



MIDDLESEX DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE



What is "sexting" and why is it an issue?

The term "sexting" refers to the sending of a photograph or other visual image, depicting a person in the partial or total state of nudity, via text message, from one cell phone to another. There presently exists a troubling trend in which school-aged children have begun disseminating nude photos of themselves, classmates or others, via text message.

What can parents do to protect their children?

- Continue to talk with your kids and establish open lines of communication, clearly explaining to your kids the negative consequences of sending a nude photo of themselves or others. It is especially important to stress the idea that once they send any photo, they lose control of it forever, and can never take it back.
- If you believe your child needs a cell phone, consider buying them one without camera or video send/receipt capabilities, or blocking their present ability to send and receive visual images.
- When you buy your child a cell phone, make sure they understand that you will impose rules limiting their use and that you will be also be periodically checking the photos on their phone. They may resist, but you can explain that this isn't a matter of punishment; it is a matter of caring for them and protecting them.
- Take advantage of education programs offered through the schools and local law enforcement in your community. This will better allow you to talk with your children about these issues.

Is the act of "sexting" a crime?

Depending on the age and appearance of the person in the photo, and the circumstances of how it was obtained and disseminated, the act of sexting could trigger the state's child pornography laws. But once these matters arrive at our office, protection of the child has already been compromised. It means that the photo has been disseminated and that child has lost any control of it. That is why education and prevention are the most important ways to address these issues.

For further information or to request Internet Safety training in your community, please contact the Middlesex District Attorney's Office at 781.897.8300 or go to www.middlesexpartnershipsfor youth.com.

Internet Tips for Parents - How to Keep Your Kids Safe on the Internet

What You Can Do As a Family

- Make Internet use a family activity. Consider keeping the computer in the family room or other open space rather than in your child's bedroom.
- Let your children know that they can talk to you about anything online that makes them feel uncomfortable. Remember, how you respond will determine whether they confide in you next time. Don't blame them if they receive an inappropriate transmission- usually, it is out of their control.
- Be an involved parent. Monitor your child's online activity just as you would the programs they watch on television, the books they read, or the movies they see.

- Tell your children not to respond when someone offers them something for nothing, such as free software or gifts.
- Remind your children that the people they chat with are still strangers; because you can't see or hear people online, it's easy for an adult to pretend that he or she is a kid.
- Check out these web sites for information about parental monitoring software

Set the Rules

- Set guidelines for your children before they use the Internet.
- Work together with your child to decide what is and is not appropriate.
- Establish Internet privacy rules for the family. Remember many services provide free e-mail, so your family's e-mail address may not be your child's only address.
- Tell your children never to respond to threatening or obscene messages, and never to click on links in an e-mail or download attachments from someone they don't know.

What NEVER to Do

- NEVER allow your child to arrange a meeting with someone they meet online without your permission. If a meeting is arranged, have it in a public place and go with your child.
- NEVER give out information about your child such as full name, home address, school name, telephone number, age or other personal information. Also, never use your child's name or e-mail address in any public directories or profiles.
- NEVER post photographs of your children on web forums that are available to the public.

What Can You Do?

- Ask your Internet Service Provider (ISP) whether they offer filtering services to families with young children. If not, check out filtering software that you can purchase for a modest cost. Also ask your ISP about their privacy policy.
- Check the Internet cache and history to see what sites your child visits (contact your ISP for help). If your child clears the cache often, find out why.
- If you become aware of the transmission or use of child pornography while online, immediately notify the police, contact the District Attorney's Office, or report it to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's Cyber Tipline at www.missingkids.com/cybertip or (800) 843-5678.
- If your child receives a message that is harassing, of a sexual nature, or threatening, forward a copy to your Internet Service Provider (ISP), and ask for their assistance. Additionally, contact the local police or the District Attorney's Office.
- Be alert to warning signs such as your child turning the monitor off quickly or changing the screen as you enter the room, receiving mail or phone calls from people you do not know, or visiting web sites containing information on bomb-making, firearms, drugs, or other illegal activity.

These sites and the information set forth therein are not authorized by nor controlled by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts or the Office of the Middlesex District Attorney.