

My child has behaved irresponsibly by sending or receiving sexual images

What are we talking about?

“Sexting” describes the use of technology to share personal sexual images or videos. It’s a mix of the words “sex” and “texting”. It is also referred to as ‘youth produced sexual imagery’.

It is called this because:

- ‘Youth produced’ includes young people sharing images that they, or another young person, have created of themselves
- ‘Sexual’ because the material is of a sexual nature
- ‘Imagery’ covers both still photos and moving videos

This behaviour involves:

- Someone under the age of 18 creating & sharing sexual imagery of themselves with a peer under the age of 18
- Someone under the age of 18 sharing sexual imagery created by another person under the age of 18 with a peer under the age of 18 or an adult
- Someone under the age of 18 in possession of sexual imagery created by another person under the age of 18

For example, this could be a picture of a boy or young man exposing himself or a girl or young woman in a state of undress; for example, in her underwear.

This sexually explicit material can be sent in a number of ways; via text message, email, through online messaging or chat facilities, or through social networking sites.



What you need to know

Coming to terms with what has happened

Most young people today are entirely comfortable with recording their entire lives online – much like other generations used to do in a diary.

These days though, this often includes uploading and sharing photos, status messages or updates on what has been happening in their lives or how they are feeling as well as texting back and forth with friends.

While this 'finger on the pulse, share all' culture has some benefits, it can also create an environment in which teenagers and young people make impulsive decisions without thinking through the possible consequences. Often times, they are only a click away from doing something digitally that they would not normally do in the 'real world'.

There could be many reasons why young people would want to take 'sexy' pictures of themselves and send them to someone else. It could be that two young people who are in a relationship want to prove their love or commitment to each other; it could be that someone is looking to start a relationship with someone else, or it could be that they simply want to show off or fit in with what their friends are doing.

When coming to terms with this behaviour it's important to remain calm so that your child feels they can talk to you.

It's likely your child is regretting what has happened and could be feeling embarrassed and ashamed.

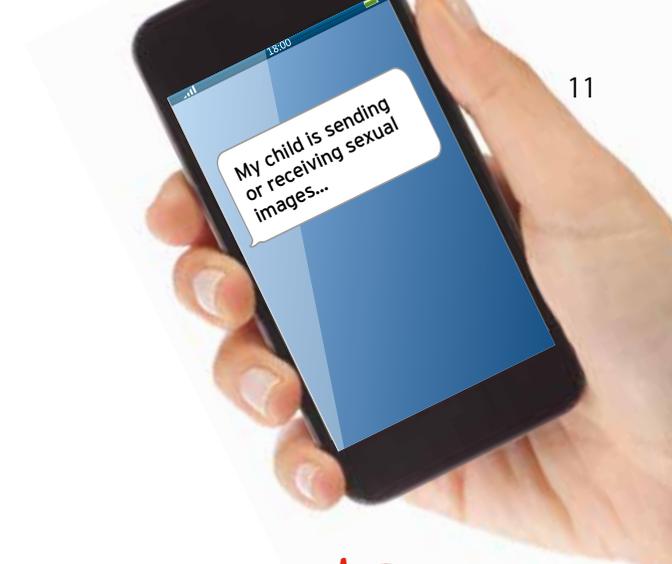
It is also possible that your child was pressured or coerced into doing what they did. If this is the case, they'll need help in learning how to respond to peer pressure and having respect for themselves and their bodies.

How safe is my child?

It is likely that your child voluntarily took the images or videos that have landed them in trouble. If they have posed or acted sexually and then deliberately sent the material to someone else, it is most commonly a real or prospective boyfriend or girlfriend. Be assured that you can help your child realise the dangers associated with this behaviour.

Remember that your child will probably be feeling embarrassed and ashamed of what has happened. They are likely to be regretting their actions. These feelings are likely to help them refrain from acting in this way again but it is important to talk to your child to see if there are any other issues: for instance, if they were coerced into taking and sending the pictures or video.

