



Sexting information sheet for parents

“Respect Me – Don’t Sext Me” activities at your child’s school

Your child may have taken part in these activities at school aimed at providing them with knowledge and tools so they can;

- have strategies to deal with sexting requests and say ‘No’ assertively.
- have strategies to use when unwanted sexts are received and be aware of the consequences of sexting.

What is sexting?

Sexting is a term created by the media to describe the practice of creating, sending and receiving sexually suggestive, semi-nude, nude images or text messages. It most commonly refers to material sent using mobile phones, and sometimes webcams. The term has been recognised and defined in one US court case as "an act of sending sexually explicit materials through mobile phones," including images and text.¹

This term includes blogs, posts on social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter and images or clips from Skype or YouTube.

The terms young people use for this activity are ‘nudes’ (“n00dz plz”), ‘selfies’ or they just ask for ‘a pic’ short for ‘a picture’ meaning one that is sexually explicit. Sexting is risk-taking behaviour that is usually done with little or no regard for consequences.

Sexually explicit content is sexually offensive by societal standards, for example nude or semi-nude images, material depicting people engaged in sexual activity or in sexually suggestive poses.

Why teenagers might sext

- Sexting has become ‘normalised behaviour’ in adolescent culture. It is considered a way of flirting, or a rung on the ladder of sexual experience.
- Sexting can be thought of as part of adolescent sexual exploration.
- Boys pressure each other to ask girls to send pictures to them and may have their masculinity questioned or be ostracised by their peer group if they don't.
- Boys feel pressured to either have sexy photos on their phones or to look at photos on other people’s phones.
- A girl may want someone to like her or notice her.
- Girls see pictures of other girls they know and they feel pressured to send pictures of themselves.
- Young people will sometimes participate in risk taking behaviour as many do not think there will be any major consequences, or think that ‘it won’t happen to them’.
- It’s easier to talk online at first, or in photos/sexts than face to face.
- Teenagers are more likely to sext someone they trust, for example their boyfriend or girlfriend.
- Many teenagers believe their online activity is private and that when they use their phone, email and the internet they are anonymous.
- Many of them believe that an image, clip or message can be erased completely after it has been sent.

How common is sexting?

Studies have found that:

- 48% of teens have received sexually explicit messages.²
- One in five Australian girls aged 18 has sent nude or semi-nude pictures of themselves over the internet.
- 17% of males under 18 have sent sexual pictures of themselves to other people.³
- From 2008 - 2011 more than 450 child pornography charges have been laid in Australia against youths between the ages of 10 and 17, including 113 charges of "making child exploitation material".

1 "About sexting" by Parent Line www.parentline.org.au/Page.aspx?element=828&category=9

2 "Sex and Tech" results from a survey of teens and young adults by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and CosmoGirl.com 2012 - www.thenationalcampaign.org/sextech/PDF/SexTech_Summary.pdf

3 "High-Wire Act: Cyber-Safety and the Young" by Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety, Australian Government, 2001 www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives_Committees?url=jscc/report.htm



Legal issues around sexting

Australian law says that anyone under 18 who is involved in sexting is at risk of being charged under child pornography laws, even if they wanted to do it and felt comfortable doing it. For those under 18 it may be illegal to:

- **Take** a sexy image or clip of yourself: this is the creation of child pornography.
- **Send** a sexy image or clip of yourself: this is transmission of child pornography. Even if you wanted to do it and felt comfortable doing it.
- **Receive** and keep a sexy image or clip of someone else under 18, whether you asked for it or not: this is possession of child pornography.
- **Forward** a sexy or suggestive image of someone who is under 18.
- **Ask** someone under 18 to send you a naked or semi-naked photo of him or herself. This is soliciting child pornography.

Anti-stalking laws prohibit the constant uploading of unflattering (but not illegal) images, offensive texts or memes. (Example of a meme: someone adds text to an existing image that is online, and posts their edited version. Internet memes are usually unflattering, and can be mean or abusive).

Consequences of sexting

There are several important consequences of sexting:

Emotional	When someone realises that their sexy clip or photo has been seen by more people than they intended, they may end up feeling: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guilty • Embarrassed • Ashamed • Regretful • Anxious.
Psychological	Psychological consequences include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trouble sleeping and eating • Difficulty getting up and going to school • Difficulty getting to part-time jobs and other commitments • Decreased performance at school • Depression • Feeling suicidal.
Legal	Young people under 18 are at risk of getting a criminal record if they take part in sexting.
Social and Reputation	Sexting can damage personal relationships with friends, boyfriend/girlfriend and family, as well as damaging a young person's reputation. This may result in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classmates and friends thinking differently about someone after a sexting incident. A photo can end up defining who you are for a long time. • The end of a relationship when trust is broken by showing or sharing a private sext. • Loss of a current job, scholarship or position. • Future academic opportunities being affected. • Future career opportunities being restricted. • Entry into certain countries being forbidden because of a child pornography charge.

