



'Sexting' – Sharing Sexual Images

Rutland County Council 'Guidance' for Educational Settings (November 2017)

It may feel awkward, but it's important to explain to children and young people the risks of sexting, how to keep themselves safe when they are online, and remind them what they can do if they need to talk to someone about something or someone who has made them feel scared or uncomfortable.

What is sexting?

- Sexting is when someone shares sexual, naked or semi-naked images or videos of themselves or others, or sends sexually explicit messages.
- They can be sent using mobiles, tablets, smartphones, laptops - any device that allows you to share media and messages.

What the law says:

Sexting can be seen as harmless, but creating or sharing explicit images of a child is illegal, even if the person doing it is a child. A young person is breaking the law if they:

- Take an explicit photo or video of themselves or a friend
- Share an explicit image or video of a child, even if it's shared between children of the same age
- Possess, download or store an explicit image or video of a child, even if the child gave their permission for it to be created.

Producing or distributing sexual images of anyone under 18 is against the law

The position of the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) and the Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre (CEOP) with regards to children who are involved in sexting is that **'prosecution options are avoided, in particular the use of legislation that would attract sex offender registration'**. It is advised that the wider safeguarding issues are looked at rather than the criminal justice element. Placing a child on the sex offenders register could cause serious damage in their future.

Why do children/young people sext?

There are many reasons why a young person may want to send a naked or semi-naked picture, video or message to someone else.

- Joining in because they think that 'everyone is doing it'
- Boosting their self-esteem
- Flirting with others and testing their sexual identity
- Exploring their sexual feelings
- To get attention and connect with new people on social media
- They may find it difficult to say no if somebody asks them for an explicit image, especially if the person asking is persistent

For any setting where there are concerns, you will need to:

- Confiscate any device(s) involved and switch it to flight mode, if possible. Flight mode is better than powering down, because switching a device off can sometimes interfere with data that could be required in an investigation.
- **Report to your designated safeguarding lead.** If you're not the designated safeguarding lead, don't try to deal with the incident yourself. Your DSL will be trained in the appropriate safeguarding procedures and might also have relevant information about the child involved.
- **Don't** try to find/view the image **or** forward/send it to anyone else, under any circumstances. Both of these actions are prohibited and could be upsetting for the child involved.

For Designated Safeguarding Leads:

It's important to keep a record of sexting incidents, including how they were dealt with, any actions you decided not to take and your reasoning. Your professional judgement, along with information about the

child and the context, will be key in deciding how best to proceed. You will probably need to gather information about the incident to decide how to respond, but you should make sure this process is handled sensitively and puts the child's needs first.

These incidents should be managed carefully and with good professional judgement.

If an incident involves an adult, a child who has previously been abused and/or a child under 13, you should make an immediate referral.

Other considerations include:

- Is there a significant age difference between the sender/recipient? Even if both are under 18, a large age gap could be cause for concern.
- Is the child vulnerable or at risk? You should consider a wide range of factors that could make a child vulnerable, including less obvious ones like low self-esteem.
- Was the child in the image coerced or manipulated in any way?
- How far has the image spread? How has it been shared?
- Is the image of a particularly extreme or worrying nature? *Note:* if you have not seen the image, **do not** look at it or search for it to make this judgement.
- Is this an isolated issue? Has this child been involved in other similar incidents?
- What is the child's reaction to the incident? Do they appear to be upset or distressed? Do they fully understand what has happened?
- Other information about the circumstances and child involved. This could include anything you know about their home situation, health, relationships etc.

Escalating the incident:

If, after considering these and other relevant factors, you do not think the child is at risk, you may choose to manage the situation in your school rather than escalating it to external services. You should still keep a record of what happened and how it was resolved. This should include your reasons for not escalating.

If you do think the child might be at risk or you are not sure, you should escalate the incident. This doesn't have to mean a Police referral – you can contact the Local Authority Duty Team (RAIS) to speak to a Social Worker, or an Early Help Coordinator for advice initially.

**RAIS (Referral, Assessment & Intervention Service - Children's Duty) including the
Early Help team:
01572 758407**

**The child's or young person's history, attendance record and consideration of any
escalating concern should always be considered when deciding on the use of any
action.**

Useful Resources:

CEOP's <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

UK Safer Internet Centre <https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/>

Internet Matters <https://www.internetmatters.org/>

Parents protect <https://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/files/Sexting%20in%20Schools%20eBooklet%20FINAL%2030APR13.pdf>

Find out more by reading the [legislation on child abuse images](#)