If your child was coerced in some way, it will be important to talk to them about who this was, how the pressure was applied and how they feel about that person now.





If you have any concerns about the safety of your child you should talk to someone about this. You could call the Stop it Now! Helpline (0808 1000 900) for confidential advice. If you think your child may be in immediate danger you should call the police. You can also contact Children's Services teams directly.

It is also important to note that while it is rare, there have been cases of young people being so distressed by what has happened they have attempted or succeeded in taking their own life. Keep a close eye on how your child is coping and seek help if you have concerns about their mental well-being.

Reassure your child that you still love them. Reinforce the message that they can turn things around, and that they are worthy and deserving of help. They may feel like everyone knows what they have done and that they are being judged. It is important to encourage them to connect with their strengths, like sport, music, art and friends.

Telling others, if, when and how

If your child's 'sexting' behaviour has come to attention it is likely that other people in their life already know. This could be their school, the police and your child's friends.

You need to think about who else needs to know. This may be other adults who may be responsible for supervising your child. Remember though that not everyone will need to know what has happened.

Try to be as open as you can with your child about who you plan to talk to and why. A key message should be that you have a responsibility to try and keep them safe and that involving other adults is a helpful way of doing this.

The Law

This type of behaviour is illegal – because the material involves people under the age of 18. Under section 1 of the Protection of Children Act 1978



and section 160 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, making, distributing and possessing indecent images of children is a criminal offence. This is the case even if the people involved are under 18 themselves.

However, outcome 21 is a recent ruling by the Home Office. It states that it is not always in the public interest to prosecute in cases of youth produced sexual imagery – for example, where there is **no evidence** of exploitation, grooming, making a profit or malicious intent (such as uploading pictures onto a pornographic website) or if the behaviour was repeated. This means that even though a young person has broken the law, the police can choose not to take any further action if it is considered not to be in the public interest to do so. It also means that police have discretion to respond appropriately to cases of youth produced sexual imagery and to record incidences in such a way that do not have a negative impact on young people.

A police investigation should take place to ensure the young person is not at risk of harm. This could involve the police finding out if the self-taken images have resulted from grooming or facilitation by an adult or if they are a result of children and young people pushing boundaries and experimenting with their friends. This approach is informed by Section 1(1) of the Children Act 1989, which states that within the context of any statutory intervention the welfare of the child is paramount. This approach is reinforced by Section 11 of the Children Act 2004, which places a duty on key persons and bodies to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Involvement in this type of activity can be indicative of other underlying vulnerabilities. Children and young people may be

at risk in other ways. If the police think this may be the case, they may make a referral to Children's Services.

However, young people who persist with this behaviour may find themselves subject to a more robust police response, potentially using police reprimands or even prosecution in certain circumstances.

Discussion topics

If we think back to our own childhoods we have probably all done embarrassing things in our time. Back then, however, they were probably not recorded online, where they could stay forever. It is important to remember that once something has been put online it will never be fully erased.

Discussions with your child could focus on the fact that when we share something electronically, either online or directly to someone we lose control of it.

Your experiences:

If you can, talk to your child about things you have done or experienced. Can you think of something that happened when you were their age and what might have happened if it had ended up online? What might the consequences have been? How might you have felt about that?

Relationships:

You can use this opportunity to talk about healthy relationships. How relationships should make us feel safe and comfortable and should involve mutual respect. No one should feel pressured into doing anything, particularly sexual things. Be open to the possibility that your child may be exploring their sexual identity through their online

behaviour. If you find it difficult to talk to your child about this have a look at the resources available to talk with young people about sex.

Long-term consequences:

You should consider talking to your child about long-term consequences associated with sexting if the content is shared with others – either by people forwarding it on using messages or emails or by uploading it onto a social networking site or website. You could ask them what a prospective college, university or employer might think if they were to see it.

