

## Let's Talk About...

### Teens & Sexting: What Caregivers Can Do

#### What is sexting & how often does it occur?

Images, videos, or text messages with sexy content that is sent by message, App, or social media on a phone or computer.

- National studies found between about 10-20% of teens have sent an image. The only study that asked about messages (not just images) found twice as many sent sexually suggestive words in a message.<sup>1</sup>
- 60% of teens who sexted did so with someone they were dating.<sup>2</sup>
- 3 in 10 friends of sexters say that the photos were sent to someone else.<sup>3</sup>

#### Why not "Zero Tolerance"?

It is tempting to just take away the phone, or to check the messages every day. There are important reasons to take a more thoughtful approach:

- Safety: sexting can be used as a tool of abuse. Half of all who sent an image felt pressured to do so.<sup>4</sup> If you shut down the conversation, kids might not feel safe coming to you if they have a problem or are scared.
- Checking messages didn't make sexting more or less likely.<sup>5</sup>
- Sexting peaks in young adults, when they are out in the world. Likelihood increases with age, so older teens are more likely to have sent an image, and sexting peaks in the mid 20's to mid 30's.<sup>6</sup> Help them learn how to be safe and smart now.
- Studies show that most kids (even those who sext!) already think that sending sexts of someone under 18 is wrong, or that kids their age are too young to do it.<sup>7</sup>
- Your kids can be leaders in helping other kids.
- Education efforts are working to reduce sexting!<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Best (and Worst) of Mobile Connectivity. Part V: Cell Phone Usage. Aaron Smith. Pew Research Center. November 30, 2012; Executive Summary: 2011 AP-MTV Digital Abuse Study; Cox Communications Teens Online & Wireless Safety Survey; The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy "Sex and Tech: : Results from a Survey of Teens and Young Adults" (2009)

<sup>2</sup> Cox Communications Teens Online & Wireless Safety Survey

<sup>3</sup> ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Executive Summary: 2011 AP-MTV Digital Abuse Study

<sup>5</sup> Pew Research Center, Teens & Sexting: Major Findings (2009)

<sup>6</sup> Pew Research Center, The Best (and worst) of Mobile Connectivity (2012)

<sup>7</sup> Cox Communications Teens Online & Wireless Safety Survey

<sup>8</sup> Executive Summary: 2011 AP-MTV Digital Abuse Study

### **Talking with your teen:**

- Sexting is just part of the bigger picture of healthy relationships and sexuality.
- Smartphones and social media are a regular part of flirting and dating.
- Start the conversation by allowing the teen to tell you their opinions and experiences:
  - What do they think of sexting?
  - What do their friends do?
  - What they would do if they received a forwarded sext?
  - What they would do if a friend was asked to sext?
  - What if a friend was pressuring someone else to sext, how could they say what they are doing is not cool?
- Above all, make it clear that you are here to help if they have questions.

### **Talking with your teen's school:**

- Ask your school what they are saying about sexting and about relevant policies or procedures.
- Encourage them to bring in someone from your local Community Sexual Assault Program to talk to students.

### **Resources for Caregivers:**

- 100 Conversations: <http://www.100conversations.org/>
- Net Smartz: <http://www.netsmartz.org/Sexting>
- Common Sense Media Parent Concerns: <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/parent-concerns>
- Talking to Your Kids About Sexting: <http://mediasmarts.ca/tipsheet/talking-your-kids-about-sexting-%E2%80%94-tip-sheet>

### **Resources to Share with Teens:**

- A Thin Line: <http://www.athinline.org/>
- That's Not Cool: <https://thatsnotcool.com>
- Healthy relationship and consent resources: <http://www.wcsap.org/consent>