motivations for sharing.

On the other hand, often those sending images/videos lose control of them – usually when the recipient shares the content without the sender's permission. This may be intentionally or unintentionally – but the impact can be devastating. Whether they've been blackmailed or pressured into sexting, or the person that shared the content with has shared it elsewhere without a child's permission, it can leave the child feeling embarrassed, ashamed and humiliated. The child can often then become the target of ridicule and bullying. In addition, once the images are out there it is important to remember they are out there forever. Children often do not consider these consequences at the time

What does legislation say?

If someone is under 18, it's illegal to take or share an 'indecent' picture of them or to look at or share someone else's picture. No one has defined 'indecent' but basically if it's naked, a topless girl, contains genitals or sex acts, including masturbation, then it will be indecent. It is illegal to take, possess or share 'indecent images' of anyone under 18 even if the young person is taking, possessing or sharing an image of themselves.

Dealing with indecent images of children (under 18 years)

As staff working with young people we have a duty to safeguard them, protecting them from harm in the real and online world. If you become aware of indecent images being shared by or about a young person, please do not:

- Screenshot the image
- Ask for the image to be forwarded to you
- Copy the image
- Print the image
- Show the image to anyone else

If you do any of these actions, even for the best of intentions, you will have potentially committed the criminal offence of making and distributing indecent images of children. The term 'make' includes downloading images from the internet and storing or printing them out. Deliberately opening an indecent computer email attachment or downloading an indecent image from the internet, so it can be viewed on a screen, is 'making' a photograph. The image does not have to be stored so it can be retrieved. Such an act must be done deliberately, innocently opening such a file is not an offence.

For example: If an email attachment was opened innocently and not subsequently deleted due to a genuine lack of skill (deleting an email in 'Outlook' may only move it to a 'deleted ' directory, much like the 'recycle bin', this directory needs to be emptied and there may be other 'temporary' directories where it could be held) If an image was innocently downloaded from the web and immediately deleted without realising that the computer has stored a backup copy in a temporary internet directory, then no offence would be committed.

Dealing with indecent images of children (under 18 years)

Should you become aware of images being shared about a young person, call Thames Valley Police on 101 and report the instance to them describing the social media site, the date and time the image was posted, the date and time you saw it and the names of those involved. Thames Valley Police will secure the evidence rather than non-police staff.

If you are sent an image or screenshot by a young person or parent unsolicited with the request that you deal with the matter, please delete the image from your inbox and deleted items folders and ask those who sent it not to do so again. Contact Thames Valley Police on 101 with the concerns. Do not forward the message to anyone else including to the police.

For more information about Sexting and Online Safety please visit www.thinkuknow.co.uk www.childnet.com