

## Let's Talk About...

### Teens & Sexting: What Educators 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"?

While many schools don't allow phone use during class or school at all, the interactions teens have through phones and social media affect their behavior when they are under your supervision. We can't just wash our hands of it and say it is someone else's problem. There are important reasons to help them navigate these waters:

- 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, students might not feel safe coming to you if they have a problem or are scared.
- 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>5</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 teens their age are too young to do it.<sup>6</sup>
- Teens can be leaders in helping other kids.
- Education efforts are working to reduce sexting!<sup>7</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, The Best (and worst) of Mobile Connectivity (2012)

<sup>6</sup> Cox Communications Teens Online & Wireless Safety Survey

<sup>7</sup> Executive Summary: 2011 AP-MTV Digital Abuse Study

### **What to talk about with students**

Schools are in a pivotal role to promote these conversations. The approach should be holistic and integrated across modalities. To be most effective, efforts should be youth-driven. The goals should be to:

- Promote healthy relationships
- Support bystander intervention
- Encourage safe and responsible technology use
- Identify how teens can get support if they or a friend find themselves in a situation like these

### **Messages for Concerned Parents:**

- Encourage them to keep communication lines open.
- Sexting is just part of the bigger picture of healthy relationships and gender roles.
- Smartphones and social media have become a regular part of flirting and dating.
- While not that many kids send sexts, many more kids receive forwarded sexts or have a friend who sexts. Their kids can help friends be safe and respectful.
- Checking messages didn't make sexting more or less likely, in one study.

### **Resources for Adults & Schools:**

- Your local Community Sexual Assault Program can help you figure out how to present the information to your students, or can come talk to you students about dating safety and respect.
- Building a Prevention Framework to Address Teen "Sexting" Behaviors <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/grants/244001.pdf>
- CommonSenseMedia.org/educators has a set of curricula for use with different age groups that covers digital citizenship broadly, and these issues specifically.
- 100 Conversations <http://www.100conversations.org/>
- Net Smartz <http://www.netsmartz.org/Sexting>

### **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>