If your child experiences any of these emotional or psychological consequences and their health is being affected talk to a Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) Counsellor: call 1800 806 292 any time.



What can you do?

While it seems that teens are influenced by their peers, parents continue to be the most influential factor in their lives. Despite fears parents have about their teens rejecting their values and beliefs, parents continue to be of significant influence. Teens report having political, religious, and general beliefs similar to their parents, and consider their parents as being highly significant and important in their lives. Positive relationships between parents and teens also equip youth to have healthy relationships with friends. Teens who have high quality relationships with parents also report having a positive relationship with their peers.⁴

Some strategies to help your child are:

Nurture their abilities and self-esteem so that they are equipped to foster positive peer relationships and deflect negative pressures. Adolescents with positive self-concept and self-worth will be less likely to succumb to peer pressure.

Form a positive and open relationship. Try to have constructive and positive relationships with teens. This can serve as a good model for other relationships. It will also contribute to your child feeling valued and help them develop a positive self image. Your child should know that they can always come to you for help or advice about their peer relationships.

Teach your child how to make good decisions. By teaching them to look at both the negative and positive sides, your child will have the skills to better analyse situations and make thoughtful decisions. For example, with sexting, teach them to weigh the possible desired outcomes (e.g., peer acceptance, looking “cool,” feeling excitement about trying something new) with the possible undesirable outcomes (e.g. the sext being posted on the internet or passed around the school).

Teach your child ways to say ‘no’ to negative pressures. Talk to your child about potential scenarios. Think through strategies together on how to deal with those scenarios if they arise. You could discuss hypothetical scenarios or even role-play. It is best for them to think about these things ahead of time rather than dealing with situations as they occur or trying to recover after they happen.⁵

If your child receives a sexually explicit text, image or video clip

- If this is a one-off incident or someone being silly, ask your child to delete the sext. Tell the person not to do it again. Then forget about it.
- If your child has received several sexts from the same person you could report this to the police. If you do, they will want to see the sexts. Ask your child not to delete them. Contact your local police station.
- If you do not want to report to the police, delete the items and tell the sender to stop.
- Never forward a sext to anyone else.
- Ask your child to tell you or another trusted adult if they continue to receive these items.

If your child is asked to take and send a picture

If this happens, ask them to think about:

- Why the person has asked for the photo. Do they think that someone who cared about them would put them at risk?
- How they may feel if the sext was accidentally or deliberately leaked and seen by other people.

If your child has already taken and sent a picture

If this happens your child should:

- Delete the sext from their phone, computer or wherever it may be stored.
- Ask the person who received it to delete the sext from their phone or computer immediately.

If they are concerned that the sext may already have been sent to other people, they may need independent legal advice from a specialist legal service such as **Victoria Legal Aid** or **Youth Law**.

4 “Friendships, Peer Influence, and Peer Pressure During the Teen Years” by Maria R. T. de Guzman, August 2007
elkhorn.unl.edu/e-public/live/g1751/build/

5 Mostly from “Friendships, Peer Influence, and Peer Pressure During the Teen Years” by Maria R. T. de Guzman, August 2007



About SECASA

The South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault (SECASA) provides services to children and adults, both female and male, who have been sexually assaulted. The Centre also works with non-offending family members, partners, caregivers and support workers.

Our service operates in the Southern Metropolitan Region of Victoria, Australia and encompasses the south east suburbs of Melbourne, covering the Mornington Peninsula, Westernport and the Dandenong, Berwick, Cranbourne and Pakenham growth corridors.

Information on the SECASA web sites:

- www.secasa.com.au - information and resources on sexual assault, child abuse, sexual harassment and family violence.
- www.secasayouth.com.au - information for young people.

SECASA can also provide assessment and treatment for young people aged 4 - 17 whose behaviour may be identified as sexually abusive or problematic. This can include problems with internet pornography and transmitting sexual images. If you are concerned about a young person's sexual behaviour, call:

- SECASA Duty Worker (03) 9594 2289 from 9.00 am to 5.30 pm Monday to Friday
- Sexual Assault Crisis Line 1800 806 292 after 5.00 pm, weekends and public holidays

Useful contacts

Victoria Police

Victoria Police has 27 teams of specialist detectives who are trained to investigate sexual assault and child abuse: the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams (SOCITs). SOCITs work with the Department of Human Services and the CASAs to provide combined services.

To find the nearest SOCIT, contact your local police station or see the Victoria Police web site: www.police.vic.gov.au

Victoria Legal Aid

Phone: 03 9269 0120

Web: www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

Youth Law

Phone: 03 9611 2412

Web: youthlaw.asn.au

Kids Helpline

Phone: 1800 55 1800

Web: www.kidshelp.com.au

CyberSmart

Web: www.cybersmart.gov.au

Crimestoppers

Phone: 1800 333 000

Web: crimestoppers.com.au

Download the Respect Me – Don't Sext Me pack

The complete "Respect Me – Don't Sext Me" pack, including information sheets, games and other resources is available online at: www.secasa.com.au/pages/respect-me-dont-sex-me