

Rock Against Child Pornography and Abuse

Is a registered charity working to give a voice to the silent victims of childhood abuse. The children of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

RACPA UK can be found at

www.racpauk.org

and on Facebook and Twitter.

We can also be contacted confidentially at:

racpauk@gmail.com

Further important information can be found at

www.virtualglobaltaskforce.com

www.ceop.gov.uk

www.iwf.org.uk

All these agencies work on a national and international basis to protect children from online exploitation of any kind and have simple reporting procedures for child pornography websites, inappropriate content or contact concerning children or young people and for advice and information in all aspects of internet safety.

©Rock Against Child Pornography and Abuse UK

Registered charity No. 1151556

Revised 2023

What you need to know about Sexting

Advice and information for parents and carers



What is rapidly and sadly becoming almost *normal* among children and young people is Sexting, sending sexually explicit text messages, nude or semi-nude photographs via phones or webcams. As a parent or carer it is important to understand the risks involved and the dangers that may face children if they get caught up in this, and what to do if the worst happens.

Firstly in law any person below the age of 18 is a child, therefore sending nude photos can be classed as creating and distributing child pornography, even if the image is a 'selfie' and being sent to a boyfriend or girlfriend it is still illegal. Anyone receiving the image can be charged with receiving and distributing child pornography, and as such runs the risk of prosecution and being placed on the sex offenders register, which of course can very badly affect their future.

Naturally, children believe that the person they have sent the image to would never show it to anyone else, would never share it around, but of course it happens. Friendships and relationships change, one row between boyfriend and girlfriend can mean that the picture that was personal has now become public property, and as such it can then be spread very quickly all over the internet, possibly ending up on a child pornography website that can be accessed by paedophiles all over the world. Not a very pleasant thought, but a very real risk.

There is also the risk of blackmail being used, 'If you don't want me to send this to your parents or school, then you will do whatever I say.' Often used by paedophiles who start online relationships with children and used as part of the grooming process, but also used by spiteful and manipulative peers to gain money or force your child into behaving in a way that is not in their nature, such as forcing them to steal.

Of course once again the question of trust comes into play, and we would always like to think that we can give 100% trust to our children. But peer pressure is a huge thing, needing to be seen to be the same as everyone else, being teased or bullied because you are not joining in, seeing it as a perfectly normal part of growing up. All of these things can be reasons your child engages in sexting, and of course they are not going to want to talk to you if things get out of hand for fear of being punished, judged, and probably having their phones taken off of them, the worst punishment of all.

So, as adults we must find ways to approach the subject. If you are giving your child their first mobile phone, set guidelines in place about the rules you want them to follow and your expectations of them. Try to make sure that your child is comfortable and confident enough to say *no*. Explain that someone asking them to sext is not behaving appropriately. Talk about what they send, ask them if they would be ok with their grandparents seeing the pictures. If the answer is no then it becomes self-explanatory that it's not the right thing to send. Explain what CAN go wrong, don't accuse them of anything but make sure they know what might happen. And of course you can set up parental controls on your child's phone as well as on their laptops and computers, most major suppliers will be happy to advise you on how to go about doing this. See our Parental Filter Software leaflet for more information.

If the worst has already happened, then your child will not need you to condemn, criticize or judge them. They will need you to be calm and supportive. Shouting, losing your temper or overreacting will only cause them to clam up, and that is the last thing you need. Let them know they are not alone, ask them what they want to happen next and then reassure them that you will do your best to make it happen, even if it takes a little while. Report the abuse, because that IS what is happening, to the police, to the Child Exploitation Online Protection agency or the Internet Watch Foundation. All of these will offer you and your child help and support to resolve the problem, and they can also point you in the direction of qualified counsellors for ongoing support.

Never ignore the subject and hope it will go away, don't accept that it's 'just a phase that all kids go through' and nothing bad will come of it. ANY image once in cyberspace becomes public property. Don't let your child do something they may live to regret because of your own possible embarrassment about talking the issues through.