

FACT SHEET — *This fact sheet is for young people, parents, carers, educators and members of community groups.*

Sexting information for young people

What is sexting?

Sexting refers to creating, sending or receiving sexually suggestive information or semi-nude, nude images via mobile phones and webcams. It can include content on blogs, Facebook and other social media posts or clips from Skype or YouTube.

Many young people think that sexting is a fun way to flirt but it's also risk-taking behaviour that's usually done with little understanding of the consequences. Sexually explicit content can be considered offensive by normal standards. For example: nude or semi-nude images, or material depicting people engaged in sexual activity or in sexually suggestive poses. It can make the receiver of the information or images feel uncomfortable or shocked.

Sexts have no geographical boundaries. An image or clip can:

- Be leaked accidentally or deliberately;
- Circulate in cyberspace for years (even if you think it has been deleted);
- Be traced back to its source;
- Phones or internet accounts can be hacked by people who may steal or publish privately stored images.

Risks

Sending a sext to someone who does not wish to receive it is illegal. Sending an unwanted sext exposes you to risks that have huge implications later life. These can include:

- You may be charged with producing and disseminating (distributing) child pornography;
- You may be put on the Sex Offender Register;
- Some employers check social media sites for inappropriate content posted by job seekers or posted about them by others;
- Future girlfriends or boyfriends can find the images in a Google search;
- Sex offenders and pedophiles copy and distribute sext images;

Legal issues

From 2008–2011 more than 450 child pornography charges have been laid in Australia against youths between the ages of 10 and 17, including 113 charges of "making child exploitation material".

POSSESSION of child pornography.

- Forward a sexy or suggestive image of someone who is under 18 — this is TRANSMISSION of child pornography;
- Ask someone under 18 to send you a naked or semi-naked photo of him or herself — this is SOLICITING child pornography.

Consequences of sexting

Emotional

When someone realizes that their sexy clip or photo has been seen by more people than they intended, they may end up feeling:

- Guilty;
- Embarrassed;
- Ashamed;
- Regretful; and
- Anxious.

Psychological

Psychological consequences include:

- Trouble sleeping and eating;
- Difficulty getting up and going to school;
- Difficulty getting to part-time jobs and other commitments;
- Decreased performance at school;
- Depression; and
- Feeling suicidal.

Social and Reputation

Sexting can damage personal relationships with friends, family, boyfriend/girlfriend relationships as well as damaging a young person's reputation. This may result in:

- Classmates and friends thinking differently about someone after a sexting incident. A photo can end up defining who you are for a long time;
- The end of a relationship when trust is broken by showing or sharing a private sext;
- Loss of a current job, scholarship or position;
- Future academic opportunities being affected;
- Future career opportunities being restricted;

What to do if you have received a sext

- If this is a one-off incident or you know that someone is being silly, delete the sext, then tell the person not to do it again.
- If you have received several sexts from the same person or a sext makes you uncomfortable, talk to your parents or contact your local police station. Do not delete the images;
- If you do not want to report to the police, delete the items and tell the sender to stop;
- Never forward a sext to anyone else. It is illegal — TRANSMISSION of child pornography;

What to do if you are asked to send a sext

Don't do it! Ask yourself:

- Do you know the person? If not, ignore their request;
- If you know them, why do you think they have asked you to do something that could be deemed illegal?
- Think about how you would feel if the sext was accidentally or deliberately seen by other people; or
- Don't decide straight away. Take some time out to think about it. This often helps to put things in perspective;
- Remember, sexting is never a good idea.

Saying no

Saying no does not mean that you don't like or care about the person you're saying no to. If you don't feel confident saying no, think about your reasons for saying no. Explain them to your boyfriend or girlfriend. Some things you might say are:

- "I don't think that would be good for me/us."
- "I don't want to get in trouble."
- "I'm not ready for that yet."
- "You've got to be kidding."

Your friend might be frustrated, annoyed, sad, or even angry when you say no. If they care about you then they will respect your decision. If they pressure you to change your mind or hold your choices against you then they don't respect you. This could be a form of abusive behaviour. Being in a manipulative relationship can damage your self-esteem for the long term so assess whether you want this relationship to continue. You do not have to stay in a relationship (as just friends or sexual) if your friend makes you do things you don't feel comfortable doing or they try and control you.

What if you have already taken and sent a picture

If you have already sent a sext, you should:

- As soon as you can, delete the sext from your phone, computer or wherever it may be stored; and
- Ask the person who received it to delete the sext from their phone or computer immediately.

Remind yourself that sexting images are easily stored and distributed, and you have no control over who sees them. The sext could remain on the internet for years and affect your future life. It's not worth the risk doing it again. If you're concerned that the sext may already have been sent to other people, you may need independent legal advice from a specialist legal service such as Victoria Legal Aid or Youth Law.

If you ask for a sext and they say no?

In relationships, sexual or not, each person has the right to say no to anything they don't feel comfortable doing. If you *really* care about someone then you won't want them to do something, they don't want to do just to please you. Sexting is highly risky, and you would be putting the person you care about at risk. You're also asking them to do something that could be deemed illegal.

When things don't go our way it's natural to feel some negative emotions such as sadness, frustration and anger. If you feel like you want to ask them again, ask yourself why you're trying to manipulate someone you care about into doing something risky. If they have said no you need to respect their decision. Your relationship will be stronger for it.

If a friend says they have been asked to send a sext?

Look after your mates and they'll look after you. If your friend tells you that they've been asked to send a sext, tell them to look at it from all angles. Sure, their boyfriend or girlfriend might keep that sext safe and not distribute it, but what if their mates got hold of the phone, found the image, and sent it on to everyone in their peer group at school, and then it just gets forwarded and forwarded. Sure, your friend's boyfriend or girlfriend didn't intend that to happen — but it could. Once an image has found its way onto the internet and social networks it's impossible to erase from all sources. In some age-related cases the incident could end up on court on child pornography charges. Help your friends make well-informed, powerful decisions where they're the ones who remain in control of their bodies.

"I asked my friend if I should send a sext. She told the best thing a best friend could say is 'no'. She said I was better than that and that I shouldn't have to send a photo for him to like me. If he gets angry at me for saying no then he doesn't respect me and is not worth my time. I realize now he was trying to manipulate me."

(13-year-old female)

Want to know more?

If you have any questions at all about sexting or are feeling uncomfortable about what someone is asking you to do, please have a confidential chat with us. Although sexting is not as physically aggressive as a sexual assault, we at CASA want to change society's behaviour towards women and empower women themselves to respect their bodies and give them the confidence to say no.

Useful contacts

Victoria Police Phone: 000

Victoria Legal Aid Phone: 03 9269 0120

www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

Youth Law Phone: 03 9611 2412

youthlaw.asn.au

Kids Helpline Phone: 1800 55 1800

www.kidshelp.com.au

CyberSmart www.cybersmart.gov.au

Crimestoppers Phone: 1800 333 000

crimestoppers.com.au