

DANGEROUS RAMMIFICATIONS OF SEXTING

Teenage Texans' use of text messaging and camera-equipped cell phones has led to an alarming new practice: sexting.

Sexting is the practice of teenagers sending sexually explicit messages or images electronically, primarily between mobile phones. Technological improvements that are now standard on many mobile phones allow teenagers to easily distribute photos & videos to boyfriends, girlfriends & friends. Some young Texans are even sexting to strangers they have only met online.

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy surveyed 1,300 teenagers about sexting and found troubling results:

*71% of teen girls and 67% of teen boys who have sent or posted sexually suggestive content say they have sent it to a boyfriend or girlfriend. *15% of teens who have sent or posted nude or semi-nude images of themselves say they have done so to someone they only knew online. *44% of both teen girls and teen boys say it is common for sexually suggestive text messages to get shared with people other than the intended recipient.

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The social danger for teenagers is that the message sender has no control of its distribution. Nearly 20 percent of sexting recipients have passed the image to someone else who the sender may or may not know. Suggestive photographs easily can be downloaded to a computer, posted on public Web sites or printed and distributed.

Unintentional circulation of inappropriate images can lead to suspensions from school or athletic participation and cause embarrassment. Compromising photos can hinder teens' attempts to get into college, receive scholarships or gain employment.

More importantly, sexting can lead law enforcement to confiscate communication devices and cause other serious legal problems. One in five teens surveyed say they have sexted despite the fact that most of them knew it was a crime.

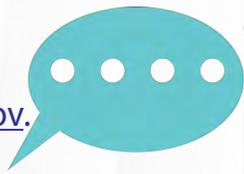
The owner of a computer or cell phone containing pictures of nude or semi-nude minors can be investigated and prosecuted on felony child pornography charges. Teenagers in possession of sexually suggestive images of classmates or companions under 18 could face up to 10 years in prison.

Clearly, this dangerous technological trend can haunt children for years, and it is impacting schools and communities statewide. Of course, investigators and prosecutors consider the circumstances of each case before deciding whether - and which - charges charges may apply. By the time law enforcement has gotten involved, however, someone has already gotten hurt. Education and active parenting present the best way to ensure children avoid this dangerous activity.

Parents must have frank conversations with their children about the potential for embarrassment and the legal ramifications of sexting. If teens do not want a photo or text message to fall into the wrong hands - including strangers, potential employers, teachers or college admission officers - they should not send it. A lack of privacy can put them at risk.

Teens, parents, teachers and law enforcement authorities must keep an open line of communication to combat sexting - which is why our Cyber Crimes Unit officers criss-cross the state speaking to students and parents about Internet and wireless communication safety.

Parents, law enforcement more information about www.texasattorneygeneral.gov. Texans safe from harm.



officers and others who have questions or want protecting children should visit our Web site, Together, we must work to keep young



Ken Paxton
Attorney General of Texas &
Your Lancaster Police Department

