




GET INFORMED. GET INVOLVED.

fight against violence and abuse in your child's life.



A publication of  We give them shelter...You make it possible®

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Is your child? sexting?



50% of teens say they have received a sex text message.

The newest craze among teens is to send nude or semi-nude photographs of themselves to others via cell phone or other media sharing devices. The staggering statistics show that your child may be affected.

- 22 % of teenagers say they have sent or posted nude photos of themselves.
- 50 % of teens say they have received a sex text message.
- More than half of teen boys and almost three fourths of teen girls say they have sent sexually suggestive texts to a boyfriend or girlfriend.

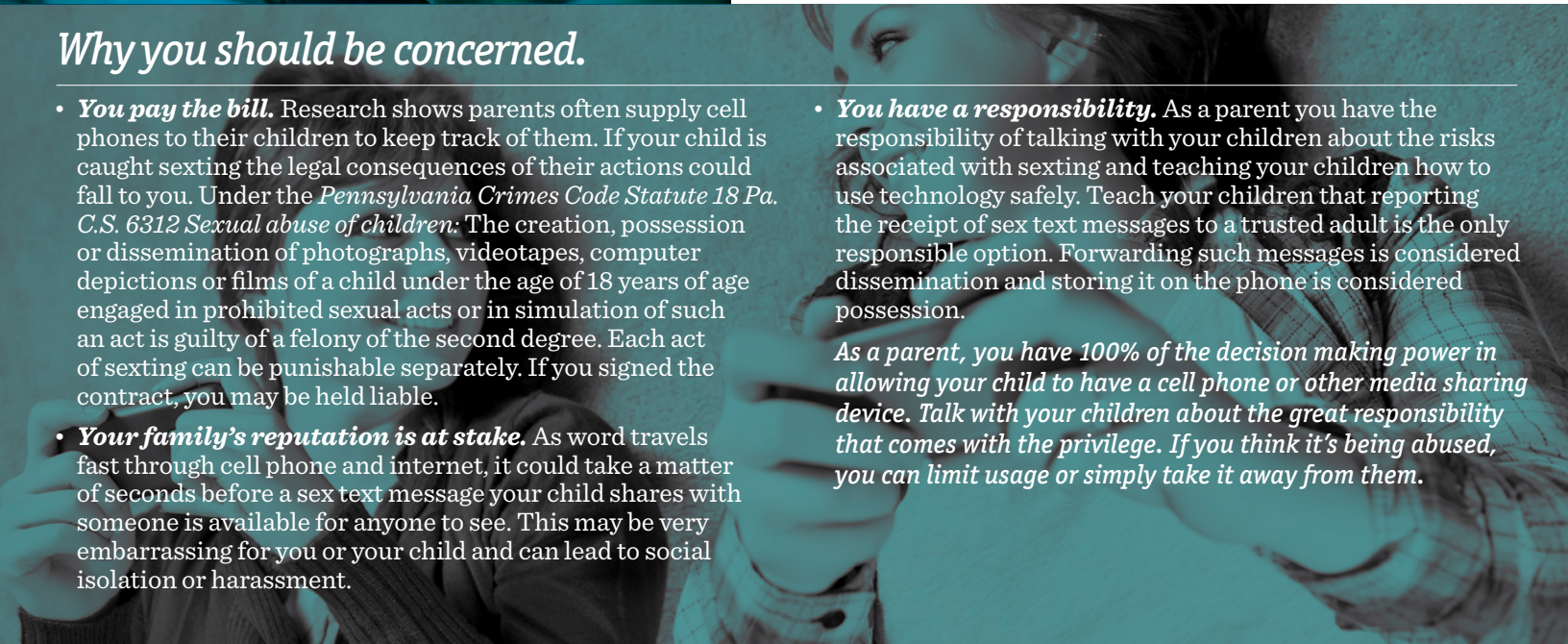
Why do they do it?

