

Teen Angst

Helping adolescents deal with anger and other emotions effectively
by Raychelle Cassada Lohmann, MS, LPC

Teen Sexting - The Real Issue

Common problems associated with teen sexting.
Published on April 7, 2013 by Raychelle Cassada Lohmann, M.S., L.P.C. in Teen Angst



Today the information superhighway is vastly changing. The internet is revolutionizing the way we communicate with each other, and teens are some of the first to experiment with modern technology. With a camcorder, radio, television, camera, and phone all wrapped into one little package called a Smartphone, teens have accessibility to friends and worldly happenings 24/7. While these times can be exciting and exhilarating to adolescents, they can also be dangerous... especially to those who get involved with sexting.

Sex texting, known as "sexting" for short, is basically sending, receiving, or forwarding sexual photos or sexually suggestive messages through text message or email. If a teen owns an electronic device (Tablet, Phablet, Smartphone and yes, even a gaming device) that can take a picture and connect to the internet then they can sext. It's that easy... Plus, it only takes seconds for one picture to make its way to the recipient and surface the internet. One thing that I've heard people say about posting on the internet is to not put anything out there "if you wouldn't want your grandmother seeing or reading it." I think that's a pretty good rule of thumb to follow; especially in this day and age where digital citizenship is as important as our real world one. Online reputations are becoming synonymous to our everyday one; and one thing's for certain: sexting can tarnish a good reputation...



Teens and Electronic Devices

[Pew Research Center](#) recently released a study that showed teen electronic device use is growing (and I don't see any decline in the future). A phone in today's terms isn't what a phone was a decade ago. Prime example, my school age daughter spoke with my husband on the phone the other day and came to me with a message: looking very puzzled she said, "Mom, dad said give him a ring???" She really didn't get it...so I had to explain that he really didn't want a piece of jewelry, but rather a phone call back. Just goes to show,

today's phones do it all and they don't ring - they tweet, play music, buzz, etc. and most teens own one of these devices.

According to this study:

- 78% of teens now have a cell phone, and almost half (47%) of them own Smartphone's. That's up 23% from 2011.
- 23% of teens have a tablet computer
- 95% of teens use the internet.
- 93% of teens have a computer or have access to one at home.

With more and more teens having internet capability we (meaning parents, schools, community members, etc.) need to be more vigilant in uncovering and educating our youth about the hidden dangers of the internet. Needless to say, sexting is definitely one of those dangers.

Utah has done a great job reaching out to teens about the dangers of sexting. Utah offered an "online diversion course" through the Utah-based website CourtEducationOnline.com. The class sets out to educate teens about sexting consequences and prevent it in the future.

In Utah, it is a misdemeanor for teens to sext one another. Students at one Utah high school took this online class, and afterward it was revealed that 90 percent of the students didn't know that sexting was against the law prior to the course. Let's educate our teens, and then as parents let's make sure we know what they're up to.



Common Problems Associated with Sexting

One of the primary problems associated with sexting is that material can be very easily and widely circulated, over which the creator has no control. There was some research by the [Internet Watch Foundation](#) that estimated that 88% of self-made explicit images are "stolen" from their original upload location, like social networking sites, and are available on other websites, such as porn sites. It is known as sextortion when your FB or Social Networking sites or email accounts and pics are stolen. That's scary, especially for those who only thought that photo was being shared with a romantic partner. Consider this: [McAfee](#), the anti-software company, did its own study and found that 60% of sexts get leaked. Scary!

Researchers at the [University of Texas Medical Branch](#) found that teens who "sext" may be more likely to engage in sexual behaviors. Here are some of the findings:

- 28% of teens admitted to having sent a sext.
- 76.2% of teens who were propositioned to sext admitted to having had sexual intercourse.
- Girls were asked to send a sext (68%) more often than boys (42%).
- The peak age of sexting is around 16 and 17 years of age.
- The plus, sexting seems to decline in individuals 18 and older.



When Sexts Hurt

It's not uncommon for a relationship to go sour and what was confidential at one time (an intimate photo) becomes electronically publicized the next (viral picture - one you wouldn't want grandma to see.) When a break up in which sexting happened goes south (not literally) then pictures that were initially intended for the boyfriend/girlfriend could resurface as a means of retaliation. These pictures may be shared to a large audience on wireless networks or the internet, causing psychological, social, cultural, and legal problems. Plus, sext messages may end up in the hands of predators or on a porn site leading to long-term harm on a teen sexter's future. No doubt, there have been numerous legal cases involving high-school students who have sexted in recent years.

To top it off, sexting pictures can be used as blackmail, or even shared while still in a relationship. Did you know men admit to sharing their girlfriend's sexts with other friends? Yeah, that girlfriend may think that picture was for her "guy's" eyes only, but he may be showing off his "girl" to other guys.

Over Exposure

If you're involved in sexting, STOP! There are too many dangers involved. Delete as many pictures and scrub the internet as much as possible. Ask the person for whom you sent the sext to delete it.

If you're exposed by an act of retaliation, use the following measures to protect yourself:

- Remove all risqué pics from your computer, phone, etc.
- Ask the person who exposed you to stop in an electronic form. You can use this as evidence, especially if the response is inappropriate.
- Print out all evidence from the sites you are on.
- Block those who are determined to take you down.
- Report any abuse to site operators and ask them to remove pictures.
- Report it to the authorities if it isn't taken down and take your evidence with you.
- Google yourself periodically and if you have a mutual friend, have them let you know if pictures resurface on the ex's site.

Unwanted Sexts

Another thing to consider is that people can get unwanted sexts. If this happens, there are some steps you can take to protect yourself:

- Text or private Facebook message the sender. Go easy the first time you ask them to cut it out. For example, a teen could say something like "Don't send me this stuff, don't you know my mom is constantly checking my messages?" If that doesn't work then go with the direct approach and call or confront the person face to face and tell them to stop.
- If you feel threatened by the message or photo block the person and cut off all contact with him or her.
- If he or she still does not stop, get law enforcement involved. Make sure that you keep copies of all messages for your records and evidence if needed.
- If your teen is getting sexts, then step in and help him/her out. If you suspect your teen is sexting, talk to your phone provider about programs to keep your teen from sending sexts.



Conclusion

Sexting is a problem that isn't going away, in fact, as technology increases and teens become more tech savvy, they are going to experiment and make some foolish mistakes. Unfortunately, what may seem like fun for now may be one of their most regrettable moments in the future. Reputations have been destroyed and lives have been altered due to a single sext. It is amazing that one picture, which takes less than a few seconds to take, holds the power to change a person's life. One picture, one moment in time, too many consequences...It's just not worth it...