

New teen craze called “*Sexting*”  
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The day of teen’s passing notes in class to flirt or date is gone. These days flirting has gone digital and teens are taking advantage of the latest technologies like text messaging, camera cell phones, instant messaging (IM), blogging, and social networking websites to flirt, hook up, and even share nude pictures of themselves. This new craze of teens sending nude or semi-nude pictures of themselves with these new technologies has been called “*sexting*”. This “*Sexting*” problem is rapidly spreading across the country and has occurred in the Antigo area.

In 2008 The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy commissioned a survey of teens, ages 13-19 years old, to explore their electronic activities. Their survey of 653 teens found that 20% of teens overall have sent/posted nude or semi-nude pictures or video of themselves. In a majority of those instances the teens sent the pictures or videos to someone they knew or wanted to date, but 15% of the time the pictures or videos were sent to persons the teens only met and knew online. Sending sexually explicit messages (text, email, IM) is even more prevalent than sending pictures. 39% of overall teens reported they have sent sexually explicit messages to someone and 48% of teens report they have received sexually explicit messages. The teens often report pictures meant to be sent as private frequently get shared with people other than the intended recipient.

This new craze can have serious consequences for the teens that can affect them for the rest of their lives. Teens involved in “*sexting*” could be prosecuted and convicted of crimes such as manufacturing, distribution, and possession of child pornography. If convicted of such crimes they could also become registered sex offenders. On top of being criminally prosecuted, once these pictures are posted online they may never really go away even after the teen tries to delete them. It is impossible to control what others may do with the photos, like copying and posting them in other places online where potential employers, college recruiters, friends, parents, teachers and enemies could see them.

I offer the following tips for teens and parents regarding teen online activities:

**Teen Tips to Prevent “*Sexting*”**

**THINK ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES** of taking, sending, or forwarding a sexual picture of someone underage, even if it’s of you. You could get kicked off of sports teams, face humiliation, lose educational opportunities, and even get in trouble with the law.

**NEVER TAKE** images of yourself that you wouldn’t want everyone including your classmates, your teachers, your family, or your employers to see.

**BEFORE HITTING SEND**, remember that you can’t control where this image may travel. What you send to a boyfriend or girlfriend could easily end up with their friends, and their friends, and their friends...

**IF YOU FORWARD** a sexual picture of someone underage, you are as responsible for this image as the original sender. You could face child pornography charges, go to jail, and have to register as a sex offender.

**REPORT** any nude pictures you receive on your cell phone to an adult you trust. Do not delete the message. Instead, get your parents or guardians, teachers, and school counselors involved immediately.

## **Tips to Help Parents Talk to Their Kids about Sex and Technology.**

### **1 Talk to your kids about what they are doing in cyberspace.**

Just as you need to talk openly and honestly with your kids about real life sex and relationships, you also want to discuss online and cell phone activity. Make sure your kids fully understand that messages or pictures they send over the Internet or their cell phones are not truly private or anonymous. Also make sure they know that others might forward their pictures or messages to people they do not know or want to see them, and that school administrators and employers often look at online profiles to make judgments about potential students/employees. It's essential that your kids grasp the potential short-term and long-term consequences of their actions.

### **2 Know who your kids are communicating with.**

Of course it's a given that you want to know who your children are spending time with when they leave the house. Also do your best to learn who your kids are spending time with online and on the phone. Supervising and monitoring your kids' whereabouts in real life and in cyberspace doesn't make you a nag; it's just part of your job as a parent. Many young people consider someone a "friend" even if they've only met online. What about your kids?

### **3 Consider limitations on electronic communication.**

The days of having to talk on the phone in the kitchen in front of the whole family are long gone, but you can still limit the time your kids spend online and on the phone. Consider, for example, telling your teen to leave the phone on the kitchen counter when they're at home and to take the laptop out of their bedroom before they go to bed, so they won't be tempted to log on or talk to friends at 2a.m.

### **4 Be aware of what your teens are posting publicly.**

Check out your teen's MySpace, Facebook and other public online profiles from time to time. This isn't snooping, this is information your kids are making public. If everyone else can look at it, why can't you? Talk with them specifically about their own notions of what is public and what is private. Your views may differ but you won't know until you ask, listen, and discuss.

### **5 Set expectations.**

Make sure you are clear with your teen about what you consider appropriate "electronic" behavior. Just as certain clothing is probably off-limits or certain language unacceptable in your house, make sure you let your kids know what is and is not allowed online either. And give reminders of those expectations from time to time. It doesn't mean you don't trust your kids, it just reinforces that you care about them enough to be paying attention.

For more information about "sexting" or internet safety you can contact Corporal Dan Duley at 627-6411 at the Antigo Police Department, a Wisconsin Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Affiliate, or go online to [www.TheNationalCampaign.org](http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org) and [www.NetSmartz.org](http://www.NetSmartz.org).