Peer pressure:

Peer pressure can be a formidable force so make sure your child knows that you understand that they could be pushed into sending something. Talk to them about making positive decisions and be sure they understand that no matter how great the pressure becomes, the potential social humiliation could be a hundred times worse. Also let them know that they can talk to you about this pressure and how they can go about dealing with it.

Taking responsibility:

Make sure your child understands that they are responsible for their actions. This includes what they choose to do if they receive a sexually explicit photo. Have them understand that if they do receive one, they need to delete it immediately. Tell them that if they do send it on, and the photo is of someone under 18, they're distributing child pornography – and that they could get into trouble with the police.



Research indicates adolescent girls, more so than boys, sometimes feel pressurised to take part in sexting behaviour

Healthy relationships, consent, compliance and coercion

As we have discussed, there could be many reasons why your child decided to send to someone else or post online sexual images of themselves – they may have been trying to impress someone or show off, or it may also be a way of exploring their sexual identity.

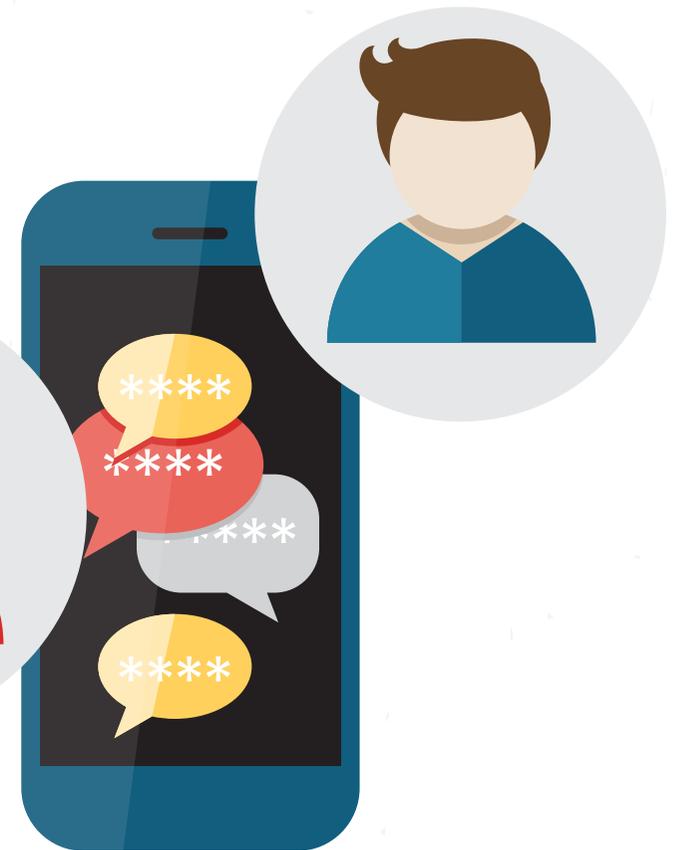
Any sign that your child was coerced into sending images or posting them online could indicate more serious problems. It could be that they are in an unhealthy relationship, or that they felt they had no choice, or they could be being sexually exploited by someone. It will be important to talk to them about who applied the pressure, how they did it and how they feel about the person now.

Peer pressure can be a strong force among children and young people so ensure your child knows that they can

talk to you about being pressured to do things they may not want to. Talk to them about making positive decisions and about having respect for themselves and their bodies. Encourage your child to give themselves 'think time' and remember they don't have to respond to anything straight away.

