

WHAT IS SEXTING & WHY IS IT DANGEROUS?

These days, almost every teen has many ways to get online using a variety of devices and it is very easy for teens and younger to create and share personal photos and videos of themselves without parents knowing about it. But, like every piece of technology out there, there are healthy uses, such as sharing a memorable photo with a friend, and uses that concern parents, educators, and law enforcement.

SEXTING: Surveys show that 20% to 60% of teens are “sexting.” While this troubling trend continues full speed ahead, parents, teachers and lawmakers are struggling to react appropriately to the phenomenon that puts kids at risk for embarrassment, exploitation, harassment, bullying, humiliation, felony charges, and even suicide.

DEFINITION: Sexting (or “sex texting”) is the sending or receiving of sexually explicit or sexually suggestive images, messages, or videos via electronic devices. Examples are

- nude or nearly nude photos or “selfies”
- videos that show nudity, sex acts, or simulated sex
- text messages that propose sex or refer to sex acts

Any sort of photo, video, or message that shows someone doing or saying something embarrassing or offensive can be damaging to a reputation. But this is especially true if there is nudity, sex, or sexually suggestive content involved. Sexting has the potential to haunt a teen for the rest of his/her life.

- Photos and videos sent privately can easily be shared with others.
- With a click they can be out there for the world to see.
- When digital images are out there you can never “take it back.”
- 40% of teenage girls do it as a joke, 34% do it to feel sexy, 51% of teen girls cite pressure from guys as a reason to send explicit materials.

Questionable behavior online can damage a college applicant or prospective employee for years to come. More and more colleges and employers check online profiles looking for indications of a candidate’s suitability, including judgment and immaturity.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO - COMMUNICATION IS KEY

- Make sure your child fully understands that messages or pictures they send are **NEVER PRIVATE.**
- Make sure your child fully understands that even their best friend, boyfriend/girlfriend may send private photos to others.

- Make sure your child fully understands potential short-term and long-term consequences of sexting.
- Know with whom your child communicates. Supervising and monitoring your child in real life and in cyberspace doesn't make you the bad guy – it is part of your job as a parent.
- Consider limitations on electronic communications
 - Computers in the kitchen where a parent can supervise
 - Limit time spent on electronic devices
 - No electronic devices in a bedroom after at night. Require a central location for all cell phones to be left away from bedroom spaces.
- Be aware of what your teen is posting. This isn't snooping, because posts are already public and a parent has every right to the information.
- Set expectations. Make sure you are clear about what you, as a parent, consider to be appropriate "electronic" behavior.

LEGAL RAMIFICATIONS: *Colorado State law defines Sexual Exploitation of a Child as follows: A person commits sexual exploitation of a child if, for any purpose, he or she knowingly: (a) Causes, induces, entices, or permits a child to engage in, or be used for, any explicit sexual conduct for the making of any sexually exploitative material; or (b) Prepares, arranges for, publishes, including but not limited to publishing through digital or electronic means, produces, promotes, makes, sells, finances, offers, exhibits, advertises, deals in, or distributes, including but not limited to distributing through digital or electronic means, any sexually exploitative material; or (b.5) Possesses or controls any sexually exploitative material for any purpose.*

In Colorado under the Colorado Revised Statutes (C.R.S.), a juvenile could be charged with Sexual Exploitation of a Child under section 18-6-403 (3) (a), a class 3 felony. Sexual Exploitation of a Child is a sexual offense and registration as a sex offender is required by Colorado law.

REFERENCES, RESOURCES TO CONTACT & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Douglas County Sheriff's Office (<https://www.sheriff.douglas.ga.us/sexting.html>)
- Sexting: First Judicial District Attorney's Office (www.districtattorney1.com)
- Is Your Child Sexting: What Parent Need to Know Education.com (<http://www.education.com/magazine/article/child-sexting-parents/>)
- What Is Sexting & Why Is It a Problem? (http://familyinternet.about.com/od/computingsafetyprivacy/a/sexting_what.htm)
- 11 Facts About Sexting (<https://www.dosomething.org/facts/11-facts-about-sexting>)
KidsHealth: Sexting (http://kidshealth.org/parent/firstaid_safe/home/2011_sexting.html)
- Teen Sexting In Colorado (<http://www.criminaldefenselawyer.com/resources/teen-sexting-colorado.htm>)
- Sexting Laws Colorado (http://mobilemediaguard.com/states/sexting_laws_colorado.html)