

## Has your child ever sexted?

To be confident that your child has not and will not do this, parents should engage in frank and continuing dialogue with their children about the dangers of sexting. Although this may be an awkward topic, it is important that children hear about the dangers of sexting before they are pressured to send a promiscuous/suggestive message or image. See inside for tips on how to start the conversation.



## Quick Tips For Parents

- **Talk to your children about their activities online and on their cell phones** and set clear boundaries for what they are and are not allowed to do.
- **Be familiar with popular social networking sites such as Facebook, and set up your own account.** If your children see that you know how to navigate the sites, they are less likely to post suggestive or inappropriate messages on them.
- **Consider instituting a “media curfew”** for phones and computers, or limiting the amount of time that these may be used.
- **Learn texting acronyms** such as “POS” (Parent Over Shoulder) so that you can identify troublesome messages.

## Where to Find More Information

**American Academy of Pediatrics**  
Talking to Kids and Teens about Social  
Media and Sexting  
[www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/  
june09socialmedia.htm](http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/june09socialmedia.htm)

**Child Lures Prevention**  
**Tips For Parents on Sexting**  
[www.childluresprevention.com/pdf/  
Sexting-Parents.pdf](http://www.childluresprevention.com/pdf/Sexting-Parents.pdf)

**Connect Safely**  
[www.connectsafely.org](http://www.connectsafely.org)

**Family Online Safety Institute**  
[www.fosi.org](http://www.fosi.org)

**The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and  
Unplanned Pregnancy**  
Sex and Tech Report  
[www.thenationalcampaign.org/sextech](http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/sextech)

**Netlingo - Text and Chat Acronyms for Parents**  
[www.netlingo.com](http://www.netlingo.com)

**Webwise Kids**  
It's Your Call Interactive Cellphone Safety Game  
[www.webwisekids.org](http://www.webwisekids.org)

**Your Open Book**  
[www.youopenbook.org](http://www.youopenbook.org)



*Attorney General Jim Hood*



For more information about Internet safety and tips for parents, visit the Mississippi Attorney General's website [www.agjimhood.com](http://www.agjimhood.com).

# Sexting:

## What Parents Should Know



Prepared by the  
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL  
Post Office Box 220 • Jackson, MS 39205-0220  
(601) 359-3680 • Toll Free: (800) 829-6766  
[www.agjimhood.com](http://www.agjimhood.com)

# Sexting: An Alarming Trend

Today's American teenager has access to a wider range of communication methods than ever before. E-mail accounts, profiles on social networking sites, online forums, and mobile phones may all be used to send and receive messages and pictures. For many teens, cell phones and computers provide a sense of freedom by allowing communication away from parents' eyes and ears.

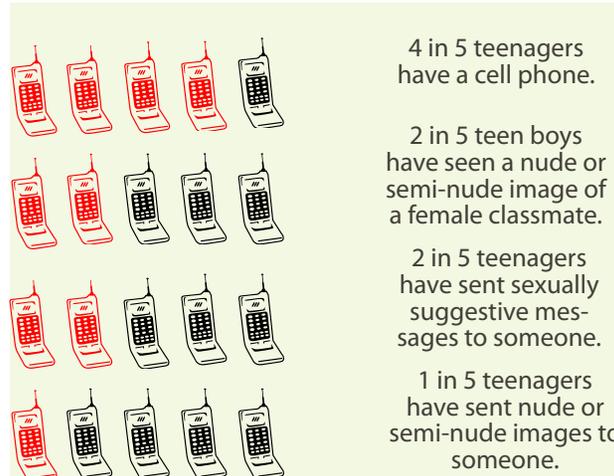
With so many ways to access technology, it is important for parents to be aware of sexting, a growing trend that has led to the exploitation of many children. It is all too easy for a teen to use a cell phone to snap a photo and send it in a text message without stopping to think about potential consequences. So, it is crucial for teens to hear about the dangers of sexting from their parents before they face pressure from a boyfriend or girlfriend.

## What is it?

Sexting is the act of sending **sexually explicit images or messages** to someone via mobile phone, social networking websites, and/or e-mail. According to a recent study, **20% of teenagers have sent a nude or nearly nude image of themselves. Forty-eight percent of teenagers say they have received such messages.** (National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, Oct. 2008).

## Who is at risk?

Any child who has access to a computer or a cell phone is at risk, but the likelihood of sending or receiving a "sext message" increases as the teenage years progress. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children reports that 14% of the images of 3,341 identified victims sent to them as of December were self-produced.



Sources: 2008 Harris Interactive Study, 2008 NCPTUP Report

## Why do teens sext?

Most teens sext because it is easier to do so when the recipient is not on the phone or in person. Most teens who have sent images reported they did so because:

- Of pressure from a boyfriend or girlfriend,
- To be "fun" or "flirty,"
- To attract attention from a romantic interest,
- "Everybody does it".

## Talking to Children and Teens About Sexting

Since studies have shown that the more parents talk to teenagers about drugs and sex, the less likely the teen is to engage in those behaviors. The same is likely to be true of sexting.

In fact, according to a study by Pew Internet Research, teens whose parents paid their cell phone bills were five times less likely to send a sexually explicit image or message, demonstrating that parental involvement has a powerful impact. (3% of teens who did not pay their own cell phone bills had sent a sext, versus 17% of teens who paid their own bills.) Also, having a limited number of text messages made teens cautious about what kind of messages they chose to send.

## Get the Conversation Started!

It may be an uncomfortable topic, but it is important that children hear about the dangers and consequences of sexting from their parents. Below are some tips to help guide the conversation:

- Monitor news stories about sexting and ask your children what they think about them.
- Ask your kids how they would respond if someone was pressuring them to send a sexually explicit picture.
- Be clear that sexting is wrong; **there are legal consequences** in addition to those that you would impose, such as losing cell phone and computer privileges.
- Explain that no matter how great peer pressure may be, the humiliation of an illicit photo getting out is much worse. **Once a photo is posted online, it stays online.**
- Remind them that even if the sender does not share the picture, cell phones can be lost or stolen and email accounts can be hacked into, which could result in many unintended viewers. Forty percent on teens and young adults said they have had a sexually suggestive message shown to them, and 20% say they have shared such a message with someone other than the person for whom it was originally intended.
- Monitor your children's activities and messages, and remind them that you will occasionally check their cell phones and email accounts.
- Tell your children to delete any sexual photos that have been forwarded to them. Explain to them that **a sexually explicit image of someone under the age of eighteen may be considered child pornography. Sexting is a crime punishable by a five year minimum mandatory sentence for sending nude photos of persons under 18 years of age.**