

'SEXTING' – Information for Parents & Carers

What is 'SEXTING'?

Unfortunately, there appears to be a growing trend in children and young people taking indecent photographs of themselves (and sometimes even of friends) and posting them in public places.

This could be on the Internet (for example on Facebook) or by sending the images on via a message from their mobile phone. Sending of images in this way is often referred to as '**Sexting**'.



Why do children and young people do this?

There is a belief that this behaviour is a 'modern day' way of experimenting with 'risk taking'.

It is also believed to be a way for children and young people to 'push boundaries' and express themselves as they become more sexually and socially aware. What we may often refer to as 'experimentation'.

Information from CEOP (Child Exploitation and On-line Protection Centre) suggests that this behaviour is prevalent in young people.

Sharing of such images is often seen by children and young people as 'harmless fun'.

Risks

CEOP receive daily reports of harassment after private photos have been circulated.

This risk comes when children and young people lose control over where the images are circulated.

The images could get into the wrong hands in a number of ways. A simple example would be that a child or young person loses their mobile telephone (which contains images of them).

A further common example is where a young person sends a 'Sext' message to their partner. That relationship ends and the partner decides to circulate for 'revenge' or 'a laugh'.

Effects

In the United States, a number of young people have reportedly committed suicide after images taken of themselves by previous partners had appeared on social networking sites.

Once an image is on the Internet – it can be freely copied by **anybody**. This could include people who have a sexual interest in children. CEOP report that a number of ‘self-taken’ images are appearing on paedophile chat sites and forums.

The Law

Children who are ‘**Sexting**’ may actually be committing criminal offences.

Crimes involving child abuse images fall under Section 1 of the Protection of Children Act 1978. This Act was amended by the Sexual Offences Act 2003 to extend the definition of children from under 16’s to under 18’s.

It is a crime to take, make, permit to take, distribute, show, possess, possess with intent to distribute or to advertise indecent photographs of any person below the age of 18 years.

If someone is prosecuted for these offences, they may be placed on the sex offenders register, potentially for some considerable time.

We do not want to prosecute children, we want to protect them. We can only do that with your help.

What can you do?

Children and young people may not realise that what they are doing is illegal or that it may be potentially harmful to them in the future.

What you can do as parents/carers is educate your children to these dangers. Tell them that this behaviour could come back to haunt them in later life and that once an image is on the internet – you can never get it back.

Educate them around the risks of sharing personal information and reiterate the SMART rules:-

SAFE: Keep safe by not giving out personal information to others such as your email address, phone number, home address or school photos.

MEETING: Don’t agree to meet up with someone you have only been chatting to online and you don’t know in the real world. Make sure you have a parent or carer’s permission and they can come along to the meeting.

ACCEPTING: Don’t accept emails, pictures, files or texts from people you don’t know or trust. This could lead to problems as they may contain viruses or nasty messages.

RELIABLE: Information you may find online may not be true and people can lie about who they are.

TELL: Tell a parent, carer or trusted adult if someone or something makes you feel uncomfortable or worried, or if someone you know is being bullied online.