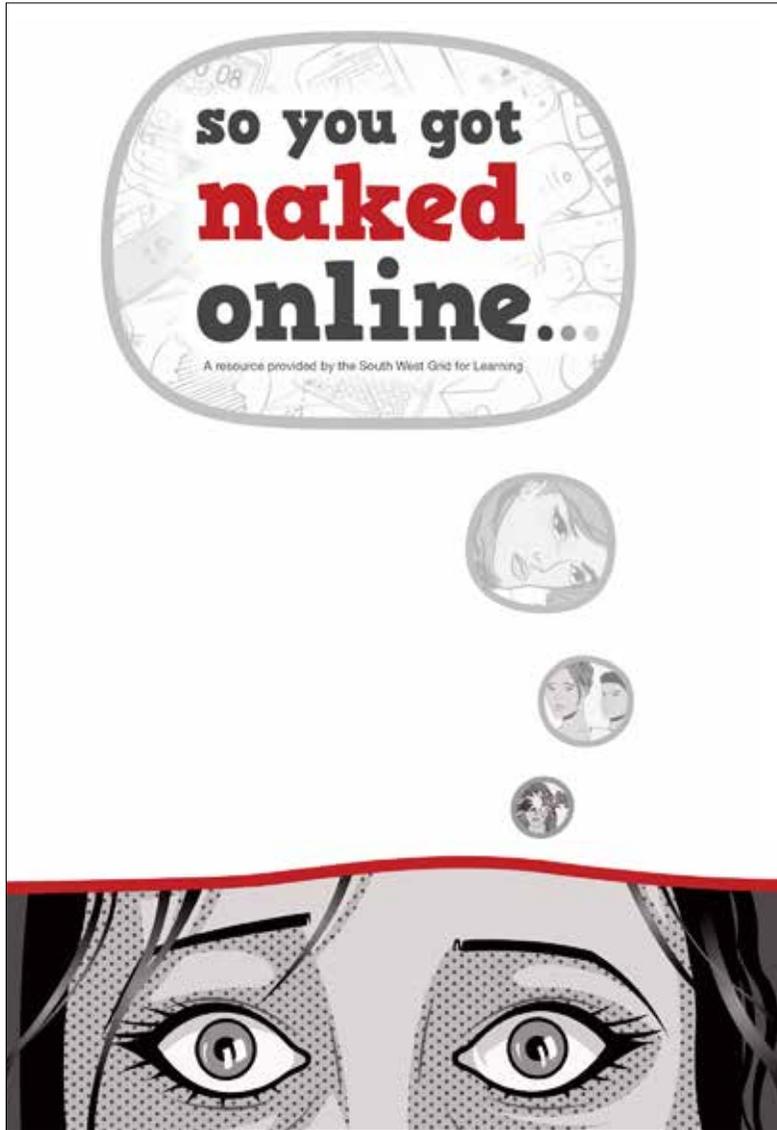
Research indicates adolescent girls, more so than boys, sometimes feel pressured or obliged to take part in sexting behaviour. Their compliance may mask hidden anxieties and sometimes raises questions about their ability to make positive choices about their sexual behaviour.

Take this opportunity to talk to your child about healthy relationships and how they should make us feel safe, comfortable and loved.



If you have concerns that your child may be being sexually exploited you could call the Stop it Now! Helpline (0808 1000 900) for confidential advice. If you think your child may be in immediate danger you should call the police. You can also contact Children's Services teams directly.





NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

Association of Chief Police Officers of England,
Wales and Northern Ireland

ACPO Child Protection and Abuse Investigation (CPAI) Group

ACPO CPAI Lead's Position on Young People Who Post Self-Taken Indecent Images.

1. Background.

1.1 The ACPO Lead on Child Protection and Abuse Investigation (CPAI) has released this position in response to the growing trend by young people to take and share indecent photos, not only of themselves, but also of friends and partners through SMS on mobile phones.

1.2 The taking of such photographs is often due to children and young people taking risks and pushing boundaries as they become more sexually and socially aware. With the prevalence of mobile phones with cameras and internet access and the increased use of Bluetooth technology, images can be shared easily between friends.

1.3 Sharing indecent images in this way is colloquially known by the term 'sexting' and it can have extremely damaging effects. In the UK, a number of young people have committed suicide after images taken of them by previous partners were posted on social networking sites.

