



Sexting: How to keep your child safe

As a parent, it's important to understand the risks of sexting so that you can talk to your child about how to stay safe and what to do if they ever feel scared or uncomfortable. It may feel awkward, but it's important to explain to children the risks of sexting, how to stay safe and remind them that they can talk to you if something ever makes them feel scared or uncomfortable.

What is sexting?

Sexting is when someone shares sexual, naked or semi-naked images or videos of themselves or others, or sends sexually explicit messages.

They can be sent using mobiles, tablets, smartphones, and laptops - any device that allows you to share media and messages.

Sexting may also be called:

- trading nudes
- dirties
- pic for pic.

What the law says

Sexting can be seen as harmless, but creating or sharing explicit images of a child is illegal, even if the person doing it is a child. A young person is breaking the law if they:

- take an explicit photo or video of themselves or a friend
- share an explicit image or video of a child, even if it's shared between children of the same age
- possess, download or store an explicit image or video of a child, even if the child gave their permission for it to be created.

However, as of January 2016 in England and Wales, if a young person is found creating or sharing images, the police can choose to record that a crime has been committed but that taking formal action isn't in the public interest.

Crimes recorded this way are unlikely to appear on future records or checks, unless the young person has been involved in other similar activities which may indicate that they're a risk.

How to talk to your child about sexting

✓ Find a way to start the conversation

Every child is different, so your approach should be based on their character and your relationship with them. You could:

- outline your expectations and explain the rules of having a mobile, tablet or smartphone
- ask them what they feel is acceptable to send to people, if they'd be happy for you or a stranger or other children to see certain photos. If the answer is 'no', explain that the image, video or message is probably not appropriate to send
- make sure they're comfortable saying no, that they know their body is private and being asked to share explicit images is inappropriate
- explain to them about the importance of trust and consent in a healthy relationship. Tell them that it's not ok for someone to make them feel uncomfortable, to pressure them into doing things that they don't want to do, or to show them things that they're unhappy about. Let them know that they can speak to you if this ever happens

✓ Explain the risks of texting

- tell them what can happen when things go wrong. Don't accuse them of sexting, but do explain the dangers and legal issues
- you may find it easier to use real-life examples, such as television programmes or news stories, to help you explain the risks
- ask them if they'd want something private shown to the world. Talk about the Granny rule - would you want your Granny to see the image you're sharing?
- talk about whether a person who asks for an image from you might also be asking other people for images
- if children are sending images to people they trust, they may not think there's much risk involved. Use examples of when friends or partners have had a falling-out and what might happen to the images if this happens

✓ Make it clear you'll be supportive & understanding

- make sure they know that you're always there for support if they feel pressured by anyone
- explain that they can come to you if someone asks to send them a nude picture or if they receive an explicit message
- let them know that you won't be angry with them but just want to make sure they're safe and happy