



This fourth issue of the ThinkUKnow e-newsletter covers an emerging trend in the Australian and global environment, "sexting".

## Sexting

An issue which has received media interest of late is "sexting". This refers to the practice of sending sexually explicit text messages or sexualised photos, usually via mobile phones. Whilst sexualised communications have almost always occurred, the digital format in which these "sexts" are created allows them to be much more easily and widely distributed to people other than the original recipient.

### Why is it a bad idea?

**It may be an offence.** Even if the young person agrees to the sexting, they may still be creating child pornography which is a criminal offence. Under section 474.20 of the Criminal Code Act 1995 (Commonwealth) it is an offence to possess, control, produce, supply or obtain child pornography material for use through a carriage service. A carriage service means a mobile phone, or any device which uses an internet connection.

**No control** over who sees it and what they do with it. Once an image is in a digital format it is quite easy to distribute it to a wide audience. Sexting photos might be sent to other mobile phones using Bluetooth technology or MMS, uploaded onto a social networking profile, or posted on a video-sharing website, eg YouTube.

It maybe a form of **cyber-bullying**. Sexting often occurs between two people in a relationship. Should that relationship end and things turn sour, the shared sexting images may then be sent to others as a form of revenge intended to humiliate the ex-boyfriend/girlfriend.

**Damage your reputation.** Once something is posted on the internet, it is almost impossible to permanently delete it. These images might damage the reputation of the young person and hinder their ability to gain a job or scholarship in the future. Employers use internet search engines to research applicants and may choose not to employ someone based on the inappropriate photos of them they find.

**Sends the wrong message** to other internet users. If these sexts are placed on the internet, they may attract unwanted attention from strangers. There are people who actively seek images of young people in sexual poses and these sexts might make their way into the collection of an online sex offender.

### What can parents, carers and teachers do?

Young people need to be made aware that the creation of child pornography is a very **serious offence** and that

## Time2Talk

This section provides some useful conversation starters for talking with young people about their use of technology.

**Has someone ever asked you to send an inappropriate of image of yourself?**

**What would you say to someone who asked you to do that?**

**Has someone ever sent you an inappropriate text message?**

**What would you do if you received an inappropriate text message?**

## Protecting your images

Once you upload an image onto the internet, you lose control over who sees it and what they do with it. Even if you later delete that image, it may have been stored, reproduced or distributed elsewhere. It is important to remember that if you don't want your images to be seen by people you do not know and trust, do not place them on the internet.

There are three main ways in which your images may remain on the internet even after you think you have deleted them:

1. **Caching:** this is a form of archiving, whereby search engines take a snapshot of what a web page looks on a given day. These cached pages are then archived and can be searched. This means that even though you may have deleted an image, it could still be found on a cached version of that page.
2. **Copying:** even if you delete the image, someone else may have already copied, distributed and stored that image elsewhere. This means that although the original image may be removed, it may have been stored somewhere else on the internet, printed or saved on someone's computer. You may never be able to identify every copy of your image to subsequently delete them.
3. **Delays:** when you delete an image onto a social networking, photo sharing or blogging site it is not always immediately removed. It may take some hours or even days for this process to occur. Some sites may simply remove the reference to the image, but retain a copy in their archives or on their photo server.

by involving themselves in sexting, they are contributing to this problem. The images or videos they create may end up in the collections of online sex offenders and further the demand for this type of material. Young people should also be reminded that even if they did not create the material, having it in their possession and/or passing it on are also serious offences.

The **future ramifications** of sexting need to be reinforced to young people. They need to be made aware that they cannot control who sees these “sexts” and that they may hinder their future employment opportunities. Once something is on the internet it is nearly impossible to delete it so young people should be encouraged to think twice before becoming involved in this behaviour.

**Involve young people** in the development of school and home policies around sexting. Giving young people a sense of ownership in these policies will encourage them to follow them and avoid risky behaviour. Sexting is an issue which is of serious concern for young people and they need to be a part of developing the solutions.

Even images sent via mobile phones can never be permanently deleted. You never know who has received the image or who they have then passed it on to. The image may even be uploaded on the internet where there are even more obstacles to having it removed.

There are a few important things for young people to consider before they send an image in an electronic format, either via a mobile phone or over the internet:

- Would they be happy passing that image around the school?
- Can they guarantee who will see it and what they will do with it?
- Could that image hinder their future career and employment options?

**If there is anything you would like more information about, or would like to see added to the ThinkUKnow website, please [contact us](#).**