

“Sexting”

With new technology come new problems. Sexting refers to sending a text message with pictures that are inappropriate, shows naked people or people engaged in sex acts. About 20% of teen boys and girls have sent these types of messages. These texts can cause emotional pain for the child in the picture, the sender and the receiver. There can also be legal implications. Parents need to begin discussing sexting before it happens and introduce the subject when the child is old enough to have a cell phone.

Here are some tips:

- Talk to your kids. Ask “have you heard of sexting?” “Tell me what you think it is.” You need to know what your child’s understanding is of the issue
- For **younger children** who have a cell phone but do not know about sex, alert them that text messages should NEVER contain pictures of people (kids or adults) without their clothes on, kissing or touching each other in ways they have never seen before. For **older children** use the term sexting and be more specific about sex acts they may know about. For **teens**, be specific that sexting often involves pictures of a sexual nature and is considered pornography.
- All kids should know that sexting is serious and considered a crime in many places. In all communities sexting will result in serious consequences possibly involving the police, suspension from school, and it being on their record which could hurt their chances of getting into college or getting a job.
- Experts state that peer pressure can play a role in sexting. Parties can be a major contributing factor. Collecting cell phones at these gatherings is one way to reduce the temptation.
- If you see a news story about sexting that illustrates the consequences for both the sender and receiver; discuss it with your child.

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