

WHAT IS SEXTING?

Sexting can be defined as, “sexually explicit content communicated via text messages, smart phones, or visual and web 2.0 activities such as social networking sites”¹.

WHO SEXTS?

Sexting is increasingly common among young people, many of whom see it as a ‘normal’ part of life.

46% of young people say sexting is part of everyday life

IPPR – Young people, sex and relationships: the new norms, 2014 NSPCC, 2015

According to a recent report released by the Labour party, sexting among young people is ‘skyrocketing’, with 13 times as many cases of sexting among under-16s last year as in 2013, according to figures obtained from the Police. Quantitative research varies when it comes to determining how many young people engage in sexting; studies suggest that between 15 and 40% of young people are involved in sexting². The STIR (Safeguarding Teenager’s Intimate Relationships) Report, published in 2015, revealed that more than 4 in 10 girls and just under a third of boys in England had sent a sexual image or message to their boyfriend or girlfriend. Many young people do not see sexting as a problem, and would be reluctant to talk to an adult about it for fear of having their phones taken away, or for fear of what they would say.

44% of girls and **32%** of boys in England have engaged in sexting

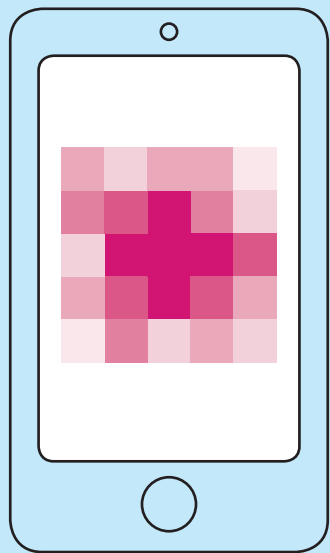
STIR Report, 2015

WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE SEXT?

An American study of teenage girls revealed that 40% engage in sexting as a joke, 34% do it to feel sexy and 12% feel pressure to do it (DoSomething.org). In the UK, the statistics are higher: 27% of girls sent messages because they felt pressured to do so³. The same study revealed that young people who reported violence and abuse in their relationships were twice as likely to have sent a sexual image or text compared to those who had not.

Sexting is the exchange of self-generated sexually explicit images, through mobile picture messages or webcams over the internet

Sexting: advice for parents — NSPCC, 2015



THE DANGERS OF SEXTING

Many young people are unaware of the dangers connected to sexting. They include some of the following:

It is illegal. Many young people are unaware that the sending of explicit images is a criminal offence. Read ‘The law on sexting’ section for more information.

It can cause long-term harm.

Young people may not be aware of the long-term negative emotional impact they may suffer after sharing images.

An individual has no control over how the images are shared.

Once shared, the sender has no control over whether or not the image will be passed on. Images shared online may never be completely removed. The prevalence of ‘revenge porn’ (where a partner shares sexually explicit content of the other person after a break up) has led to a wave of new laws and convictions in the UK.

The connection between sexting and abuse.

Many of the studies listed above reveal a close connection between sexting and abuse in relationships, and the pressure young people are under to engage in activities of a sexual nature.

An individual may be vulnerable to blackmail, bullying or emotional distress.

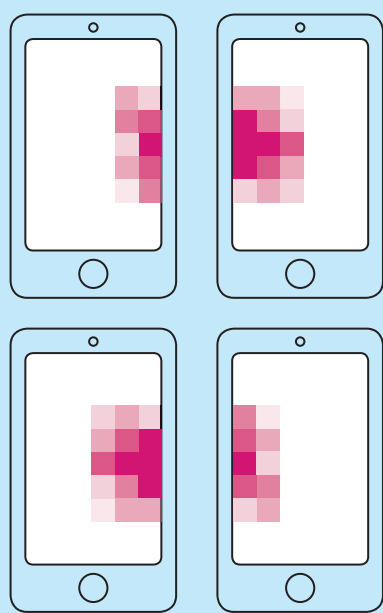
An offender may threaten to share images with others unless the child sends them more. Children may also be bullied on account of images shared, which may cause humiliation and emotional distress. This could lead to self-harm or suicide.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND SEXTING

The most popular social media sites for young people are Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat (Refuel agency digital media teen explorer, 2015). All of the above feature on Barnardo’s ‘website and apps linked to sexual exploitation and abuse’ list, in their recent Digital Dangers report. Although the age limit for **Facebook** is 13, there is no default safety in place to prevent younger users signing up, and the site now allows graphic content. **Instagram** is particularly popular with primary age pupils⁴ (even though the age limit is also 13), and it is possible to share sexually explicit images in closed groups. **Snapchat** has been dubbed by the media as the ‘sexting app’, due to the fact that images disappear after a few seconds of being viewed. There have been many instances, however, of individuals taking a screen shot of the snapchat, and posting them on ‘Snapchat exposed’ pages on social media sites.

