



Sexting

I have heard of sexting, what does it mean?

'Sexting' describes the use of technology to share sexual and sexually implied content. This content includes texts, photos of partial nudity and sexual images or video. This could be shared between partners, peers and strangers. Individuals may use a range of technology to share the content.

The sharing of naked pictures is not a new thing but the speed with which you can share and the potential audience size has dramatically changed as a result of the online world.

What is the law?

If a young person under the age of 18 engages in sexting by creating an explicit photo or video of themselves then they have potentially **created** an indecent image of a child. By sending this content on to another person, they have **distributed** an indecent image of a child. By receiving content of this kind from another young person, they are then in **possession** of an indecent image of a child.

The Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland have stated that young people engaging in sexting should not face prosecution as first time offenders, but the situation will be investigated to ensure that the young people involved are not at risk. Repeat offenders and more extreme cases are reviewed differently, still with a focus on avoiding prosecution unless absolutely necessary.

What other risks are there?

Other than the legal implications you need to also consider the possible reputation and emotional consequences of sexting.

- **Reputation damage:** sexting content can be distributed to other users very quickly, so once you have sent sexting content it is very hard for you to control where the content is posted. Your reputation could be damaged by this type of content if future employers, universities, colleges or friends see it.
- **Emotional and psychological damage:** the distribution of sexting content to others can cause distress and be really upsetting for those involved, especially if the content is distributed by someone they trusted. The effects of others seeing this content can lead to negative comments and bullying, and may result in a loss of confidence or self esteem.

It happened...what should I do next?

1. **Stay calm and act quickly:** if you are worried about an issue of sexting the quicker you act the easier it is to manage the distribution of the content.
2. **Talk to someone:** it can be hard asking for help but in a situation like this it is really important. Family, professionals and friends want to make sure you are safe. In order for them to help you they need to know all of the facts so be honest and let them know what happened and how you are feeling.
3. **Will I get in trouble with the police?** As we outlined above, the law relating to sexting is there first and foremost to protect young people. The Association of Chief Police Officers have stated that young people will be treated as victims and that sexting needs to be dealt with on a case by case basis.

Who can help me?

- Parents and carers: in order for them to support you they need to know that something has happened. Try not to be embarrassed, be honest and let them know how you are feeling
 - The local police
 - Teacher or Child Protection Officer at school
 - If you are worried that you have been groomed or coerced into sending the content you need to make a report to **CEOP** (www.ceop.police.uk)
- Remember you can always speak in confidence to ChildLine (www.childline.org.uk) or call them on 0800 1111