

Know! Your Child's Risk for

Sexting...

As any parent or caregiver raising teenagers knows, smartphones play a leading role in their daily lives. While social media, apps and messaging provide a fun and highly accessible path to connect and share with friends, such outlets also allow youth to connect with those they should not be connecting with and share things they should not be sharing. We're talking SEXTING - defined as sending sexually explicit messages, photos or videos via cell phone or other electronic devices.

Regardless of where you live or where your teens go to school, you can bet "sexting" is taking place among their peers. While we do not want to believe our children would ever make such a bad judgement call, it is important to know that 39% of teens report having sent sexually suggestive messages by way of text, email or instant messaging and 20% say they have sent nude or semi-nude photos or videos of themselves.

Through countless stories in the media, we see that any adolescent with access to a cell phone or other electronic device is at-risk for getting involved in the sending, receiving and/or forwarding of inappropriate messages or images – which can lead to a number of negative legal, social, safety and health consequences. A study published in the Journal of Adolescent Health found that sexting also has links to substance abuse and risky sexual behavior among youth.

So what is it that causes a teen to engage in such activity and what can we do, as parents, to prevent or stop our child from partaking in any way, shape or form?

According to a compilation of studies shared by GuardChild.com, the most common reasons teen give for sexting include: to be fun and flirtatious; sent as a "present" to a boyfriend; pressure from a guy or girl; sent in response to receiving a sext; sent as a joke; and some report sending it to "feel sexy."

In other words, teens are generally sexting for approval and acceptance. But this type of behavior can obviously backfire. The girl who sent a "private" photo to her now ex-boyfriend ends up being seen by all of his and her peers - to humiliate her for breaking up with him. The inappropriate picture sent out as a joke gets into the hands of the school principal - not so funny now. The image sent by a girl trying to attract a certain boy somehow lands on a pornographic website - putting not only this young lady's reputation, but safety at risk.

Once sent, there is no turning back. And what may have been intended for one person to see can end up on the screens of everyone at school and elsewhere. For many young people, sexting becomes their social death sentence. In numerous instances, these adolescents become targets of shame and ridicule among their peers – some to the point of becoming suicidal (as again we've seen far too often in the media).

How many of us have talked to our children about sexting beyond saying, "You better never...?" If that's as far as you've gotten, you're not alone. But the conversation must go deeper. In the tip to follow, we will give suggestions on how to talk to your pre-teens and teens about this subject and provide content on what those conversations should include.

Sources: [GuardChild.com: Teenage Sexting Statistics](http://GuardChild.com). [Joseph Nowinski Ph.D. - Psychology Today: Teen Sexting: The Dark Side of the Web, Dec. 2015](http://Psychology Today). [The Atlantic: Why Kids Sext, Nov. 2014](http://The Atlantic). [TheSpruce.com: What is Sexting and Why is it a Problem, Feb. 2017](http://TheSpruce.com).