17% of sexters share the messages they receive with others, and **55%** of those share them with more than one person

DoSomething.org



THE LAW ON SEXTING

Sending or receiving a sexually explicit message of someone under the age of 18 is considered child pornography and can result in criminal charges. Although the age of consent is 16, it is still a criminal offence to send pictures of anyone under the age of 18. Holly Powell-Jones, a freelance journalist who runs social media law training to young people in schools, said the following to Youthwork magazine:

‘For the past two years I’ve been delivering training in schools on ‘media law and ethics’, something which is standard for journalists but applies to anyone broadcasting, distributing or publishing content, which, thanks to the Internet, means nearly everyone. Students tend to be most shocked to hear that sending sexual images of anyone under the age of 18 is actually a criminal offence. Likewise, it is a criminal offence to possess those images and a criminal offence to create them (this includes if the creator is themselves underage and taking a ‘selfie’). The maximum sentence for offences relating to indecent images of children can be up to ten years in prison. Even without that, a criminal record and joining the sex offender’s register is a real risk for young people (who are also shocked to hear that they are criminally responsible from the age of ten). In 2014, two Nottinghamshire teenagers made headlines after the girl sent a topless picture of herself to her boyfriend and they were subsequently criminally investigated. The police warned that in future cases they would consider prosecution, even against children.’

The law around sexting among under-18s is currently under scrutiny and debate. As it stands, sending or receiving a sexually explicit message of someone under the age of 18 can result in criminal charges, even of those under 18, and there have been cases of young people being added to the sex offender’s register. Barnardo’s have recently backed an inquiry titled ‘Now I know it was wrong’, questioning whether or not it is right to give young people criminal convictions for sexting, something which could affect their job prospects and opportunities for the rest of their lives (July, 2016).

“Well like say I got a girlfriend I would ask her to write my name on her breast and then send it to me and then I would upload it onto **Facebook** or **Bebo** or something like that”

Male participant, Year 8, Children, young people and ‘sexting’: summary of a qualitative study. — NSPCC

27% of girls sent explicit images because they felt pressurised to do so

STIR Report, 2015

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Many young people will feel anxious and embarrassed to talk to an adult about sending explicit messages. According to Sue Berelowitz, Deputy Children’s Commissioner for England: ‘Young people have told us that they do not wish to or feel unable to discuss such matters with their parents. It is essential therefore that every school and youth service recognises and fulfils their responsibility to young people to provide quality relationships and sex education – truly an education for life.’

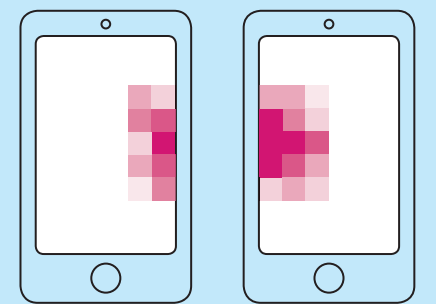
If a young person shares with you that they have been sending explicit images, try to be sensitive and listen to what they are saying. There may be a few things to do off the back of your conversation:

– If the young person believes the image or video has been circulated online by either a child or an adult, they can contact Childline who may be able to make a report (with their consent) to the Internet Watch Foundation to get the image removed from the internet. ChildLine are also available to speak to children and young people at any time if they want to talk about how they are feeling.

– If the young person was forced into sending an image or video by another young person, the incident should be reported to the local police, who can prevent the image from being circulated and can take the appropriate action to safeguard the young person (and possibly others).

– If the image or video has been shared with an adult the incident should be reported to CEOP, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre – the national policing lead for online child sexual exploitation.

– If appropriate, report the incident to the young person’s school, as they can keep an eye on the situation and try to stop images or videos being circulated.



“The high rates of sexual coercion discovered need to be addressed through education and awareness raising that challenges attitudes and helps change behaviour. We need to nurture children to have positive relationships based on **mutual respect**”

Claire Lilley – Head of Child Safety Online

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SEXTING

1. Ringrose, et. Al. (2012) See Children, young people and ‘sexting’: Summary of a qualitative study, NSPCC, 2012. 2. Ibid. 3. Safeguarding Teenager’s Intimate Relationships (STIR) report, 2015. 4. Digital Dangers Report, Barnardo’s 2015. 5. ‘Sex without consent, I suppose that is rape’: How young people in England understand sexual consent report, 2013

Sources of help from *Youthscape*

www.youthscape.co.uk

Healthy Relationships Course

‘**Romance Academy**’ is our facilitator-led course focused on empowering young people with a positive framework for building healthy relationships.

Let’s talk about sex roadshow

Events hosted around the UK to equip parents with facts, ideas and confidence to help them talk with their children about sex and relationships.

Equipping Days

Hosted in our new state of the art HQ in Luton, these stand-alone days for youth work practitioners offer a unique opportunity to debate, discuss and dig deeper into specific aspects about young people’s relational and sexual health.

Youth Events / SRE Sessions

We offer bespoke sessions for formal and informal education settings as well as youth events on a range of topics.

Coming soon...

Sexting Resource

An innovative resource for engaging teenagers in conversations about sexting.

Visit our online store for more details of our resources for parents, teachers, youth leaders and young people in the area of sex and relationships:

romanceacademy.org