

"Sexting" is No Laughing Matter



A troubling new trend is sweeping middle schools and high schools across the country. Using a practice referred to as "sexting," students are sending and receiving nude or partially-nude photos via cell phones as a joke or way of flirting with one another. Chances are your child's school is not immune to this disturbing digital phenomenon.

In fact, according to a [recent survey](#), **one in five teen girls, ages 13 to 19, admit to having electronically sent or posted online nude or semi-nude images of themselves.** Of that, 11 percent were 13 to 16-year-old girls. Additionally, almost one in five teen boys admitted to having sent or posted nude or semi-nude photos of themselves online.

And it's not going unnoticed. School districts and law enforcement officials across the country have been cracking down on this trend. Just this month, six boys in a Massachusetts middle school were caught with images of a 13-year-old female classmate. They are now awaiting a hearing to determine whether they will face child pornography charges. Similar stories are being reported nationwide.

So what can we as parents do to combat "sexting" and other dangerous Internet behavior?

1. **Talk to your child about the realities of cyber space.** Despite what they may think, nothing is really private or anonymous. Once an image is sent, the teen has no control over how it will be used, and once it's online, it may never be deleted.
2. **Discuss the importance of resisting pressure from friends or classmates to do something that makes them uncomfortable.** Forty percent of teens and young adults say "pressure from guys" is a reason girls send suggestive messages and/or images.
3. **Remind your child that the recipient may misinterpret the purpose of a picture they send.** A picture taken as a joke may be considered sexually suggestive. (Parents may simply forbid the sending of pictures entirely and choose to disable that function on their child's phone or computer, or they may remind older children to avoid being misunderstood by being very careful with the content of their photos.)
4. **View their MySpace and/ or Facebook page yourself.** It's important that you are where your kids spend time online.