

TEEN SEXTING

What is teen sexting?

Sexting is the sharing and receiving of sexually explicit messages and nude or partially nude images...

Research shows that while teens who participate in sexual activities over text are often knowledgeable about the potential consequences, many engage risky behavior anyway. The current generation of young people have significant exposure to online sexual imagery starting at a young age and by the time they reach their late teens may be somewhat desensitized to online sexual activity.



While understanding the very serious risks, it is important to understand how common sexting is among teens and the attitude teens have towards sexting...

Understandably, many parents who discover their teens' sexting behavior are deeply shocked - and frightened. Parents can be quick to question the moral shortcomings of their teen, the "failures" of their own parenting, and often feel isolated and unsure of where to go for help.

Here's The Facts

01 Sexting is likely happening more than you think.

Recent studies indicate that 27.4% of youth admit to participate in sexting in some form.

02 Even the best parental controls fall short.

Social media platforms like Snapchat are impossible to monitor. iPhone privacy protections create additional obstacles for concerned parents.

03 Teen sexting is a sex crime in California.

While 27 states have enacted youth sexting laws enabling parents and kids to better access support without serious repercussions. California has not. The creation, sharing, and receiving of nude photos by a minor, regardless of circumstances, is considered child pornography.

04 Teachers, therapists, and coaches are legally required to report underage sexting.

All mandated reporting professionals are required to report sexting, even if behavior was voluntary.

05 Sexting has become normalized behavior for sexually active adults.

In recent studies 80-88% of dating adults indicate that they have sent or received sexts at some point.

Here's The Risks

01 Sexting creates long term psychological risk for teens of all genders.

Surveys indicate that teens engage in sexting in order to find acceptance and connection. Unfortunately, these "benefits" are often short lived and come with a significant risk of social humiliation and a lasting sense of shame. Ironically, both boys and girls report that sexting can feel "safer" than real-life intimacy, as it comes without the awkwardness of in person interaction and the risk of pregnancy or STI's.

02 There are few risk-free ways for youth and parents to get support

Because sending and receiving underage sexts is a felony in California (even if both parties are underage and behavior is consensual), families cannot turn to trusted professionals without facing significant risk. This establishes a "don't ask don't tell" environment with helping professionals, who are obligated to report an issue that could - in a worst case scenario - lead to jail time and sex offender registration.

03 Youth are more vulnerable to sextortion and other related sexual trauma in this environment

In this "don't ask don't tell" environment, youth are unable to turn to trusted adults for support. This makes them vulnerable to bad actors who would seek to use their photos to extract social influence or monetary gain. Recent sextortion schemes have become so ubiquitous across the US that the FBI recently issued a warning to parents and teens after a rash of related teen suicides.

Here's What We Can Do

01 Talk with your kids. If your child has a smartphone, it very likely that they will eventually be exposed to some kind of sexual content. Social Media apps should be set to "private" and periodic parental phone checks for secret accounts are advised. Be specific with your kids about the situations they might encounter (picture requests, sextortion schemes), be clear about the risks, and work together to identify steps they can take to protect themselves.

02 Keep Calm. If you find concerning content on your child's phone, take a deep breath! Keep in mind that your child is not terrible and you have not failed as a parent! Online communication is now a very common avenue for youth (and adults) to explore romantic and sexual relationships. Research shows that teen sex and teen pregnancy have actually gone down in the last 15 years and experts believe that this may have something to do with the availability of online "resources". While there must be consequences for risky behavior, try not to panic or shame your child. Instead, discuss your concerns, validate their desire to connect, and let them know that you will take appropriate action to protect them. Illicit their ideas for how to help keep them safe.

03 Take it Down. If your child admits to sending compromising photos, go to <https://takeitdown.ncmec.org>. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has created a service called "Take it Down" that "helps youth and families remove or stop the online sharing of nude, partially nude, or sexually explicit images or videos" taken of individuals younger than 18 years old.