- They may see such photos as romantic, fun or adventuresome. It is the new way of flirting.
- They could be feeling pressure from peers.
- They might be bored or seeking attention.
- They might do it to please a boyfriend or girlfriend.
- They may see it as harmless and flirty.

Why you should be concerned.

- **You pay the bill.** Research shows parents often supply cell phones to their children to keep track of them. If your child is caught sexting the legal consequences of their actions could fall to you. Under the *Pennsylvania Crimes Code Statute 18 Pa. C.S. 6312 Sexual abuse of children*: The creation, possession or dissemination of photographs, videotapes, computer depictions or films of a child under the age of 18 years of age engaged in prohibited sexual acts or in simulation of such an act is guilty of a felony of the second degree. Each act of sexting can be punishable separately. If you signed the contract, you may be held liable.
- **Your family's reputation is at stake.** As word travels fast through cell phone and internet, it could take a matter of seconds before a sex text message your child shares with someone is available for anyone to see. This may be very embarrassing for you or your child and can lead to social isolation or harassment.
- **You have a responsibility.** As a parent you have the responsibility of talking with your children about the risks associated with sexting and teaching your children how to use technology safely. Teach your children that reporting the receipt of sex text messages to a trusted adult is the only responsible option. Forwarding such messages is considered dissemination and storing it on the phone is considered possession.

As a parent, you have 100% of the decision making power in allowing your child to have a cell phone or other media sharing device. Talk with your children about the great responsibility that comes with the privilege. If you think it's being abused, you can limit usage or simply take it away from them.





What do I do as a parent?

Talk to your children

Ask them what they know about sexting. Express how you feel in a non-threatening way. A two-way dialog can go a long way toward helping your kids understand how to minimize legal, social and reputation risks. Discuss the various pressures they may encounter regarding sending revealing photos. Let teens know that you understand how they can be pushed or dared into sending something they may later regret. Remind your kids that once an image is sent, it can never be completely deleted and they will lose control of who sees it. Ask teens how they would feel if you, your other children, their grandparents, or the entire school saw the picture.

Refuse secrecy

It's important to your teen's developing sense of privacy and independence, but he or she must learn the difference between privacy and secrecy. Your kids have a right to talk with friends in private, to keep a diary and to have uninterrupted time alone. However, evasive behavior needs to be addressed firmly and calmly. Insist that as a responsible and caring parent, you have a right to know who their friends are and what they are doing together. Check pictures, videos and text on cell phones, digital cameras, MySpace and Facebook pages to see who your children are communicating with and what they are communicating about. Respect privacy but refuse to accept secretive behavior.

Establish the 3-W Rule

Teens need to tell you **where** they are going, **who** they will be with and **when** they will be back. It's not invasion of privacy; it's common courtesy. Minute by minute details are not needed, but in a time of need you can locate your child and it will build upon the trust and respect you have for one another.

Talk with other parents and teachers

Be proactive in talking about prevention with other adults. Don't wait for an incident to happen to your child or your child's friend before you talk about the consequences of sexting. Town hall meetings or parent-teacher organizations are great forums to share information, discuss concerns and ideas.

Understand the capabilities of the technology you choose to give your children

As a parent it is your responsibility to understand the capabilities of the technology you choose to give your children and limit access to certain features if deemed necessary. Does your child's phone have the capability of receiving multi-media messages? You can deny that feature with your cell phone provider. Can your child's iPod be converted into a phone by downloading a free application? Can your child's phone or other technological device gain access to free Wi-Fi giving them access to the internet?

Be conscious of development stages

The middle and high school years are a time when teens are exploring who they are as individuals and become curious about their sexuality. Seek to understand the changes that are taking place within their physical and mental state. This may aid in formulating the discussion that is needed with your child. Many children in this age group:

- *Struggle with their sense of identity*
- *Feel awkward or strange about their body*
- *Have an increased interest in sex*
- *Are concerned about their sexual attractiveness to others*
- *Frequently change relationships*
- *Test rules and limits*
- *Experiment with sex and drugs*

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