



LET'S CHAT

ONLINE SAFETY

Moray

Sexting



Online Safety Tips for Parents and Carers

Sexting is sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually explicit messages, photographs, or videos, between mobile phones, computers or any digital device. Exploring sexuality has always been a part of a child's development so it's important to have age appropriate discussions about healthy sex and relationships so they have the right advice.

Children take part in sexting for a range of reasons;

- To fit in
- As a joke
- To express feelings in a relationship
- To flirt
- In search of validation due to low body image
- As a result of peer pressure or coercion.

When sexting goes wrong, it can affect a child's emotional wellbeing, reputation and can lead to blackmail or legal consequences.

What do I need to know about sexting?

'Self-generated' child sexual abuse material (CSAM) describes indecent imagery produced and shared by children and young people. However, it is an imperfect term, there are many reasons why a child may choose to take and send sexual images of themselves. Whatever the reason once sent, there is a risk that images are shared further, without the subject's consent. While it is technically true that the child 'generated' a sexual image of themselves, it is important not to imply that they are in any way to blame for their abuse. This is the responsibility of the perpetrator. As children have no control over how and where images and messages spread online, sexting leaves them vulnerable to bullying, humiliation and embarrassment, or even to blackmail.

How common is it?

It's not 'endemic.' It is, however, most prevalent among those aged 15 and over, with 17% saying they had shared a nude or sexual photo of themselves. This drops to 7% for 14-year-olds and 4% for those aged 13. Self-generated sexual material such as sexting or nudes is a significant driver of online harm.

In 2021, the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) reviewed over 250,000 webpages and found 72% to contain CSAM. This is an increase of 163% from the year before, additionally, they reported a 360% growth in the amount of CSAM of 7- to 10-year-olds compared to the same period the year before.

For those young people who have sexted, 78% said they hadn't faced any consequences, leading them to disbelieve traditional online safety advice.

What are the possible consequences of sexting?

- Taking, sharing or receiving an image can have a long-lasting impact on a child's self-esteem.
- It may cause emotional distress.
- It can lead to negative comments and bullying, which can be very upsetting.
- Sharing naked or almost naked pictures of someone is a form of online child-on-child abuse when done between under-18s.
- It could affect your child's reputation - Explicit content can spread very quickly over the internet.
- It may result in different treatment at school and in their community both now and in the future.
- It could affect their education and employment prospects as online reputations tends to stay around longer.



How you can protect children from sexting

Help them understand - Understanding the impact that sexting could have on their wellbeing will help to ensure children think critically about what they share with others.

Talk about sexting - The time to talk about sexting with your child is as soon as they start using the internet or get a mobile phone.

Explain what can happen to an image - Remind your child that once an image has been sent, there's no way of getting it back or knowing where it will end up.

Think before sending - Ask them to think before they send a picture of themselves: 'would I want my family, teachers or future employers to see it?'

Tackle peer pressure - Show you understand how they may feel pushed into sending something even though they know it isn't the right thing to do. Help them to understand that the results of giving in to pressure could be much worse than standing up to it.

Focus on 'what if' situations - Explore how they would deal with such a situation and whether it would be something that they'd consider doing? Do they know people who have done it? Did anything happen? Did it go wrong? Do they do it to flirt or for fun?

Use scenarios - Teach them how to respond to requests for nudes, help them think about potential responses if they are asked to share a nude.

Healthy relationships - If appropriate, discuss what a healthy loving sexual relationship should look like, so they are aware of what to look out for if they are pressured into sexting.

Have open and honest discussions - Make sure they know that they can come to you to share their concerns and get support without judgement.

Body confidence - Talk about how they feel about their body image and body confidence and the role of peer pressure can play.

Use news stories - Use real-life examples that they can relate to, to explain the risks. Explain that even if they are sending images to people they trust, relationships can change and cause issues.

Not everyone is doing it - Make the point that not 'everyone is doing it' if they are ever pressured.

Influence TV shows and social media - Discuss how seeing images of influencers in 'sexy poses' can lead to them feeling encourage to do the same, but ultimately they shouldn't be swayed by someone else.

What else can you do to help?

- Teach them how to report incidents.
- Review their privacy settings on social media so they only share with people they know.
- Signpost to trusted sources for help if they can't talk to you, direct them to another trusted adult, a relative or friend or seek external support from services such as Childline where they can talk to trained councillors.
- Discuss the risks of sexting and what to do to resolve the situation if it does happen and it goes wrong.
- Encourage them to think carefully about people's intentions or motivations.

What should I do if sexting affects my child?

Most young people don't see sexting as a problem and are reluctant to talk to adults about it because they're afraid of being judged or having their phones taken away. If your child has shared an explicit photo or video of themselves, they may be very upset, especially if it's been widely circulated. If you become aware of this, try to stay calm and reassure them that they have your support. You can help them by taking the following steps:

Explore the facts - Find out who the content was shared with initially, who it was passed on to, whether it was done maliciously or was a joke gone wrong.

Contact the website or provider - Social networking sites should remove an image if asked. Visit report/remove website where they can work to have the image removed and/or contact Childline.

Contact your child's school - Your child's school will be able to help you deal with the repercussions and support your child at school.

Report it - If you suspect the image has been shared with an adult, contact the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), who are the national policing lead for online child sexual exploitation.

Where to go for help

If you are concerned and need help to deal with the issue with your child, here is a list of organisations that can support you:

[Moray Protects](#) website.

[Internet Watch Foundation](#) – provide support to removes explicit images or videos of children.

Police helpline – 101 for non-emergency support.

[Parents Protect](#) website and helpline (0808 1000 900) – works to prevent child abuse.

[Safer Schools Scotland](#) website and app - contains advice and guidance on a range of topics.