A Parent's Guide to Dealing with 'Sexting'
What to do and how to handle it

What to do if you're worried about your children sharing inappropriate or explicit pictures of themselves and others

It can seem like every parent's worst nightmare - their child taking explicit or inappropriate pictures of themselves, sharing them with others via the internet or their mobile phone and being caught up in the increasingly common, rampant sexting culture. There are a variety of reasons for a number of them, both subtle and obvious and others as a result of ignorance or coercion.

So what is sexting?

Taking and sharing inappropriate or explicit pictures or videos is often referred to as sexting. It is a activity that young people and adults are engaging in quite a lot. Young people are used to sharing and documenting their lives online. It can seem to be the 'next' natural step before actually sharing to think about the consequences.

If you find that your child has been involved with an incident, this guide will help you know what to do and how to handle it.

Steps to take if your child has shared an inappropriate or explicit image or film of themselves

The steps below will help you to work through how to deal with the incident and how to take control.

Step 1 - Offer reassurance and try not to panic

- This is a lot easier said than done, especially if the image or film has been shared widely, but there are things that you can do.
- Offer reassurance to your child, let them know you are going to help them look down the image and remove the content.
- Explore the facts tentatively with them.
- Keep the evidence, you may need it later.

Step 2 - Ask them who they have shared it with

- It may be embarrassing for you to admit this to you so be cautious about handling this. It may be embarrassing for them to admit this to you so be cautious about handling this.
- If you don't know how widely it has been shared ask them who they shared it with directly.

Step 3 - Inform the provider/web site

- Most images are shared on websites but they can be shared on social networking sites.
- If the image has been shared on a web 2.0 social networking site get in contact with them and report the image and/or film.
- If the image or film has been shared on a mobile get in contact with the provider (O2, etc.) as you may want to change the number/PPN of your child's current mobile so that they aren't tracked or monitored either.

Step 4 - Inform the authorities

- Get in contact with the local police. This is especially important if you think that your child may have been coerced into sharing the image.
- If you think your child has shared the image willingly and it is a misplaced romantic gesture that they regret you may not need to involve the police. This is a really judgement call and you will want to think about how best to handle the incident. You may want to contact your child's school/principal and/or their parents and consider how best to resolve the situation or control the circulation of the image or film.
- If the image has been shared with an adult, inform CEOP www.ceop.gov.uk report

Step 5 - Inform the school/college

- Get in contact with your child's school and inform them about what has happened. They will be able to help you to control the circulation and support your child.
- If the image or film has been shared with someone who attends the school they will be able to work with you to approach them directly. They can help with reassurance and control.
- If it is apparent that your child has been coerced into sharing the image as part of sexual exploitation or that you may have been misled, this will be a child protection and safeguarding procedure and will be able to assist you in supporting your child as things progress.

It's really hard to tackle this issue as a parent and your child will be terrible worried. You can help them by managing the circulation of the image and how you can help them through this.

Make sure that your child is offered support, whether this is by you or someone else. Also remember that children are resilient, so it is important that you understand as much as possible about why they have done it and in what capacity. This may not be straightforward, as the child may be embarrassed or control that they are going to get in trouble. It may be that you need to bring in third party support to help establish the facts. Don't be afraid about doing this whether it is the school, friends, other external support or even the police.



Specific resources that may help

A leaflet aimed at young people who have posted or sent sexual images:

www.swgfl.org.uk/Staying-Safe/So-you-got-naked-online/Download-Page

Association of Child Police Officers guidelines on sexting:

http://ceop.police.uk/Documents/ceopdocs/externaldocs/ACPO_Lead_position_on_Self_Taken_Images.pdf

A parent's guide to dealing with sexting:

www.saferinternet.org.uk/ufiles/A-Parents-Guide-to-Dealing-with-Sexting-26SEP13.pdf

A short video from the NSPCC on how to stay safe online: I Saw Your Willy - Be Share Aware - NSPCC

www.youtube.com/watch?v=sch_WMjd6go

