

Social Media

Presented by CASSY

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I. II. Sexting

What is sexting?

Sexting is the term used to describe the exchange of nude images or a sexually suggestive text message on cell phones.

How frequently does sexting occur?

A report set out by the Pew Research Center in 2009 mentioned that nearly 15% of teenagers with cell phones have received nude photos through a text service (Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project). For the most part, teens in the older age group of 14 to 17 are more likely to engage in sexting than their younger counterparts (Pew Research Center).

Why do people use their phones for sexting?

According to a focus group held by the Pew Research Center, there are several reasons why teens decide to take part in sexting:

- Some see sexting as a "first step" before they decide to become sexually active;
- Sexting is often used in a romantic relationship between partners;
- Other teens think that sexting is a good way to tell someone that they show interest in a future relationship.

There are several other reasons, unrelated to personal relationships that also lead people to send nude images on cell phones. The most common was peer pressure that leads many young teens, especially girls, to feel that they have to send sexually explicit images of themselves over the Internet.

Others treat sexting as an experiment, wanting to send these images before they become sexually active.

What is so wrong about sexting?

Unfortunately, what may seem harmless to many people can have severe social and even legal consequences. In some states, including California, teens that have either sent or received nude images over the phone have been prosecuted on charges of child pornography. Some have even been listed as sex offenders.

Perhaps one of the biggest risks associated with sexting teens frequently overlook is that it does not guarantee privacy. Often times, especially after breakups of relationships or friendships, sexting images are sent to other

students. These can also be used as blackmail or even more dangerous forms of sexual harassment.

II. WEBSITES YOU SHOULD BE AWARE OF:

Tumblr.com:

Tumblr, is a microblogging platform and social networking website, owned and operated by Tumblr, Inc. The service allows users to post multimedia and other content to a short-form blog. Users can follow other users' blogs, as well as make their blogs private.

Formspring.com:

Formspring is an interest-based social Q&A website, launched in November 2009, and created to allow users to relate their ideas and opinions on any topic. The site allows its users to set up a profile page, follow other users and ask questions. The questions and their given responses are then published on the user's profile page. It is operated by Formspring.me, Inc., a company headquartered in San Francisco.

Formspring is set up as a forum. Users can ask questions anonymously or they can be visibly sent from another Formspring account, depending upon the asker's preference. Users can choose to disallow anonymous questions and have the ability to block selected people from asking further questions

Controversy around Formspring:

Formspring has garnered some controversy, especially among teenagers, for the perception that it opened the door for harassment and bullying, due to the anonymity of the entries. A fight between several students at a Harrisburg, Pennsylvania high school, which started after an argument over Formspring, received some media attention in February 2010.

On March 22, 2010, a 17-year-old West Islip, New York high school graduate committed suicide, reportedly after dozens of insulting comments about her had been posted on Formspring in the days leading up to her death. Soon after, a local grassroots boycott of the Formspring site began.

A further incident of suicide allegedly prompted by bullying on Formspring was the untimely death of 15-year old Natasha MacBryde, from Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, United Kingdom. The Coroner's inquiry heard that she received anonymous personal abuse via the website on 13 February 2011; this appears to have compounded bullying and teenage anxiety into a level where, having researched suicide methods, Natasha took her own life on 14 February 2011.

Another incident of bullying involving anonymous harassment on Formspring was reported on in September 2011. A fourteen year-old student, Jamey Rodemeyer, from Williamsville North High School committed suicide on September 18, 2011 after repeated incidents of bullying in real life and on Formspring. Rodemeyer's "It Gets Better" video specifically calls out Formspring as contributing to the anti-gay bullying impacting his life.

Facebook: Facebook is a [social networking service](#) launched in February 2004, owned and operated by [Facebook, Inc.](#) As of June 2012, Facebook has over [955 million active](#) users, more than half of them using Facebook on a [mobile device](#). Users must register before using the site, after which they may create a [personal profile](#), add other users as [friends](#), and exchange messages, including automatic notifications when they update their profile. Additionally, users may join common-interest user groups, organized by workplace, school or college, or other characteristics, and categorize their friends into lists such as "People From Work" or "Close Friends".

Instagram:

Instagram is a free photo-sharing program and social network that was launched in October 2010. The service enables users to take a photo, apply a digital filter to it, and then share it with other Instagram users they are connected to on the social network as well as on a variety of social networking services. Instagram currently has 100 million registered users. A distinctive feature is that it confines photos to a square shape, similar to Kodak Instamatic and Polaroid images, in contrast to the 4:3 aspect ratio typically used by mobile device cameras.

Twitter:

Twitter is an online social networking service and microblogging service that enables its users to send and read text-based messages of up to 140 characters, known as "tweets".

III. What can parents do:

- **Understand the consequences.** Share with your kids the stories you've heard. Ask them if they know of anybody in their school who has experienced the negative consequences of sexting.

- **Know the law.** Specific laws vary from state to state, but sending and receiving sexually illicit photos of minors is illegal everywhere. Make sure your child understands that sexting is against the law.
- **Delete sexts immediately.** Your kids may not always be able to control what arrives in their inbox, but they can decide what to do next. No matter how strong the temptation, they should delete any sexts immediately, and tell the sender to stop.
- **Be a good friend.** With the rising popularity of sexting, it's likely that one of your child's friends has been the sender or recipient of an explicit message. Encourage your child to share what you've talked about with friends, who may not understand the dangers.

You can also use this discussion as an opportunity to move to a broader conversation about dating and self-respect. Talking with teens about sex or sexting is never easy, but it is critical.