



What is Sexting?

Sexting is the term used to describe the act of taking and sharing a sexual image or video with others. Through a mobile device, and can often be referred to as 'nudes.'

Sexting can occur in adult relationships and is becoming an increasingly normalised behaviour in teen relationships. They can be sent to a boyfriend or a girlfriend, or as a way to attract the attention and affection of someone you are attracted to. Images such as these can cause a person long term harm as the image will never truly disappear and has led to adults and young people being blackmailed or groomed online.

Young people who have sent indecent images have spoken about feeling anxious about who it might be shared with. Images shared without consent can have a huge impact on the victim yet it is increasingly seen as a frequent occurrence within teen friendship groups.

Research by the SPIRTO Project found that the main motivating factors for sending indecent images were:

- Flirting and meeting new people
- Exploring sexuality
- seeking affirmation
- Social acceptance
- part of a romantic or sexual relationship
- being asked or coerced
- For fun

What does the law say?

While young people may see sexting as a harmless behaviour, they may not be aware that they may be committing a criminal offence. As the law defines a child as a person under the age of 18, any indecent image of a child or young person under 18 is classed as illegal content (even though at 16 a young person is legally allowed to consent to sexual activity)

A young person would be committing a criminal offence if:

- they take an indecent picture or video of themselves or another young person they know.
- they were to share the picture or video with anyone else
- They were to possess, download or store an indecent image or video, even with permission from the child or young person who created it

Police do not want to criminalise young people and, since 2016, do not have to take formal action against the young person as long as the images were shared with consent, with no coercion involved between the 2 young people. The law is designed to protect young people so it's vital to report it to the police, whether it was shared with consent or not, to reduce the potential impact on the victim.

Is this part of a healthy relationship?

Sending nude pictures is not part of a healthy relationship, nor is it a healthy way to start a new relationship. While many teens will argue that adults don't understand modern relationships, the reality is that sexting can be incredibly harmful to the individual who sends the image. But the pressure that teens may face can be quite powerful. In a survey conducted with a number of secondary schools in Lincolnshire, girls reported feeling under pressure to send indecent images while boys reported feeling under pressure to receive images. It can also be seen by teens as being 'not that big a deal,' with some teens using it as a way to test how trustworthy a partner is. Many celebrities and influencers regularly post sexualised content, and many TV programmes promote unhealthy relationship stereotypes, many of which will be discussed amongst their peers.

To learn more about healthy relationships, consent and sexting, you can visit www.disrespectnobody.co.uk

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Advice for parents

Be open and honest

Talking about sex and relationships can sometimes be an awkward experience, however, discussing online risk is vital no matter how uncomfortable we may feel discussing it. Many young people are unaware that sending an indecent image can have huge consequences on their lives—even if they trust or love the other person. Talking about sexting could also be an opportunity to find out how your child might react if they were sent an indecent picture of someone else or how they might respond if someone asks them to send one. Be clear about the risks of sending any photo from their phones or tablets and how they might feel if their private pictures were shared with their friends or family and to ensure that they never share any indecent images or video they receive, always making sure that they talk to a trusted adult about it.

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) have produced a series of videos for parents on how to talk to your children about naked images. Check out their YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/ceop>

Set clear boundaries with technology

Make some clear rules at home regarding the technology they use. Agree areas in the house where technology can be used such as living or dining rooms and kitchens, but also agree areas in the house which should be technology free—bedrooms, bathrooms and toilets. If smart phones and tablets are used behind closed doors it can make it incredibly difficult to monitor what they may be doing. If an individual is putting pressure on a child or young person to send an indecent picture, keeping technology in family friendly areas could reduce the likelihood of an image being sent.

Talk about appropriate apps to communicate with friends and family, depending on their age. Social media was designed for adults to use so the majority of other users will be adults who may not always communicate in an appropriate way.

Promote healthy relationships

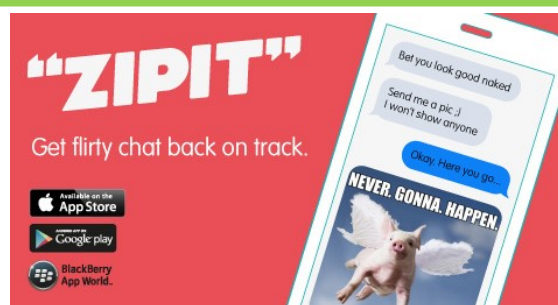
Many young people feel that sexting is a normal behaviour in relationships so it's important that we discuss what a healthy relationship looks like. Ensure that they understand that anyone who truly cares for them or loves them would NEVER ask for a naked image, or put pressure on them to send one.

Some individuals may send a young person an indecent picture of themselves in order to get one in return. This can make the young person feel under pressure to send one back, even if they may not know that person in real life. Ensure your child understands grooming and that some offenders may use a mixture of flattery and insults in order to persuade them to send a picture. It's not necessary to send one, no matter how persistent they are.

Encourage your child to tell you if someone ever sends them an indecent picture or puts pressure on them to send one, and that they can talk to you anytime if someone ever behaves inappropriately towards them online. It's vital that young people feel they can discuss openly if things go wrong without the fear of getting into trouble.

Childline have produced a free app to help young people tackle sexting. Zipit allows users to send 'witty responses' to requests for naked pictures

Find out more at <http://www.childline.org.uk>



If you have concerns about the immediate safety of a child, you can call Lincolnshire Police on 101 or, in an emergency, dial 999